The European Space for Citizenship Education

Sustaining democracy through quality citizenship education

CONFERENCE
17 – 18 October 2024, Berlin

MEETING REPORT

Report prepared by General Rapporteur Sabine Jenni,
Director of Demokrative – Initiative for civic education, Bern (Switzerland)

Summary

On the 17 and 18 October 2024 the Council of Europe organized its first conference to launch the co-creation of a European Space for Citizenship Education and the German translation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic culture. The conference also marked the 75th anniversaries of the Council of Europe and of the German constitution (*Grundgesetz*).

The conference was conducted with political and financial support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and organizational support by the civil society network Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe – DARE. Around 80 participants from German and European universities, public agencies and civil society organizations as well as several members of the Education Policy Advisors Network contributed to the conference with their expertise.

The conference showed that education for democratic citizenship is a deeply political and politicized question. In times when we observe democratic backsliding, the legitimacy of topics inherent to citizenship education like gender equality is questioned, schools' activities are scrutinized and the space of work of the non-formal and youth sectors is reduced.

At the same time, there is a **political momentum** for action. The Council of Europe has made democracy a priority and heads of state and government as well as ministers of education assign an important role to education. It is important to remember that majorities across European societies (still) support democratic values. A European Space for Citizenship Education must build on and mobilize these majorities.

The European Space for Citizenship Education covers three areas for which the participants discussed goals, challenges and the role of different actors including civil society.

For the area of **codification** of the 'acquis', the conference showed that the materials and concepts produced by the Council of Europe since 1996 are widely accepted and appreciated. They can serve as a good starting point for quality standards and effective cooperation. A few gaps were nevertheless identified: we must more strongly emphasize the importance of political action and youth participation in associations, and we must work more on the digital competences needed for a democratic culture in the digital era. But most importantly, we must guarantee that the didactic principle of teaching controversial issues is respected when teaching about democratic values This is particularly important in the education tradition in the German-speaking countries because of the *Beutelsbacher Konsens*. In times of democratic backsliding, a meaningful and a consensual definition of democratic values which lie beyond political controversy is key.

Regarding **quality citizenship education,** the conference showed that transparent and well-founded values and principles of education are an invaluable standard for quality. But we need also quality standards about the effectiveness of approaches, concepts and methods and about success criteria for cooperation between actors across sectors and countries. Here, the work must start with basic research and the instigation of a Europe-wide research-based discussion, which both build the fundament for quality standards and evaluation. The European Space for Citizenship Education could formulate a research agenda.

In terms of **cooperation**, the participants of the Berlin conference appreciated the invitation to the co-creation process and the civil society representatives wish to be included for inclusion in the process also in the future. Cooperation is relevant for the European Space in several ways: Non-formal education actors contribute significantly to citizenship education, in schools and beyond. The legal and practical conditions differ largely between schools, regions, and countries; funding is insecure and

should be discussed in the European Space considering values and principles guiding the Council of Europe's work in the field.

For the Council of Europe, just as for other international as well as national organizations, arises the need to actively address the cooperation of different sectors, namely the formal and non-formal education as well as youth sectors. Much can be learned from the non-formal and youth sectors, for example regarding the inclusion of (young) people facing social, financial and educational barriers as well as regarding adult learning. The need to consider the whole society as being both responsible for and target group of citizenship education was emphasized on various occasions throughout the conference.

Table of contents

Opening: 75th Commemoration of the Council of Europe and the German Constitution

The conference was opened by two keynote speeches.

Simona Koß, member of the German Bundestag and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, BpB*) opened the conference and shared her worries about the recent electoral success of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland, AfD*) in her constituency Brandenburg. The AfD was voted by a considerable share of young voters in one of the regions which suffered the most during World War II. Against this background, MP Koß shared three insights from her work:

First, education for democratic citizenship is a task we must fulfil continuously and tenaciously. We are not the firefighters who can be activated in times of crisis. Second, cause-effect mechanisms are complex. Evaluation, though important, should not be used for maximizing impact while minimizing investment. Third, education for democratic citizenship is a task for the whole society and cannot be assigned to schools only. The task must involve different actors and diverse approaches and channels - specifically in the adult learning field. Koß thanked the Council of Europe for the organization of the conference and underlined how valuable it is to learn from each other.

> *"Education for democratic citizenship makes our societies future-proof."*

Matjaž Gruden, Director for Democracy at the Council of Europe, reminded us that it never has been easy to sustain liberal democracy. He thanked the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its support of the conference and shared the observation that excellent examples of citizenship education exist across Europe, and especially in Germany. Unfortunately, these examples are not sufficient, and they do not exist everywhere. One reason is that citizenship education has not received the necessary recognition and investment. According to Gruden, there are many justified reasons why (young) people are disappointed in politics. Education for democratic citizenship can and must provide young people with competences, which help them to think critically and demand democratic political answers to their disappointment.

On a hopeful note, Gruden listed recent decisions at the political level in the Council of Europe. At the 2023 Reykjavík summit, the heads of states and governments acknowledged that education plays an important role in the response to current threats. At the 26th Standing conference of ministers of education in Strasbourg later the same year, the Learner's First strategy of the Education Department of the Council of Europe was adopted. Much work has been done on which we can build to create the European Space for Citizenship Education.

> *"Education must provide young people with competences, which help them to think critically and demand democratic political answers to their disappointment."*

Role of Education in Strengthening a Culture of Democracy among Europeans

The high-level round table was opened by **Villano Qiriazi**, Head of the Education Department at the Council of Europe. Qiriazi took a brief look back to the year 1996 when the Council of Europe launched its first program in European Citizenship Education. Then he welcomed the panellists as an international round of enthusiastic Europeans.

The first question concerned the current challenges to education systems in the face of multiple crises. **Luz Martinez Seijo**, member of the Spanish parliament and Chair of the subcommittee on culture, education and democratic values at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) reminded us of crucial societal changes in the last few decades. Among them are an increase in internet consumption related to social media and artificial intelligence and a decrease of time spent with friends and family. This poses a challenge for the development of critical thinking, when young people have too much information which they are not yet ready to understand. Also, legitimacy of topics inherent to Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education[1] (hereafter EDC/HRE) such as gender diversity and sexual identity, but also antisemitism and anti-racism are increasingly being challenged in political discussions. MP Martinez Seijo shared insights form her work in parliament to foster citizenship education: involving civil society in policymaking enhances the motivation of less engaged politicians and parties, as they wish to respond to demands from society. She stressed how in Spain in particular, but elsewhere as well, history and remembrance are crucial aspects of democracy education. People are more willing to defend democracy if they know about the non-democratic alternative.

"Involve civil society actors to build political coalitions for citizenship education"

Asked about the role of the Council of Europe, **Marie-Anne Persoons**, Chair of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU), mentioned the 70th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention. Persoons stressed the convention as an example that the Council of Europe, in addition to his role as a reference organization for democracy, human rights and rule of law, has also had a strong mandate in education for seven decades. In her words, all education activities of the Council of Europe contribute to a democratic culture. In this context, she mentioned the importance of the 'last entry' among the Council of Europe's instruments in citizenship education: the 2019 Recommendation on digital citizenship education. In line with MP Koß' keynote, she mentioned that education for democratic citizenship needs a 'whole society approach', including vocational education and training (VET) and adult education. Persoons stressed that the Council of Europe instruments must foster competences which empower us to keep the dialogue alive in times of increasing polarization and fragmentation of public discussions.

"Education for democratic citizenship and Human Rights Education needs a whole-society approach"

The third panellist discussed the local level and the challenges in a large multicultural city. **Thorsten Altenburg Hack**, Director General of the Office for Education within the Authority for School and Vocational Education of the city of Hamburg (Germany) shared the challenges and policies in the city of 2 million inhabitants, where schools teach pupils from 160 different nations. Learners of all levels learn in school and vocational education how to live in such a diverse and pluralistic society. Although a challenge for teachers, Mr Altenburg Hack stressed the importance of values education as an integral part of democratic citizenship education and the important role of vocational education, as well as continuous education and life-long learning in it. Regarding this last point, Hamburg financially supports programmes to educate workers of all ages who did not receive civic education during their formal education.

"Life-long democratic citizenship education for workers"

The fourth panellist shared his view on the role of non-formal education. **Bernd Hüttemann**, Secretary General of the European Movement Germany, described his own personal education experience in Westphalia and how 're-education and re-democratization' were important aspects of the educational

---

[1] The use of this term and its abbreviation EDC/HRE is based on custom and should not be interpreted as a position against other terms like citizenship education, education for democratic culture, and similar.

message in the 1980s in West Germany. In his personal account, Hüttemann stressed how important the participation in youth councils and his activities in associations were for the development of democratic responsibility. Hüttemann criticized the lack of recognition of what he called 'little democracy': everyday participation on local levels and engagement in association should be recognised and supported as a crucial aspect of citizenship education. Using the metaphor of 'young leader' programs he called for 'young democrat' programs.

> ***"'Little' democracy, meaning civic engagement and associations, is a crucial part of citizenship education."***

The high-level panel was concluded by **Matjaž Gruden,** who shared two reassuring points. First, the topic is high on the political agenda. Gruden mentioned a meeting with the new Secretary General, who made democracy a priority and, in that respect, mentioned education. Second, notwithstanding democratic backsliding, there is still a majority in European societies who supports the values of education for democratic citizenship. Yet not all actors belonging to this majority recognize the importance and urgency of citizenship education. However, Gruden stated that success is not measured at conferences in Strasbourg or Berlin, but in the impact of democratic citizenship education in schools, youth centres and adult education.

> ***"There is a majority in Europe who supports the values of education for democratic citizenship."***

A European Space for Citizenship Education

Sarah Keating, Head of Division of formal and non-formal education, presented the plan for the European Space for Citizenship Education. Also, Keating stressed how crucially the world has changed since the education activities of the Council of Europe started[2], and how fast the world is likely to continue changing throughout the life of the children and young people going through education nowadays. She cited a 2019 study by the World Economic Forum which estimated that an impressive 65% of children will most likely work in jobs that do not yet exist today. Future competencies are more important than ever for today's young generation.

The creation of a European Space for Citizenship education is part of the Learner's First strategy adopted at the 26th session of the CoE Standing Conference of Ministers of Education in September 2023.[3] The European Space is one of the measures defined in the strategy's pillar one called *Renewing the Democratic and Civic Mission of Education.* The European Space for Citizenship Education focuses on three areas:

1) The **codification** of the materials, approaches, and principles that have been developed in the last few decades. The European space aims to put this acquis under one roof, and, if need be, fill some gaps in the acquis.
2) Develop a **hallmark of quality citizenship education** to enhance credibility and accountability.
3) Foster **cooperation** among diverse actors in citizenship education.

Next steps in creating the European Space for Citizenship Education

The European Space for Citizenship Education, as the Learners first strategy, will be implemented in two phases.
- First implementation phase 2024 – 2026,
- Second implementation phase 2027 – 2030.

---

[2] See Annex I for a list of important steps in the Council of Europe's activities leading to the European Space of Citizenship Education.
[3] URL: https://rm.coe.int/education-strategy-of-the-council-of-europe-2024-2030/1680aee0c4, last access 07/11/2024

For the first phase, the education division plans the following measures to create the space:

- Creation of a working group to develop the space in the above-mentioned three areas.
- Organization of three events per year: two meetings of the Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) and one conference for consultations with actors form the non-formal and the formal education sectors and civil society.
- Continuous work with the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) and its Bureau as well as other Council of Europe bodies and networks.
- Continuous work on communication and visibility.

The co-creation process of the European Space of Citizenship Education will be finalized by the end of 2026 and presented to the next Standing Conference of Ministers of Education.

Role of Civil Society and Youth in the European Space for Citizenship Education

The round table of civil society representatives was opened and moderated by **Georg Pirker**, former chairman of the Democracy and Human Rights Education Network DARE and person responsible for international EDC/HRE work at Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten – AdB e.V.

Visions for the European Space

In a first round, the panellists shared their visions for the European Space for Citizenship Education. The European Space should…

… be a frame to bring **the field of non-formal education and youth work to cooperate on eye-level with formal education**. Germany provides an example where non-formal education and youth work overlap. The legal framework (social code SGB VIII) mentions specifically the non-formal education and the youth sectors and assigns them responsibility for EDC/HRE, alongside formal education in schools.

… be a **space for inter- and transnational, as well as national exchange**: For Germany with its federalist structure and heterogeneous education policy, CoE frameworks provide a tool for a common language in inter-regional discussion.

… provide a forum for the **discussion of concepts and definitions** for both formal and non-formal education.

… lead to **better recognition of EDC and protection of non-governmental organizations in the field** against legal bindings and cutting of funding. To enable cooperation on eye-level requires political support of non-formal education mainly in capacity development.

… **actively search to include civil society actors**

… **give time and voice to the younger generation**.

… be a **safe space for our profession** where we can develop professional strategies and refuse to be threatened.

Moderator Pirker asked the panellists if the European space is still arriving timely. The question was answered in an affirmative way. The main message was that no action is no alternative, quite on the

contrary: for civil society, action is urgent as various European monitoring studies describe shrinking democratic spaces for civil society organizations.[4]

In addition to the visions, two points are worth highlighting considering the democratic backsliding experienced. One is an increasing urgency to define the core of democracy which are beyond legitimate democratic controversy. Another is the suggestion that we should ask from people to take on more responsibility for our democracies, as we all benefit from the fact that we live in democracies in Europe. This means, among other things, to constantly work on our education offers to make them accessible for all and to reach out to adults as well.

The European Space and schools

In a next step, the panellists discussed the question, how Council of Europe instruments like the Charter, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (hereafter: RFCDC) and now the European Space for Citizenship Education can help to strengthen citizenship education in schools.

Andrea Szukala, board member of *Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Bildung e.V.* (DVPB), underlined that civic education in schools should go beyond the whole-school approach. In addition to the facilities, learners and education professionals, also the parents, neighbourhoods and related civil society associations should be considered in EDC planning. We must consider that parents can be a challenge if they want to transmit their values to their children and object if values education is part of democratic citizenship education at school. This challenge requires formats to reach parents, which could be provided e.g. by adult education institutions. In that regard, an interesting innovation in Germany is the presence of multi-professional teams in schools, which are featured in the so called "Startchancen Programm".[5] This program asks for targeted cooperation with social work. external expertise, the non-formal education and youth work sectors.

Sophia Oppermann, director and member of the board of Gesicht Zeigen e.V., described the diversity of schools which leads to diverse forms of cooperation of non-governmental organizations with schools. While some schools book workshops without further contact, other schools develop longer cooperations where whole cohorts repeatedly participate in activities. While the latter is very productive for the participants, the organization of such cooperation formats is complicated and requires a strong commitment from both schools and NGOs to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and structural imbalances (e.g. project related work of NGO´s dependent on funding etc.).

Monika Oberle professor at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, added to these challenges that there is a tendency to make a false distinction between civic education ('politische Bildung' in German) from experienced-based social and value learning. Instead, experience-based, action oriented and value-based approaches should be combined with learning about policy and politics. An example are simulation games. Simulation games model real-world decision-making processes[6] and thus teach the learners <u>about</u> politics and policymaking. At the same time, the learners actively engage in the modelled decision-making process, experiencing it and influencing its outcome. Learners thus also learn <u>through</u> democracy and ideally reflect the social skills and values which helped and guided them when they pursued their interest.

[4] See for example a 2022 report by the European parliament (URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0032_EN.html#_section2) and a 2019 report by the Conference of International NGOs and the Council of Europe (URL: https://rm.coe.int/cmj-2019-7-shrinking-space-report/168096cd0f), last accessed 15/11/2024.
[5] For more information (in German), URL: https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/de/bildung/startchancen/startchancen-programm.html, last access 15/11/2024.
[6] Famous simulation games are Model United Nations, where students experience the work of country representatives in UN committees. There exist also simulations of the European Union's institutions (e.g. URL: https://learning-corner.learning.europa.eu/learning-materials/council-simulation-game_en) or of national legislative and political processes (e.g. in Germany planpolitik, URL: https://www.planpolitik.de/en, or in Switzerland Politik Macht Gesetz, URL: http://www.politik-macht-gesetz.ch/, last access 04/12/2024)

Cooperation across sectors: challenges and criteria for success

The first aspect discussed can be summarized as the challenge and need of **eye-level cooperation across sectors**. In the German experience, topics, approaches and formats of cooperation between non-formal actors and schools are determined by schools. Therefore, actors of the non-formal education sectors cannot fully realize the advantages and benefits of their approaches when cooperating with schools. One reason is that adults are too hesitant to let children and youth have their space. Another reason is the wide-spread lack of time, resources and funding of actors from the non-formal education sector.

Cooperation across the formal and non-formal education sectors and the youth sectors could be part of the solution of one of the challenges frequently mentioned throughout the conference: the challenge of hard-to-reach (young) people. **Helle Becker,** director at Transfer für Bildung e.V., highlighted that it is crucial to build citizenship education on everyday experiences and on topics brought in by the participants. Regarding this, schools could learn from youth work and non-formal education. Also, because the non-formal education sector has taken on an important role in fostering and facilitating European networking on EDC/HRE and thus makes learning from best-practices possible.

The RFCDC could be used as a tool to facilitate cooperation between the formal and non-formal education sectors and the youth/youth work sector, as one barrier is the lack of a common language. We should build on the RFCDC to develop a common basis of terms and knowledge. The Council of Europe can set standards and produce adequate instruments. The European Space should not only instigate **cooperation across sectors at the grassroot level, but also at the political level, both in the national contexts and internationally**.

In addition to a common language, cooperation between the non-formal and formal education sectors and the youth sector would be considerably simplified by more investment in fundamental research. We must bring together discussions that nowadays evolve in parallel between sectors and we must start **a Europe-wide research-based discussion.** In Germany, this must happen considering the **established models of competencies**. The RFCDC, as an example, provides an opportunity to widen the traditional view on citizenship education and include more soft skills in the agenda.

Only on the fundamental basis of research will we be able to define quality criteria, enhance the quality of citizenship education, and evaluate. Research-based quality criteria would help actors from the formal education sector to make informed cooperation decisions. For all actors potentially involved, research on success criteria for cooperation between formal and non-formal actors could help to plan more effective cooperations in the future. To highlight the need for such research could be a task for the Council of Europe in the development of the European Space for Citizenship Education.

Co-creation of the European Space for Citizenship education

Salvador Sala, Head of the European Space for Citizenship Education Unit at the Council of Europe tells the audience that the European Space is being created in a participatory process with the aim to capture diverse perspectives from a wide range of education actors and sectors.

With the invitation to be realistic and inspirational, and to keep in mind that we must bridge the gap between policy makers and education practitioners, the participants were divided into four groups to discuss their views on four fundamental questions. After the workshops, the rapporteurs met on a panel moderated by **Özge Erdogan** from the German National Committee for international youth work. Appendix II lists reports from the workshops.

Role for formal and non-formal education actors and civil society

The question about the role of education actors and civil society in the creation of the European Space proved to be the right question: civil society actors welcomed to be asked to contribute and, in their turn, asked to be invited also in the future. Sometimes, to them, it is not transparent who has access to what processes at the European political level and they lack resources, to be actively seeking contact all the time. The Berlin conference was described as a positive example of collaboration of the Council of Europe's Education division with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs providing political support and funding and the DARE-network mobilizing its network among civil society actors. The conference itself is a good example for the cooperation with civil society and non-governmental organizations.

Participants reminded us that the **Charter on EDC/HRE lists as relevant actors** "policy makers, educational professionals, learners, parents, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, youth organizations, media and the general public" (paragraph 5i) and asked that these actors should be considered for the creation of the European Space for Citizenship Education as well. In other moments of the conference, participants also brought employers and cultural institutions into the discussions as potential allies in fostering democracy and citizenship education.

The experience shows that the task to bring valuable Council of Europe instruments to practitioners is all but obvious. Considering this, conference participants described two examples when the Council of Europe established successful forms of cooperation that supported the implementation on the ground:

- The Compass and later Compasito manuals for Human Rights education are widely known and used across Europe. The reason is that the Council of Europe organized **trainings for practitioners on the national and regional levels.** The European Space could envision similar measures for the implementation and dissemination of the RFCDC and related best practices.
- The No hate speech movement run by the Council of Europe in the years 2013 – 2017 initiated **national and local campaigns** implemented with European and regional campaign partners. Many of the national campaigns continued to function even after the Council of Europe sustained the campaign. The creation of **national committees** crucially strengthened the sustainability of the campaign. The European Space for Citizenship Education could benefit from local and regional committees as well.

A recurrent topic discussing the role of different actors was the frequent lack of time and funding in civil society and non-governmental organizations. This already difficult situation worsens with the overarching political challenge of democratic backsliding that affects civil society organizations in a vital manner. This challenge cannot be met with communication measures only (e.g. a campaign); it requires a broader discussion of best-practices in funding civil society organizations in the field of EDC/HRE. The result could be recommendations for public funding instruments and private donors that should be based on values and principles of EDC/HRE defined by specialists and practitioners. The European Space for Citizenship Education could serve as a platform for this endeavour.

Values and principles

On several occasions, conference participants positively mentioned different aspects of the Council of Europe's acquis, like the Charter, the principle of "education about, for and through" democracy, and the RFCDC. This acquis should be maintained and sustained as a very good basis and a few gaps should be addressed. The participants thus agreed with Keating's presentation of the task to be done in the codification area of the European Space for Citizenship Education.

Guidance on **how to deal with political controversy while teaching democratic values in citizenship education** is one of these gaps identified on several occasions throughout the two days in Berlin. In the German tradition, as well as in Austria and the German-speaking part of Switzerland, controversy is an important and very widely accepted principle of citizenship education.[7] On the one hand, the RFCDC is a valuable complement to the principle of controversy thanks to its emphasis on values such as diversity and with its competences including attitudes like empathy. On the other hand, the RFCDC lacks guidance on how to combine the principle of controversy with activities fostering democratic values as for example defined in the RFCDC. Or, as was said at the conference, a meaningful definition of the core democratic values which lie beyond legitimate democratic controversy. Such a guidance would be of utmost help for teachers across the German speaking countries and beyond.

When it comes to its values and principles, the European Space for Citizenship education should not become too 'noisy'. The 'noise' was used through the workshops and discussions as a metaphor for the range of concepts and goals often in one way or another related to citizenship education. Such concepts are Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), intercultural education and others. In the European Space we should avoid competing with such concepts but show how they are connected and integrated, like what is stated in the Charter on Education for Democracy and Human Rights (paragraph 1 on the scope of the Charter).

Quality assessment and evidence

The discussions about quality throughout the conference evolved around two issues. The first is the question about 'quality of what'. In the workshops, participants reminded us of the different questions that occurred when measuring different dimensions of quality. We can measure the **quality of input, educational process, outcomes, or the long-term impact**. All these dimensions require different standards and research approaches. While the need for research on education outcomes was stated a few times, there was widespread agreement that immediate results like the voting behaviour of (young) people are not useful quality standards. A much more useful first step would be taking the underlying values and principles of education measures as quality standards.

The second issue evolved around a **research agenda** for EDC/HRE. Several of the topics were already mentioned in other parts of this report, like the definitions of terms, the development of a common language across professional sectors and engaging in a Europe-wide exchange. In addition, participants shared that research makes progress if we conduct both quantitative large-N studies as well as small and detailed qualitative research on effectiveness. Such small studies should be disseminated as pilots and inform a research-based discussion.
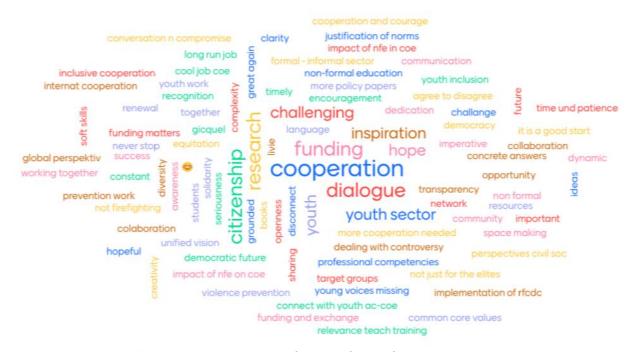
Useful cooperation forms

For several reasons, **the non-formal education sector should be strengthened and should not only be encouraged to focus its activities only on schools**, as this bears the risk to reduce non-formal education to a service provider for the formal education sector. An advantage of non-formal education is that innovation is faster yet meets more hurdles in the formal sector than in the non-formal sector. Moreover, where non-democratic forces gain political power, they can influence schools as public institutions. Participants shared their observations of teachers who avoid certain topics out of fear of the authorities. Unfortunately, such forces can also legally define (and limit) the space where educational and youth NGO´s, the main providers of non-formal education work, are active. Cooperation endeavours should reach out to **allies in the defence of democracy**. Allies can be found

---

[7] The principle of controversy is one of the three principles of the Beutelsbacher Konsens which is very widely recognized. For more information, see for example explanation of the Federal Agency of Civic Education in German (URL: https://www.bpb.de/lernen/inklusiv-politisch-bilden/505269/der-beutelsbacher-konsens/, last access 11/11/2024) and in English and other languages (URL: https://www.lpb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens, last access 11/11/2024).

among employers, in science and research, and in cultural institutions. The non-formal education sector should strengthen its ties to youth associations. All actors should build on the experience gained also in the fields of youth and social work on how to include people facing social, financial and educational barriers.

Figure 1: Word cloud created by the participants at the end of day one of the conference. Every participant submitted three terms as his or her personal take-home messages of the day. Font size of the words corresponds to the frequency with which the words were submitted.

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)

In the morning of the second conference day, **Villano Qiriazi**, head of the Education Department, thanked Salvador Sala and Sarah Keating for their work on the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). In Qiriazi's words the Charter defined the objectives for learning systems and the RFCDC provides descriptions of outcomes. These outcomes are described as competences.

In his keynote speech, professor **Hermann Josef Abs** from the University of Duisburg-Essen presented the RFCDC. The RFCDC consists of four clusters (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding) of a total of twenty competences. The main message of the model is that a persons must activate competences from all four clusters to act democratically. This core of the model is illustrated by the 'butterfly' with four wings, one for each cluster.

Professor Abs underlined the following innovative aspects of the RFCDC:

- The model focuses on all aspects of education systems, from the work in the classroom to the whole-school approach to curriculum design and the level of education policy.
- The RFCDC explicitly puts human rights at the fundament of citizenship education.
- The RFCDC acknowledges that democratic citizenship contributes to quality education.
- The RFCDC focuses on language and intercultural competences as important aspects of democratic competences.

For Germany, professor Abs expects the following benefits: The RFCDC addresses all teachers, from all regions and levels. It provides a description of intercultural and language competences which have been less emphasized in the German tradition of citizenship education. Finally, unlike other competence models, the RFCDC provides descriptors of competences and describes levels of proficiency. Both are very helpful not only for the assessment of learning outcomes, but also for the design of educational material.

There are also open questions and needs for further work on the RFCDC.
Does the RFCDC need a **complement for political concepts, institutions, and procedures** ("politics")? This consideration by professor Abs resonates with observations made in different discussions throughout the conference. More space for political questions would mean also to explicitly deal with controversy as a fundamental principle of citizenship education and it would give space to empowering young people to act not only democratically but also politically.

Other open questions regard a possible update of the model considering recent developments. The RFCDC was developed in the years 2013-2018, the German translation was inaugurated in October 2024, seven years after the first publication of the model. Most importantly, the RFCDC needs an add-on about **competences for digital citizenship**. While the handbook for digital citizenship education by the Council of Europe provides a good starting point, the definition of competences and proficiency levels would be helpful.

Implementing the RFCDC at the national levels

At the Berlin conference, the German translation of the RFCDC was officially launched. On this occasion, **Bernt Gebauer**, Hessian ministry of Education discussed implementation questions with **Fatih Demircan**, Federal Agency for Civic Education and **Patricia Hladschik**, Zentrum polis – Politik lernen in der Schule.

In his first message to all participants, Gebauer stated how important it is that Council of Europe instruments are **translated into national languages**. While at the policy level, international concepts may have some influence also without a translation, the implementation in schools and in the non-formal education and youth sectors can only really start now with the German translation. For that matter, he thanked the Federal Agency for Civic Education for funding the German translation.

The panellists agreed that the translation is a valuable start, but an effective and sustainable implementation needs more. Gebauer and Hladschik shared how the RFCDC was mentioned in official documents in Germany and Austria and how this enhances the legitimacy for the implementation of the instrument mostly in the formal education sector.

Demircan stated that the **implementation process must be kept alive** by addressing different target groups with tailored measures, providing workshops for multipliers, and exchange with other countries regarding best practices and challenges for implementation. Similarly to the open questions formulated in the keynote speech and during the workshops on Day 1, Demircan reflected on the fruitfulness of feedback loops through which experiences in practice could feed into the further development of the material.

Hladschik reminded the participants that it requires **patience and continuous work to implement the RFCDC and bring it to its full potential**. While the butterfly illustration is an easy-accessible tool which can be used in a wide range of settings, delving deeper into the RFCDC, especially into the competence levels and the descriptors, requires more work. Therefore, Hladschik asks whether we need additional tools for the practical implementation of the RFCDC.

Gebauer, from the point of view of teachers, observed that the **development of didactical material** can be challenging if one wants to foster competences in all four clusters with the same didactical intervention.

Questions and statements from the public mentioned further challenges:

- Practitioners expressed their view that the RFCDC can complement but not substitute existing concepts, mainly because it is not very specific about the dimension of politics, policymaking, collective decision-making, conflicts of interests and related knowledge and skills. These aspects are considered crucial in citizenship education and this point was mentioned also in the keynote speech.
- In a similar vein and as discussed during the first day of the conference, the balancing act was described which is required when teaching values and attitudes while abiding by the principle of controversy. This balancing act becomes even more challenging and problematic, when learning outcomes must be assessed.
- Several speakers mentioned scientific definitions and use of the term 'competence' in German, which according to some does not correspond to how it is used in the RFCDC while according to others the definitions are not contradictory. The disagreement evolves around the fact that the RFCDC defines values as an aspect of democratic competences, which is not the case in other models.

RFCDC in practice – workshops about examples

In the years since its first publication, the RFCDC has been used in a variety of contexts in practice. Practitioners from Germany and several other European countries presented practice examples in three parallel workshops. The practice examples ranged from national level accounts (Georgia) to curriculum design (Freie Universität Berlin), from the development of educational materials (Demogames) to the further development of teaching (Teacher reflection tool). The practice examples are listed in Appendix III, wherever possible with names and links to websites.

Closure and conclusion

After a summary by the Rapporteur general, Villano Qiriazi gave a brief outlook into the near future. He announced the year **2025 as the year of digital citizenship education** and said that a few more conferences like the one in Berlin will be organized to consult with civil society in different countries for the co-creation of the European Space for Citizenship Education. For the effectiveness and impact of the European Space for Citizenship Education, it remains important how the findings and recommendations from the conferences feed into the process of its creation and how a follow-up for the diverse conference participants is organized.

Appendix I – History of the Council of Europe's activities in education

The history started in 1996, the year of the 50th anniversary of the Council of Europe, with conceptual work on what will become known as Education for Democratic Citizenship/ Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE).

- In 2001, the first EDC/ HRE network meeting took place in Andorra.
- In 2002, the Compass Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People[8] was first published. It became one of the CoE success stories and was follow by the Compasito Manual[9] for the work with children.
- 2005 was proclaimed the European Year of Citizenship through Education.
- From 2007 to 2011 the Living Democracy Manuals[10] were published.
- In 2010, the Charter on EDC and HRE made ground-breaking recommendation and has been cited and used throughout Europe ever since.
- In 2016, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)[11] was first published in English and French and today is available in 16 European languages. The German translation was inaugurated at the Berlin conference in October 2024. Sarah Keating stressed that the RFCDC makes the abstract concept democracy tangible.

---

[8] Compass Manual online, URL: https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass, last access 07/11/2024

[9] Compasito Manual online, URL: https://book.coe.int/en/human-rights-democratic-citizenship-and-interculturalism/10035-compasito-manual-for-human-rights-education-with-children-3rd-edition.html, last access 07/11/2024

[10] Living Democracy Manuals online, URL: https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/living-democracy-manuals, last access 07/11/2024

[11] Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture online, URL: https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/rfcdc-volumes, last access 07/11/2024

Appendix II – Workshops on the Role of Civil Society

1) What role for education actors and civil society from formal and non-formal education in the development of the European Space?
2) Which principles of citizenship education guide your activities? What values and principles are needed for quality citizenship education in Europe?
3) How do you currently assess the quality of your activities? What evidence is needed to develop quality citizenship education in Europe?
4) What forms of cooperation would be most useful for a quality citizenship education? How to involve education actors and how can we cooperate with them?

Workshop 1, moderated by Natia Nasvlishvili, report by Elisabeth Moorse

Question 1: Role of education actors and civil society

Gap between policy and practice still needs bridging. This means that policy papers alone do not make the difference, but people who enact them and implement them would make the difference.
Crucial role of teachers: Teachers have an important role in filling the gap between policy and practice as they interpret and activate policies. One challenge is that teachers (all levels) do not have enough space/ time/ resources e.g. to discuss the fundamental values underpinning education and promote teacher reflection. The role and view of teachers of wide range of subjects (history, geography, languages, civics etc) should be considered for the European space.
Role of Council of Europe and access to its activities: To some participants, it was not clear who (experts, NGOs) are/ can be involved with the Council of Europe. Does it happen informally? Are there some formal procedures? The Council of Europe should avoid creating the impression that it talks mainly to those who it already collaborates with. Instead, it should ask its partners to join a wider conversation.
Practical ideas for the European space: For a start, maybe a survey or consultation among citizenship education actors should be conducted to understand the starting conditions of the space. Actors should be asked what they need that citizenship education survives and thrives (e.g Codified principles for content, assessment, pedagogy, teaching standards)?

Question 2: Principles of citizenship education

CoE Charter and publications as a good fundament: Learning about, through and for democracy and human rights remains a good starting point. The Council of Europe Charter and several other good documents exist, so there is a good basis.
Other principles: Discussion of additional important principles: Learner's First principle (e.g. Germany); problematising the issues of everyday life; conflict orientation of learning; action orientation in learning; participation in learning; learning social and political participation; principle of controversiality and limits of controversy (rights, rule of law, science (climate change; distinguish facts from opinions and from false information)); dispersion of power and access to power.
Funding: NGOs survive on funding and what gets funded shapes what NGOs do. Good principles and practices for donors needed to make funds and investment support the right citizenship education principles.

Question 3: Quality assessment

IEA ICCS mentioned as one international measurement tool.
Quality of what? Discussion about input, process, or outcome quality. Need for theories to help us define the content (including political theories for the content of teaching).

Size and focus of studies: Small intervention/impact studies are needed in addition to larger quantitative studies. They should include impact and outcome quality. Pilots and dissemination of such studies would be helpful.
RFCDC competencies could be a starting point for studies.

Question 4: Cooperation

Funding: Need for (more) transparency about who is paying for what, who is setting the agenda, what values underpin the investment. Ethical funding for Citizenship education would be a form of quality assurance.
Forms of cooperation: Citizen science as a form of cooperation that helps researchers, teachers, young people, politicians and wider society to learn together; project based learning approaches which involves wider society and community around a project; formal/ official cooperation must be complemented (or must be is preceded) by informal connections which needs time and space too; cooperation should be diversified and extended more widely (e.g. beyond urban and into rural communities, by finding diverse channels of communication).

Workshop 2, moderated by Nils-Eyk Zimmermann, report by Hanna Lorenzen

Question 1: Role of education actors and civil society

- **Role:** Ideally practitioners should feed into the policy level and vice versa.
- **Link of the European Space for Citizenship with the Charter for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education:** The Charter names actors relevant in the process. The same actors should be involved in the development of the European Space for Citizenship. Importantly, educators from the formal and the non-formal sectors should be represented equally.
- **Learned from successful CoE campaigns** like the "No-Hate-Speech-Campaign" or the Compas/ Compasito manual for the development of the European Space
- **Current challenges:** Highlight that the European Space has potential to help with current challenges regarding democracy (e. g. right wing parties, extremist movements)

Question 2: Principles

- **Be aware of diverse traditions and philosophies across Europe:** Communication, research and exchange of the different philosophies of education in the nation states, e.g. theoretical concepts and important scholars all educators refer to, existing consents like the Beutelsbacher Konsens in Germany.
- **School systems:** on European Level knowledge about the different school systems is needed to develop and realize a whole school approach.
- **Teacher training and university education:** It is important that teachers-to-be are introduced to the role and relevance of the non-formal education sector and its work during their education.
- **Controversy as principle and challenge:** More trainings and exchange about how to deal with controversial issues are needed. There cannot be clear-cut guidelines, but many educators feel insecure how to act in very heated and polarized discussions.

Question 4: Cooperation

- **Youth and education sectors:** More cooperation is needed between the Youth and the Education departments on the national levels, but better cooperation is needed also on the European level, including the Council of Europe. School systems strongly differ regarding the

legal environment and regulations to cooperate with the non-formal education sector. Best practices and success conditions for good cooperation need to be closely examined to develop targeted policies.

- **RFCDC as quality criteria for cooperation:** RFCDC could help to develop standards or quality criteria for cooperation. Nowadays, many schools are insecure who to choose to cooperate among the available non-formal actors and/ or education materials.
- **Barriers to cooperation:** The European Space should be aware of common barriers to cooperation like financial and time resources, employment-linked conditions.

Workshop 4, moderated by Ulrike Wolff-Jontofsohn, report by Bernt Gebauer

<u>Expectations for the European Space of Citizenship Education</u>

Opportunity at the right time: The European Space of Citizenship Education is considered a great opportunity at the right time in Europe by the workshop participants. The main hope is, that it contributes to a truly shared understanding of what citizenship education should be in a Pan-European context for the next generation of learners.
Emphasize citizenship education as a benefit and need, and not only employability. This needs a focus and means for citizenship education.
Pragmatic approach: The products of the European Space are likely to be a compromise found by the member states; implementation is very free; they could be useful for supporting educational policies.
Co-operations works best with regional partners.

<u>EDC/HRE needs to become a more natural part of every school life</u>

It was widely shared that more compulsory time for EDC/HRE is needed in schools. It should be made more visible that democratic citizenship education is part of everyday teaching and everyday school life, and it should be widely understood that this has added value for the whole society.

<u>Question 2: Thematic foci of the European Space (values and principles)</u>

Sharing methodologies and principles rather than content is a promising approach for the European Space. The reason are the various and often very different curricula in the member states and regional education systems.

Didactic principles mentioned: multi-perspectivity, controversiality, future orientation, science orientation, quality standards; importance of each individual learner. The RFCDC with its descriptors is useful already about the questions which values should be reflected on and how.

<u>Which support needed for NGOs?</u>

The specific commitment and expertise of NGOs is very often invaluable for schools in this field and often underestimated. This added value of NGO work is not an extra or 'nice to have' but crucially and permanently needed for quality citizenship education. Therefore, a reliable funding structure is needed, and lacking in many education systems.

<u>Discussed challenges for citizenship education</u>

- Quality challenges when civics is subordinated to e.g. a topic like well-being.
- Challenge to reach out to students from non-academic backgrounds. There are great learning gains for non-academic students, but gains are lost rather quickly as research shows once projects are over.

- „Who belongs?" – whom have we failed? Increasing sense of alienation vs. strengthening the sense of belonging – „hard to reach learners"
- The European Space shouldn't be too noisy or too crowdy with other approaches. The primacy of democracy/democratic culture is its focus and not sustainable development, inclusive education, and similar
- Why not call it a European Space for (Democratic) Citizenship?
- More research is needed (e.g. like at DemokratieWerk Kiel)
- There is sometimes or often a struggle of implementing citizenship education due to family values. Families need a school for parents/ parents organization/ school projects for an education community to make families see that schools do not overwhelm their children with the wrong values.
- How to create a CoE discourse on an observatory on citizenship education?
- The true challenge is: What is more important? Subjects or citizenship education for the values we share? Citizenship education needs to be on the same level as other subjects. Exactly this needs to be in the narrative of the ESCE.
- How to motivate politicians to create and promote alliances for this?

Question 4: How to co-operate in the ESCE?

- Time to contact people and have spaces for learning to find out what to do together when sharing similar problems
- Exchange programs with meetings in presence
- Website with good practice examples
- Using the RFCDC as co-operation tool

Appendix III – Workshops practice examples with RFCDC

Workshop 1, moderated by Hugo Wester

1) **Elisabeth Moorse: Parallel Election and other practices in implementing RFCDC in the UK**

Promising work in UK on parallel elections for learners. Scandinavian countries, with long experience of "School Elections" parallel with National Elections or EU-parliament Elections, have been benchmark for the work in UK. Research supports learning for active citizenship by practising and experience democratic actions, even in simulations.
URL: https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/act-launch-parallel-elections-project/, last access 05/11/2024

2) **Andreas Thimmel: Handbook critical political education 2024**
3) **Daria Arlavi: Policy brief on citizenship education**
4) **Tomke Lask: Presentation of two projects on Europe and the far-right, and on a work book on politics and arts**
5) **Hugo Westers: Democracy Step by Step**

Presentation of a systematic whole school approach on Education for Democracy. For more information, please contact Hugo Wester, Swedish National Agency for Education, hugo.wester@skolverket.se
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=V8K2eWfT6X5HH2Pr&v=sONxfb_sRGU&feature=youtu.be, last access 05/11/2024

Workshop 2, moderated by Sigrid Steininger

The following RFCDC practice examples were presented and discussed:

1) **Ulrike Wolff-Jontofsohn: Curriculum MA Democratic School Development**
Master studies program in the department of educational sciences and psychology at Freie Universität Berlin
URL: https://www.fu-berlin.de/studium/studienangebot/master/demokratiepaed_schulentwicklungsozialekompetenzen/index.html, last access 05/11/2024.

Many migrants, whose diploma is not recognized in Germany, are doing this master studies program. The RFCDC and other Council of Europe materials are being used in the studies program; on several occasions, they were also used in MA theses.

2) **Patricia Hladschik: Council of Europe Teacher Reflection Tool**
The Council of Europe's Teacher Reflection Tool is now available also in German:
URL German version (download and online link at the bottom of the page: https://www.politik-lernen.at/rfcdc_reflexionstool, last access 05/11/2024
URL English version: https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/-reflection-tool-for-teachers, last access 05/11/2024

3) **Ralph Carstens: Insights from the IEA ICCS 2022 and plans for ICCS 2027**
The presenter gave an oversight over the study and announced that Austria will participate in the ICCS 2027 edition.
URL ICCS 2022: https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs/2022, last access 05/11/2024
URL ICCS 2027: https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs/2027, last access 05/11/2024

4) **Nils-Eyk Zimmermann: LICEAL competence explorer**
The Competence Explorer was presented as a useful tool for implementation. It helps to 'translate' the various documents into educational practice.
URL: https://competendo.net/en/Competence_Explorer, last access 05/11/2024

Workshop 3, moderated by Nina Lüders

1) Moritz Borchardt: Demogames

Demogames was an Erasmus+ funded project by six organisations from five countries in the period 2019 – 2022. It combined the RFCDC and game-based learning to develop eight educational games, a MOOC, a training-the-trainers course and a handbook. Project outputs are available on the project website:
URL: www.demogames.eu, last access 05/11/2024

2) Felix Lohmann: Presentations of materials of best practice

Demokratie in Aktion at Kieler Forschungswerkstatt
URL: https://www.uni-kiel.de/de/detailansicht/news/079-demokratie-werk, last access 05/11/2024

3) Annette Ullrich: Materials of non-formal political youth education at Wannsee Forum

URL: https://wannseeforum.de/en/welcome, last access 05/11/2024

4) Daniela Danz: Federal competition "Act democratically" (Demokratisch handeln)

URL: www.demokratisch-handeln.de, last access 05/11/2024

5) Natia Natsvlishvili: Georgia' experiences in implementing RFCDC