

Rethinking the European Union of Values: a table game with asylum seekers and students

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Background

In Europe, in the last decade, there has been a '**civic education turn**' due to :

- General increase of **diversity** in European societies
- Growing flows of **migrants and asylum seekers** with a consequent focus on civic integration policies for 'new citizens'
- **Terroristic attacks** in Europe targeting also European values and way of life (Art. 2 TEU)
- **Renewed focus and valorization of common European values** in EU strategies and policies, including in the education sector (EU Paris Declaration, 2015) and funding programs (CERV - Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme) but also with the appointment of the **EC Vice-President** responsible for promoting '**our European Way of Life**' (Margaritas Schinas)

Main Research Questions

- How to design inclusive civic integration programs that focus on European values and overcome **multiple criticisms** towards these programs?
- To what extent such programs could be **successful**?

Methodology

Educational tool "**The House of Common Values**" developed by Eurac Research and used in schools in South Tyrol and Uni Bz (Faculty of Education)

Main criticisms on civic education programs based on common values

- They reflect the **views of the majority** rather than serving as a common foundation for strengthening social cohesion
- They carry **cultural biases** : are values truly universal/common ?
- Risks linked to the **neutrality** and **impartiality** of teachers/operators
- They are **unidirectional** and based on **assimilationist** approaches (risk of counter-indocrination)
- Risk to reinforce and perpetuate new forms of **paternalism** and **power relations**
- They are overburdened by **high expectations** : they are often considered a panacea for all sorts of social and political ills, such as political apathy, marginalisation, alienation, crime, extremism, social unrest
- There is a **disconnection between theory and practice** : they lack uniformity leading to a problem of double standards

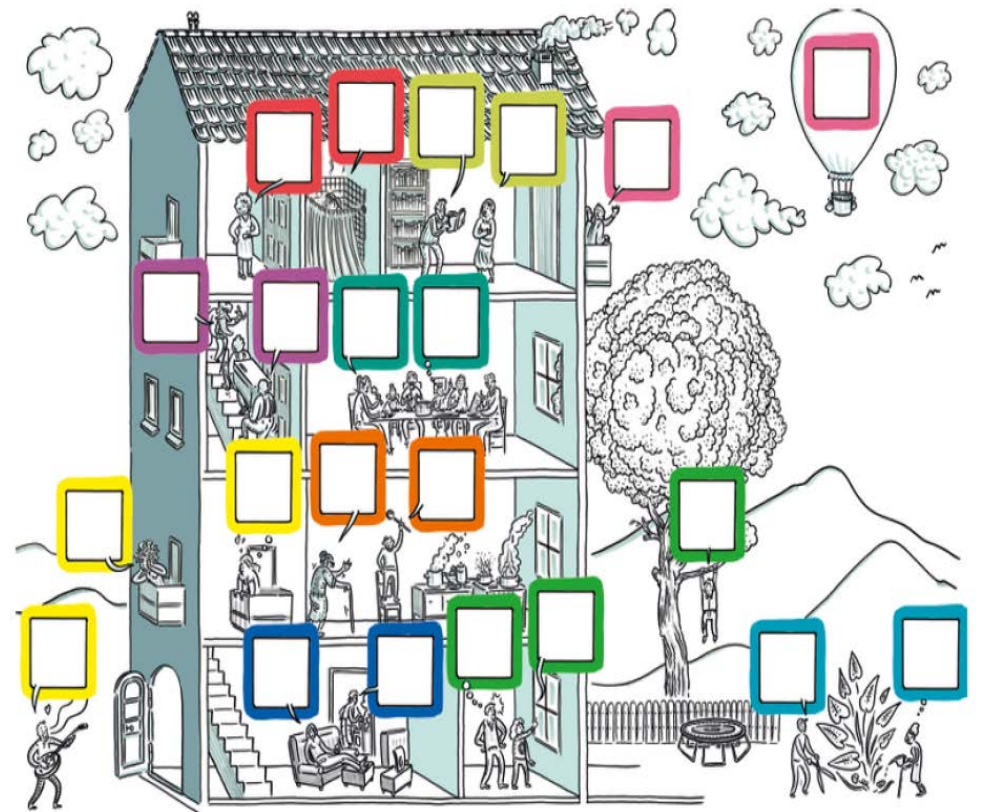
How to overcome problems of civic education programs?

- Paradigm shift: **moving from 'sameness' to 'togetherness'**
- Values should be presented and discussed impartially, acknowledging their **imperfections, limitations, and contradictions**
- Rather than assessing the willingness to believe and adhere in common values, the focus should be on acquiring **knowledge and understanding** of those values
- Values should be presented through concrete and practical experiences to demonstrate their **relevance in everyday life**
- Focus on **active learning** through **participatory** and **creative** didactic methodologies.

The House of Common Values

Interactive and collaborative game that allows to explore EU common values, strengthening the bonds of mutual understanding among the participants, while respecting their diversity.

- The game is based on a **metaphor** : **European societies** are like a **house** where tenants are kept together by various factors, incl. **common values**
- Participants elaborate short personal/fictional **stories** out of the open situations drawn on the board and link them to a common value.
- The connection stories-common values is open to **individual interpretation**
- By linking values and individual experiences, values are no longer perceived as abstract and rhetorical concepts but as **relevant to real daily life**.



The House of Common Values: main results

- **1** board game, **39** explanatory notes (IT/DE/EN), **39** video clip (IT/DE/EN), **13** illustrations, **1** promotional video and **2** surveys (>400 valid answers) on common values.
- Game tested in more than 80 encounters in Italy and Austria with more than **700 participants** among asylum seekers, refugees and the local population.
- Game used by **PAB/KOI** for classes on civic integration
- **Training courses** on Citizenship and Constitution for teachers in South Tyrol
- Free University of Bolzano/Bozen – **Intercultural laboratories** – Faculty of Education, Prof. Doris Kofler



Concluding Remarks

Necessity to **balance diversity and unity** :

- if more emphasis is on **diversity**, the risk is to create 'cultural' ghettos and enclaves, lack of common values and overall social and political objectives and a risk of social fragmentation ;
- if more emphasis is on **unity**, the risk is to alienate minorities and provoke resistance.

The **ultimate goal** is to create a **stable and cohesive society** where **legitimate minority claims are fulfilled**.

This can be achieved through an approach that regards **minority rights as an integral part of human rights**, so, not in contradiction or in contraposition, but by adopting a **combination** of diversity-oriented and shared-values education programs.

In this regard, the game **“The House of Common Values”** combines these approaches contributing:

- to foster self and mutual understanding of **what individuals have in common**
- to overcome the **fear of 'the other'** and the dichotomy **'us-they'**

<https://www.eurac.edu/en/institutes-centers/institute-for-minority-rights/projects/pedagogical-tools>

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