

Conference on

**CIVIC EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN DEMOCRACIES:
COMPARING INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO EDUCATING NEW CITIZENS**

at San Diego, California
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Observations and Recommendations for Next Steps

Educating new citizens implies a specific difficulty: it very often means educating adults with quite a different background in respect to culture, the political system, religion and the general standard of living. And to make things worse: immigrants often do not even speak or understand the language of the country they want to live in. Furthermore, some of the immigrants do not really intend to integrate even if they want to stay in their host countries for good and apply for citizenship.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most countries have strict regulations and frequently put up barriers in order to restrict the inflow of immigrants. The qualifications for accepting new citizens and the procedures differ in the various countries, but they generally are in accordance with the interests of the accepting countries. That means that these interests do not always coincide with the hopes or needs of the immigrants. During the conference we had the opportunity to compare the immigration qualifications of the three countries represented here, the United States, Germany and Mexico, and to compare the problems that arise in this context. In doing so, we did not only reflect the present situation but also tried to consider the historic perspective. This allowed us to trace developments and to observe a change of attitude. And this revealed a lot about the countries concerned.

On the whole there seems to be an improvement in immigration policy and procedures, mainly out of economic and demographic reasons, which make it advisable to increase the working population. In some cases, however, we observed new restraints caused by the difficult economic situation in quite a number of host countries. But it is impossible, so we thought, to give a prognosis for the future. Most countries are subject to the still increasing impact of globalisation; many boundaries and borders have lost their former character of a barrier, and traffic facilities make immigration easier now than it was before. Therefore it is to be expected that problems will not minimize but will become more serious.

Being civic educators and because of our personal background most of us had little or even no knowledge of the problems which immigrants are experiencing. And we rarely know little more than just a few basic facts about the legal regulations that allow or disallow immigrants to enter a host country. Therefore it was most enlightening for us to have two officials from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) at San Diego describe very many details. In doing so they gave examples of what a person, applying for US citizenship, has to do and to know in order to pass the naturalization test. We were told that there are courses and commercial books that teach potential applicants and help them to prepare for the interview, and we also got a list of possible questions.

When I read these nearly one hundred sample questions I thought it might be a good idea if the Center for Civic Education would draw up and publish a book in the style of 'We the People', a book specifically written to meet the demands of immigrants. However, I also think it would be advisable to do a project like this in close cooperation with the US Citizen and Immigration Service; for this might allow the Center to take some influence on the selection and phrasing of the questions used at the interviews. The great pedagogic experience and reputation of the Center would certainly lead to a rephrasing of question no. 72 and the expected answer to it. It reads: "Name the amendments that guarantee or address voting rights." The expected answer is: "Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth." No doubt, this answer is correct, but it does not mean very much. If the question were phrased differently, the examiners would be able to find out whether the applicants know what these changes of the constitution brought about and why there was the need to have these amendments. This example shows, I think, how important it is that civic educators with a NGO background gain greater influence on governmental institutions. And I suppose, eventually also the government would agree that accepting their advice and help is to its own benefit.

After this initial briefing with a great number of interesting details about the American naturalization process – including the astonishing fact that members of the Military Forces need not necessarily have US citizenship – the papers of ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN, EDUARDO RODRÍGUEZ MONTES and MATTHIAS WINTER approached the subject of citizenship policies, laws and requirements for obtaining citizenship in a more abstract and systematic way, including the historical perspective. It became evident that the official immigration policy always reflects the changing needs and interests of a country and at the same time the changing requirements imposed on the applicants. The comparison showed many differences in the three countries. Germany has only recently started to accept the fact that it is an immigration country. Mexico on the other hand, though also taking in new citizens, must rather be described as an emigration country; for very many Mexicans leave their homeland to seek work in a foreign country, mainly in the United States.

The discussion after the presentation of the three papers concentrated predominantly on the problem of dual citizenship. The fact that not all countries accept it brought us to discuss the question whether dual citizenship must not inevitably lead to a split of loyalty, and it also raised the problem of identity that was followed further in later sessions of the conference. However, it was also put forward that dual citizenship may help to avoid the loss of one's heritage. Perhaps a differentiation between the two terms 'citizenship' and 'nationality' could help to make things clearer. In my understanding 'citizenship' emphasizes the legal implication while 'nationality' also additionally includes emotional connotations.

Two papers of the Monday afternoon session concentrated on civic ideals and gave a historically orientated analysis of themes and practices in civic education in Mexico and the United States. MARÍA DE LOURDES ROSAS pointed out that in Mexico great efforts have been taken to strengthen the interest and participation in politics, and she described how the IFE (Instituto Federal Electoral) is helping to do so. MICHAEL SCHUDSON outlined the development of four different models of citizenship in the United States since the 18th century and thus stressed the fact that democracy and citizenship are not just abstract notions but are subject to historical changes. Although our present ideals and practices differ considerably from those in former times, we should not, so he pleaded, neglect the importance and value of older models.

While these two papers reflected the participation of citizens in politics, with special stress on voting practices, GERT STRASSER outlined the history of Germany as an immigration country. In the discussion afterwards it became evident that it is sometimes very difficult, if not

impossible, to discern clearly between immigrants and migrants. Both groups need special attention in respect to civic education, and the case of Mexico shows that some countries rather have a migration problem, based on different identities, and not an immigration problem. The paper of VICTOR VALLE gave examples of this. Because of its history Mexico seems to be a multi-cultural country, anyhow to a certain extent. Germany, so quite a number of people fear, may be on the way of getting near to a multi-cultural society. The fact that a great number of its residents are foreigners, legally, socially and culturally, made UWE AHLEMEYER point out that it is necessary to integrate these people without making them lose their traditional identity. Therefore he pleaded to grant them citizens' rights, e.g., the right to vote, even if they do not want to become German citizens. This point was heavily debated in the discussion afterwards.

In the United States this problem does not seem to exist. Here, multiculturalism is widely accepted as long as there is unanimity about the basic civic values and the political institutions. DIANA OWEN explicated this in her paper discussing citizen identity. She outlined three models: the citizen as loyal subject and patriot; the citizen as voter; and the citizen as enlightened community participant. She stressed the fact that the interest of young people in political affairs is declining, and she reflected the role a 'hero' can play in enhancing greater interest. Her example, Michael Jordan, initiated a vivid debate on the influence of heroes, and it was also pointed out that different times bring about quite different types of heroes.

From the Mexican viewpoint GABRIEL DE LA PAZ linked civic education and citizen identity by outlining basic schemes and requirements which can further a new understanding of citizenship in a society of social inequality. Both Gabriel de la Paz and Robert Schadler reflected the definition or rather the definitions of the term 'citizen'. ROBERT SCHADLER pointed to a typical American interpretation by citing G.K. Chesterton, and he stated that Americans regard all aliens as prospective Americans. This seems logical under the aspect that all Americans have ultimately a non-American background in so far as they all are the descendants of immigrants who were aliens in one way or another. Therefore, so Schadler said, "Americans see citizenship as more creedal than cultural, more as the sharing of common ideas and attitudes than ethnic, religious, linguistic or historical commonalities."

RAINER TETZLAFF stressed that immigrants often bring new energy to a country; and he also pointed out that diversity can be a source of progressive ideas and initiatives. But at the same time he warned that this brain gain is a brain *drain* from the viewpoint of the developing countries. To make things worse, this brain drain can widen and even perpetuate the deep gap

between the developed and the developing countries, thus aggravating the situation and causing yet more emigration, respectively immigration. Rainer Tetzlaff illustrated these push- and pull-factors with examples from Germany, where for instance refugees from Africa want to stay on, even when the political situation in their home-countries would easily allow them to go back.

The presence of large groups with a different national, social, cultural, and religious background can cause many problems, and these problems do not only exist in relation to the host country but also among the different immigrant groups. This is particularly the case when immigrants from hostile countries meet in the host states. Very often clashes cannot be avoided then, even if the host state is neutral in the conflict concerned. With her example of the 'Abrahamic Youth Forum' on religion, everyday life, politics, and culture, MARGRIT FRÖLICH showed how a pedagogic initiative, which was exercised near Frankfurt/Main in Germany, tried to overcome prejudices and hatred among young people with a Christian, Jewish and Muslim background. The object of this inter-religious dialogue was understanding instead of discriminating each other.

Projects like this will gain an increasing importance as the size of the immigrant population in European countries and the United States will get even larger in the future. Therefore it is absolutely necessary – both for the immigrants as for the host states – that new schemes and procedures are being developed.

DAN PRINZING described the challenge of civic education in the United States under these circumstances. In several US states the rate of the immigrant population is particularly high. That California is one of them, all of us realized, I think, during the conference. Our trip to the Mexican border and the information we got there gave us an idea of how the state authorities of California try to put up a dam against illegal immigration. But we were also told that all measures taken cannot prevent the stream of illegal immigrants entering the country. Therefore, schools will increasingly have to teach children, whose first language is not English. The figures Dan Prinzing gives in his paper are alarming. And the paper of ESTEBAN GARAIZ showed that immigrants from Mexico do not only have language problems but in addition to that also serious deficiencies in civic education, due to the fact that until recently the political and social structures in Mexico were rather undemocratic.

The comparison of Mexico and the United States shows, how much a country's political situation, institutional structure and history can depend on the spirit and on the tradition of the constitution and its influence on everyday life. Therefore it was a good decision of WILL

HARRIS to go back to the basics of the American constitution which he regards to be the ultimate standard and the nexus between regime norms and civic education. Therefore he relies fully on the spirit and the framework of the constitution which he regards not only as the foundation of the American *res publica*, but which he also wants to be the guideline for civic education.

WOLFGANG BÖGE took us back from the higher spheres of constitutionalism to everyday problems. In some sections of his paper he gave a very pessimistic perspective of the future development. I hope his rather gruesome scenario will not come true. I personally think – or should I rather say: I hope – that the undeniable tendency to develop an increasingly multicultural society may also have positive aspects. And even Wolfgang Böge is not without hope as his detailed proposals for an alternative way show. But there can be no doubt that we have to take great efforts in civic education if we want to generate more knowledgeable, enlightened and tolerant citizens. It will be a great challenge for all schoolteachers, not only for the instructors in civic education.

That many teachers already work on achieving this aim became evident during our visit in Meadowbrook Middle School at Poway. I happened to be in the group that attended the reading and writing class of the eighth grade. Although the main purpose of the lesson was to train the language capacities of the students, it nevertheless had something to do with civics. For the sentence to be analysed – it dealt with littering in school – made the students reflect the causes and the consequences of social behaviour and it thus referred to the responsibilities of young citizens. My impression was that in this school ‘civics’ was not reduced to a few lessons on governmental institutions but was an all-embracing objective.

I think we should go on working in this field of research and should try to improve the mode of practical application. It may be worthwhile to discuss in another conference in what way and to which extent the aims of civic education can be advanced outside the designated civic education classes. A critical investigation of the curricula as well as the textbooks of other subjects would be helpful in this respect. As far as Germany is concerned the Georg-Eckert-Institut at Braunschweig (Brunswick), which does research on textbooks for schools – and has done so for decades now on an international scale – might be a valuable partner in this investigation.

Let me close with a remark which primarily seems to concern the structure and the organization of the conference but which also has something to do with the results of the conference. I think it was an excellent idea to restrict the presentation of papers to 15 minutes

and to distribute handouts of the longer versions. In doing so, more time than usual could be allocated to discussion units, and this, so I believe, was one of the reasons why this conference was so stimulating and so successful.