

Consultation on the European Commission’s Memorandum on Lifelong Learning Submissions of the ACC

Developing effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning.

Developing high-quality, user-oriented and adaptable learning systems for different groups of active learners.

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PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

Statement (Section 1)

Europeans have realised the existence of questions which are not to be solved inside a system of states all having sovereignty in all fields. A certain development has then characterised the history after the Second World War. Sovereignties among states have been loosened and **discussions take place in super-nation-states forums as well as in the nation-states forums**. More and more people can imagine a state system less defined in accordance with nation-state borders. **The European capitals former centres of discussions have now to realise that they are both centres and periphery.**

The political discussions have moved horizontally (to Brussels, Strasbourg etc) and also vertically, as most of us are not participants in the definite discussions. They are much more run by professionals, by officials, most of them not even elected, and we don't even know their names. Moreover, we do not know the parties that are discussing, those parties our state-politicians meet in discussions, we don't know their points of view and we don't know the contexts of these points of view.

Those in power in this system (the ones that have been voted by the citizens) do not know with whom they are talking. In such a system it is a permanent temptation for those in decision and for those setting up the public opinion to make these mysterious unknown dialogue-partners into scapegoats and culprits of problems belonging to domestic affairs.

It is a necessity that the Europeans know much more about each other, that we understand the backgrounds of the points of views presented in the different forums and of the representatives of the different states, and it is important that we understand which cultural values the populations want to preserve and to be respected.

In short a **common European public and permanent debate is needed (Europäische Öffentlichkeit/"public subject")**. This "community" based on common questions should not only be a professional one.

The Austrian elections of 2000 probably show a lot, which has not been investigated fully. The Austrian example should probably show us, that voters having no real chance of influencing political decisions tend to vote in protest, no matter the contents of the alternative. The institutionalised political life (Strasbourg, Brussels, etc.) needs a "public subject" (Öffentlichkeit) to be a permanently present partner/opponent. The public subject does/did exist in Austria of course, but it was no serious partner/opponent/voice. Rather it was necessary to consider the voices of the so-called "social partners" ("Sozialpartnerschaft"). No social partner is nowadays considered enough in the EU level, the opinions of civil society are most of the times ignored, the opinion of the "organised" society is not being used, and taken serious.

The generation building the system may be able to consider nowadays EU-political situation a temporary phase and to abstract from the fact that citizens are on distance of the political debates, when talking about the common-level political issues. For the new generations, the youth, it is just obvious, that the Inter-European political issues are something far away, and it has been like that from the beginning of their conscious lives.

Measures (Section 2)

We consider it reasonable to widen the common European questions **to include every citizen or inhabitant and we find it necessary for the Europeans to know much more about each others** in order to avoid misunderstandings and to avoid unbalance between the aim of unity and the aim of diversity.

Therefore **we propose the idea of creating Community Colleges on a common European basis as a way of introducing Europeans to people with whom they share “community” or political system.**

The aim of Community Colleges should be the provoking of debates, which are of common nature, should be experiencing the differences, should be aimed at living together with other Europeans for period of for example one month, should be aimed at learning and discussing together as a way of eliminating stereotypes, prejudices... we want people to have a real image, and to be part of this process and give their opinion about it.

Community colleges:

- take their starting point in an idea and an objective, which has been defined by a non-governmental group of people running the school (this could be interpreted as the principle of subsidiarity),
- have as their ideal boarding-school courses that last for a longer period of time (preferably at least one month),
- organise courses on topics of common (European) interest in accordance with the idea of the group running the school,
- are "governed by culture" in the sense that life at the individual schools should be influenced by local traditions and culture
- have adults as their target group; adults who are interested in learning and thus also in paying part of the courses themselves.

Because of the distances, the **boarding-school system** is a very good possibility, when every young person in Europe should have the opportunity of being present. No matter the necessity of the boarding school-system, it is also to prefer because discussions made on a place where you sleep, eat, learn etc. under the very same roof, become so much more serious. Contacts will develop in a natural way, prejudices will be deconstructed, and qualified images of Europeans about Europeans will be created.

It would be the task of member-states to provide the **legal frame** for setting up Community Colleges, to give up the monopoly (as far as it exists) of defining curricula

and to give up the ideology of testing students through exams and other kinds of disturbances. The giving up of the monopoly should include member-state support of community colleges, even though the state in principle loses the power of defining, which questions are of common European relevance and of defining the curricula.

After the establishing of a legal frame, this could be the scenario: (1) an initiative of founding a community college comes from a non-governmental group of people, (2) the member-state allows the school to be subsidised, if it is considered to be legal, and (3) EU offers co-financing of community colleges, if the idea is considered to be of a common European character.

In order to fulfil an aim like this, it is necessary for member-states to allow groups in the civil society to form schools outside the formal systems. The practising of organising Community College Courses is possible only by the help of EU-and other funding.

It is really important that an initiative of the kind drafted, should include as soon as possible the candidate countries for EU-membership, just as there should be plans to include and perspectives for the second- and third wave countries. Even though Russia is and probably will not be a candidate for EU-membership, it would be clever to give young citizens of Russia a perspective as well.

Good practices (Section 3):

A model for the legal frame of such schools could very well be the Danish Act on Folk High Schools and the very "de-centralist" spirit of the Folk High Schools.

The Danish act on folk high schools as a rule does not allow the allocation of money to folk high schools containing too many non-Danish citizens. This is only natural. But in recent years, a new practice has emerged, since the Danish ministry of education has allowed dispensations, in cases where the schools received an amount from an international/European organisation, which was similar to the amount expected from the Danish state for the particular course/event/program. This allows Community College Courses to be arranged, which exactly deal with common European questions, which are able to prepare and to elaborate the European dimension in youth work, which are small bricks in the establishing of the requested European public and permanent debate (Europäische Öffentlichkeit).

Under this model, the ACC has been working for two years already, organising Community College Courses in Latvia, Denmark, Transylvania (RO) and planning courses in Italy, Macedonia, Latvia, Denmark and Hungary.