The Impact of Cultural and Citizenship Education on Social Cohesion

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Input

Panel
The Impact of Cultural and Civic Education on Social Cohesion:
Chances – Challenges – Changes

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The role of research on the impact of cultural and civic education on social cohesion is to provide a better understanding of what social cohesion is, to explain the pressure points that currently exist and to evaluate the learning strategies for making improvements. Therefore in this presentation I will aim to explore these points by particularly addressing the following questions:

What do we mean by social cohesion? And what type of social cohesion does Europe want? Which values, attitudes and ways of behaviour of individual citizens are required to achieve this type of social cohesion? Which pedagogical approaches deliver these results?

Social Cohesion
In order to understand social cohesion, I will start with examining some existing definitions. The first to be considered is a research based definition that demonstrates the specific mechanisms of this phenomenon:

'Social cohesion is the property by which whole societies, and the individuals within them, are bound together through the action of specific attitudes, behaviours, rules and institutions.'
(Green, Janmaat and Han 2009 p.20)

The second one is the Council of Europe (CoE) (2008) definition that describes the type of social cohesion that Europe considers desirable, '*well-being of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation'*. The CoE definition and the accompanying report of a high-level task force on social cohesion (Daly et al 2008) encapsulate the values of equality, solidarity, fairness and tolerance contained within their model of social cohesion. The European Commission (EC), although to the best of my knowledge it does not have a single agreed upon definition of social cohesion, regularly uses this concept and within the latest Education and Training objectives for 2020 highlights the need for equity, social cohesion and active citizenship (Education Council May 2009). In this text, the focus of the usage of the term social cohesion centres on inclusion, in particular highlighting the need for equal access to good education regardless of social and economic circumstances, preventing early school leavers and supporting fringe groups such as those with special needs and those with migrant backgrounds. The definitions and uses of the term social cohesion of European institutions highlight the type of social cohesion that Europe is aiming for, whilst the research definition highlights the mechanisms involved in the different existing types of models of social cohesion.

Interestingly, however, research shows that social cohesion ideals and practices work in different ways in different European member states. For example, the previous literature (Green, Janmaat and Han 2009) has found at least three types which have different emphasis:

Liberal (typically associated with the UK and Ireland)
-   Emphasis on volunteering and charity
-   Values of freedom, rights and responsibilities
-   Individualism and competition
-   Outcomes: high level of wealth inequalities, higher rates of crime and lower standards of overall health

Social market (typically associated with France, Germany, Austria)
-   Emphasis on political participation at the national level
-   A single common identity, common culture and civic virtues
-   Strong belief in solidarity
-   Outcomes: lower levels of wealth inequalities, but higher rates of unemployment

Social democracy (typically associated with the Nordic countries)
- High levels of democratic participation and decision making in everyday life both for local and national level decisions
- The development of cooperatives and social movements
- Values of equality and fairness
- Collectivism and solidarity
- Lower rates of wealth inequalities and lower rates of unemployment

One limitation of these distinctions of social cohesion models is that they do not offer any explanation for social cohesion models in southern and eastern European countries, and therefore further research is required to understand how social cohesion is currently functioning within these states.

Pressure points on social cohesion
Next I will examine the strains on social cohesion models across the whole of Europe today. Firstly, there is a large degree of marginalisation and alienation of groups within the political and everyday decision making procedures of society according to class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age etc. Secondly, there are increasing levels of inequalities of wealth, leading to high levels of crime and lower levels of health (Wilkinson 2009). Thirdly, the level of tolerance across Europe is quite low, and with increasing levels of migration within and outside Europe social cohesion is going to be tested. Fourthly, climate change will increasingly put pressure on social cohesion through extreme weather and the need for citizens to change their behaviour to reduce their CO_2 output.

As a result of these major tensions today and due to a belief that societies should be fairer it is thus relevant both to understand how social cohesion is working across Europe today and to consider which steps are needed to be undertaken to move towards a fairer and more inclusive system.

Values and Behaviour in the form of Active Citizenship
The second part of the presentation, after establishing the different ways of understanding social cohesion, is to establish the mechanisms involved in developing the type of social cohesion that Europe desires including the rules, institutions and attitudes and behaviour of citizens. The research definition utilised above highlights the importance of institutions and laws, and in European Union/ CoE countries this includes welfare and protection systems, a democratic polity, redistribution of wealth mechanisms through taxation, a legal system and a free press. However, in order to focus on the topic of the conference and due to limitations of time, I will speak predominantly on which type of citizens' values, attitudes and behaviours is needed to achieve a more desirable form of social cohesion. This I have referred to previously as active citizenship and defined as:

'Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy.' (Hoskins 2006)

This definition encompasses ways of participation from across the different national models of social cohesion, emphasising the three dimensions of representative democracy, volunteering in the community and the role of civil society. What is important in the context of all this, is the quality of participation in terms of the underlying values.

The indicators that I produced, deriving from this definition, demonstrate large differences between countries in Europe, with the social democratic Nordic countries out-performing the rest of Europe as far as active citizenship is concerned, Sweden (1), Norway (2) and Denmark (3), and in particular with regard to the dimensions of civil society and protest and social change activities; Sweden (1), Norway (3) and Denmark (2) and community life;

Sweden (2), Norway (1) and Denmark (6) (Hoskins and Mascherini 2009). Some social market countries perform well on the political side, such as Belgium (1), Austria (4) and Luxembourg (5), but not France (16), and as would be expected the Anglo-Saxon countries perform reasonably well on the community life dimension UK (4), Ireland (8). As previously discussed, the south and east European countries in general have lower performances for all aspects of active citizenship, but as with the models of social cohesion we simply have much less of a research base to work from (Hoskins and Mascherini 2009).

How does active citizenship interrelate with social cohesion?

Representative democracy and protest
In a democratic polity based on the values of equality, solidarity and fairness, the government requires the vast majority of the citizens to vote, in order that they legitimately represent what most people want. After voting, they need to be consulted and involved in dialogue on decisions affecting their lives. In addition, the citizens need to hold those in power continuously accountable through civil society and protest actions (creating and signing petitions, writing to politicians, web logs and newspapers and organising protests), so that the powerful will reflect the needs of all society and not just their own self or group interests or corrupt practices. This process of voting, dialogue and accountability includes all elected officials at all levels. A lack of accountability, dialogue and legitimate government can lead to a lack of trust in politicians and the political process.

The Council of Europe and European Commission use of social cohesion directly refers to fringe groups. Marginalized groups tend to vote less and either do not have the knowledge and skills or the social networks within civil society or political organisations to ensure that their voices and needs are heard, or they lack the self efficacy or self belief that they will be listened to if they try. However, these voices need to be heard in order that they are empowered within decisions that have effect on their lives. The consequence of not bringing these people into the decision making process can lead to further alienation.

Community life
An additional mechanism typically associated with social cohesion is volunteering and charity. De Toqueville and Putnam stressed that volunteering within community groups is important for community cohesion. This is no doubt the case for specific communities. However, then on a national level a high degree of community participation can lead to a lack of community bonding. The answers really depend on the type of volunteering we are discussing. Volunteering for right-wing extremist parties promoting anti immigration slogans would certainly not increase overall levels of social cohesion. Volunteering for religious groups can help the individual feel more included in a specific community, but these specific groups may clash with other groupings in that society. Volunteering for human rights and environmental organisations can be viewed more positively, as they work towards the common good. In order to evaluate which types of volunteering are beneficial it is best viewed from the perspective of civil republicanism and from reflecting when the actions undertaken try to promote the 'common good' or recent descriptions of actions aiming towards the 'common goods'.

Tolerance
In a multicultural Europe, with an increasing number of migrants and a declining number of employment prospects due to economic recession as well as,a war on terror as an addition to this mix, intercultural understanding is under pressure. Enhanced with popular parties rhetoric, migrants are targeted as the cause of all difficulties of society. Increasing tolerance is an important aspect of improving social cohesion. However, there are key issues under discussion on whether multicultural or assimilation policies will be most effective for supporting social cohesion.

Wealth inequalities

In a democracy, in order to introduce policies that will increase the levels of equality, equality needs to be considered desirable. Although we would all believe in the principle of fairness, what is fair is in reality quite a tough question and can be set against performance based on merit. The extent of a redistribution of wealth can rest on opinions based on these questions, but in countries with a high degree of wealth inequalities (Wilkinson 2008) the consequences have been considerably negative such as, for example, increasing rates of crime and reduction of health care.

Sustainable development

Climate change is likely to cause numerous challenges for social cohesion, with places to live in Europe being lost to rising water levels and increasing desertification and an increase of abnormal weather patterns such as floods and heat waves. Active citizens can play an important role in creating solidarity and support to other citizens in times of crises. In addition, active citizens are also needed to change the way they live to reduce CO_2 output and increase the political pressure on politicians to act.

Pedagogy

By a final step, this presentation will focus in the pedagogical approaches that will have effect on the quality and quantity of active citizenship and that in turn will then influence the type of social cohesion in Europe.

In a large scale quantitative study that we have completed in five countries across Europe, in England, Finland, Italy and Poland, similar patterns of effective learning strategies for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for active citizenship have been found (Hoskins, Jammat and Villaba forthcoming). Using an analytic model based on the communities of practice literature (Lave and Wenger 1992 and Wenger 1998), the results showed that learning citizenship is most effective if developed through meaningful activities. This means that learning is effective if the learner is situated in an environment which is relevant to the topic, where learning is guided by the interest of the learner and builds on positive learning relationships and role models. In this regard, peers and family members can be considered a very useful resource. In addition, those environments are most effective in which the individuals feel safe to give their own point of view and to argue their opinion. These approaches to learning can be used both in the formal and non-formal learning sector and used for both the topics of citizenship and intercultural education.