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Learning democracy by encountering "the other": The potential of inclusive public spaces in civic education

Aprendendo a democracia encontrando "o outro": O potencial dos espaços públicos inclusivos na educação cívica

Apprendre la démocratie en rencontrant "l'autre": Le potentiel des espaces publics inclusifs dans l'éducation civique

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Abstract: In view of current (economic, social and identity-political) crises, (Western) societies are facing multiple challenges like disintegration, social exclusion and political polarization. In Germany, civic education sees itself facing an increasing problem in the didactic processing of these challenges, as there has so far been a lack of compatible, inclusive narratives that could be put into position against these phenomena of social division. By creating methodically reflected group workshops with citizens and civic educators of the city of Dortmund, the research project ZuNaMi tries to react to these societal challenges by analytically reconstructing narratives of social cohesion. It will be shown that the discussions within the group workshops refer to central questions of democracy theory, and that the subject of social cohesion between citizens and civic educators is negotiated along radical democratic ideals.

Keywords: civic education, democracy theory, inclusion, participation

Resumo: Face às atuais crises (económica, social e de identidade-política), as sociedades (ocidentais) enfrentam múltiplos desafios como a desintegração, a exclusão social e a polarização política. Na Alemanha, a educação cívica vê-se confrontada com um problema crescente no processamento didático destes desafios, uma vez que tem havido até agora uma falta de narrativas compatíveis e inclu-

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sivas que poderiam ser postas em posição contra estes fenómenos de divisão social. Ao criar oficinas de grupo metodicamente refletidas com cidadãos e educadores cívicos da cidade de Dortmund, o projeto de investigação ZuNaMi tenta reagir a estes desafios sociais através da reconstrução analítica de narrativas de coesão social. Será demonstrado que as discussões no âmbito dos *workshops* de grupo se referem a questões centrais da teoria da democracia, e que o tema da coesão social entre cidadãs/os e educadores/as cívicos/as é negociado ao longo de ideais democráticos radicais.

Palavras-chave: educação cívica, teoria da democracia, inclusão, participação

Résumé: Face aux crises actuelles (économiques, sociales et identitaires), les sociétés (occidentales) sont confrontées à de multiples défis tels que la désintégration, l'exclusion sociale et la polarisation politique. En Allemagne, l'éducation à la citoyenneté se voit confrontée à un problème croissant dans le traitement didactique de ces défis, car il y a eu jusqu'à présent un manque de récits compatibles et inclusifs qui pourraient être mis en place contre ces phénomènes de division sociale. En créant des ateliers de groupe réfléchis méthodiquement avec des citoyens et des éducateurs civiques de la ville de Dortmund, le projet de recherche ZuNaMi tente de réagir à ces défis sociétaux en reconstruisant analytiquement des récits de cohésion sociale. On montrera que les discussions au sein des ateliers de groupe renvoient à des questions centrales de la théorie de la démocratie et que le sujet de la cohésion sociale entre citoyens et éducateurs civiques est négocié selon des idéaux démocratiques radicaux.

Mots-clés: éducation civique, théorie de la démocratie, inclusion, participation

Introduction

In recent years, a variety of crisis phenomena point to worsening political and socioeconomic problems, which seem to increasingly erode the (neo)liberal-democratic consensus underlying most Western societies. These phenomena include the financial and economic crises, the threat to living conditions and habitats for humans and non-human beings, the migratory movements of the global South, the rise of right-wing and left-wing populist currents, and the more and more obvious democratic and legitimacy deficit of political institutions (connections between these phenomena are drawn, among others, by Latour [2018] or Sloterdijk [2014]). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the deficiencies and blind spots in the basic structures of Western democracies (Agamben 2021; Žižek, 2021). Times of crisis, in particular, have the potential to sharpen our focus on such deficits, since an interruption of business-as-usual on this scale opens up spaces for reflection, for gaining a better understanding of these problematic tendencies. And this pandemic interruption shows that it is precisely *the* ideological foundation of Western societies

that is increasingly being revealed as the "mother of all problems": the apparently natural connection between democracy, liberalism and capitalism.

Yet we can see how deeply anchored the belief in the primordial connection between liberal democracy and capitalism is in Western societies, despite their obvious deficiencies, by looking at the failed attempts to establish alternative forms of economic life in opposition to this narrative: forms that are not fixated on perpetual profit maximization and exploitation of peoples and the earth. For even if there has been awareness for decades of the finitude of resources and the social consequences of an economy based on constant growth, alternative forms that place the focus on sustainability and the common good have had little success competing against capitalist logics and the (neo)liberal consensus that predominates in large parts of economic and political life. Such politics of there being no alternative to liberal capitalism – known since Thatcher as the TINA ("There is no alternative") principle – have experienced a roaring revival since the outbreak of the financial market crises in 2009 and especially in times of the pandemic.

Two interwoven problem areas, whose origin is to be found in this "post-political" (Mouffe, 2005) ideology, are especially relevant for work in civic education that is focused on democratic coexistence: disintegration and segregation. For the growing political and social inequalities are directly reflected in processes of disintegration and the associated decline in the acceptance of cultural diversity, which are gaining increasing importance in the form of discourses of social division and get expressed in phenomena of spatial segregation. Educational institutions, as the key venue for civic education and democratic learning, play an especially important role in meeting these challenges.

The aforementioned crisis phenomena makes clear, however, that, especially in recent years, the democratic promises of civic educators appear implausible. For teachers and other actors involved in the work of civic education, this often leads to normative dilemmas and a growing helplessness. Thus, for example, the *Leitkulturdebatte* or debate on "central" cultural values again and again becomes the focus of public attention when the topic of "cohesion" comes up, even though there is a broad consensus in the social sciences that socioeconomic inequality represents a far greater threat to social cohesion than cultural and ethnic diversity.

The ZuNaMi Project and its methodological approach

The participatory research project ZuNaMi, which methodological approach and results are to be presented in this paper, has applied these concerns within the field of civic education. Funded by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), the project is located in the area of the old industrial town of Dortmund, a well-known locus of social disintegration

(Grau, 2013) and socio-spatial segregation (Kurtenbach, 2016), as well as a stronghold of the right-wing extremist scene (Luzar, 2013, 2016) in Germany. The research focuses on the inclusive negotiation of narratives of social cohesion within urban spaces and their applicability to innovative formats of civic education. What is at issue is a common search for resilient and viable narratives of social cohesion that are up to meeting these political, social and economic challenges, which are increasingly bundled together in questions of identity politics. We consciously keep the concept of "narrative" in the plural here, since, given individual horizons of experience, it cannot be assumed that the different narrations of cohesion are given meaning by the same underlying motif.

In order to meet this objective within the first phase of the project, six group workshops with eight participants each were organized as open spaces for communication in the first phase of the project (for detailed methodological reflections, as well as a precise description of how the workshop participants were recruited, see Zimenkova et al., 2018). In the workshops, citizens from the city of Dortmund were invited to negotiate, without a predetermined outcome, how coexistence in a commonly shared urban space could be shaped. Even if the conditions of access for voluntary participation in a research project are not the same for everyone, we were, nonetheless, able to reproduce an extremely heterogeneous composition within the group workshops, whereby the socio-spatial segregation processes in the city of Dortmund were explicitly taken into consideration here.

In the spaces for communication created by the ZuNaMi-Project, participants in negotiations draw on their shared-knowledge-based local expertise, which is derived from common experience of a shared lifeworld. Based on the latter, they ascribe themselves an exclusive knowledge, which only comes into being in the practice of shared life in a heterogeneous urban society. Using their local expertise, participants also identify concrete challenges for social cohesion in the urban context. Thanks to the sequence analysis, it was thus possible to show, among other things, that the participants in the group workshops attribute possible hurdles and barriers to social cohesion, above all, to those phenomena that, as mentioned at the outset, can also be identified as key crisis phenomena of democratic societies.

Consequently, the group workshops are "artificially assembled groups" (Loos & Schäffer, 2001, p. 43), whose heterogeneous members do not have any social points of contact on an everyday basis, but, nonetheless, dispose of a comparable horizon of experience of shared urban life in Dortmund. This made it possible to reveal implicit knowledge about collective phenomena – like, for instance, "contexts of experience, processes and orientations" (Liebig & Nentwig-Gesemann, 2009, p. 104) – which was made accessible by way of the diverse narratives of social cohesion present in the urban society of Dortmund, even if no claim to representativeness can or should be made here. Furthermore, the negotiations about cohesion within the group

workshops took place without input by the researchers, who limited their role simply to providing initial instructions in order to promote discussion processes among the citizens that, at least sometimes, approximated "normal" conversation (cf. Loos & Schäffer, 2001, p. 13). For the purpose of the further analysis of the six group workshops, the participants' discussions were videotaped and recorded and then transcribed by the researchers. In a next step, the raw data obtained in this way was then processed using sequential analysis (Oevermann, 1993; Oevermann et al., 1979) and case reconstruction (Wernet, 2000).

The results generated in the first phase of the project, which also include the foregoing reflections, were discussed by civic educators in the second phase of the project. To this end, two additional group workshops involving altogether thirteen participants were conducted. This second workshop phase was also videotaped and recorded, as well as transcribed, for purposes of analysis. Drawing on their professional knowledge, invited experts in civic education discussed the analytically reconstructed narratives of social cohesion from the first phase of the project and then examined the extent to which these narratives could be integrated into approaches to civic education. Apart from a few instructions given by the researchers, these negotiations took place largely on the basis of the individual experience of the educators in educational institutions, as well their area and didactic expertise in professional practice. Consequently, here too, no claim will be made for the representativeness of the results generated by the analysis or their presentation on the part of the ZuNaMi-Project. The methodological processing of the transcripts from the second workshop phase took place deductively using a coded evaluative procedure in accordance with the requirements of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). As we will show in the next section, the problem diagnosis mentioned in the introduction was shared in both workshop phases insofar as disintegration and segregation are seen as the (most important) obstacles to an inclusive negotiation of resilient narratives of social cohesion.

Shared problem diagnosis by citizens and civic educators: segregation and disintegration

On the one hand, processes of disintegration based on social inequality are prominent here. The most inclusive possible negotiation of desirable forms of coexistence in a shared urban space would thus be predicated on participation. According to the workshop members, active involvement in promoting a democratic society is an aspect of such participation, since democracy constitutes the basis for negotiating a desirable form of cohesion in the public arena. In the view of workshop members, however, the propensity to participate (and, above all, the possibility of doing so) is being restricted by structures of social inequality. Thus, the question of access to

or availability of material and immaterial resources is seen as decisive for access to various forums for participation (e.g., within urban institutions, by way of concrete political engagement or also via multiple forms of protest). Ultimately, however, there is always also the question of to what extent a society in which one is supposed to participate is viewed as "fair" at all. Workshop members thus perceive a directly negative impact of growing social inequality on the propensity to participate and the threat of increasing disintegration.

Secondly, besides processes of disintegration, a further problem area can be noted, which is tightly connected to the barriers already discussed: namely, segregation, understood as the unequal spatial distribution of different population groups. Processes of segregation were framed as a key challenge in every group workshop, since they can also lead to the spatial reflection of social inequalities and privileges, which are both reproduced and consolidated within segregated spaces in turn. This appears to be significant above all in light of the fact that the main object of negotiation with respect to social cohesion is not described by workshop participants as a phenomenon that can be grasped using a rigid definition or a fixed catalog of criteria. What is relevant here is rather the concrete process of negotiation out of which the shaping of a desirable form of cohesion emerges. Thus, all the key negotiations in the group workshops refer to the necessity of inclusively-structured discourse, which consequently also depends on there being accessible possibilities of (physical) encounter among all citizens. It is only on the basis of this communicative process, which is located upstream, that the preconditions for a resilient form of social cohesion can be created in the first place. The (social, economic and ethnic) selection mechanisms that can be spatially understood as processes of segregation thus hinder precisely this possibility of unimpeded encounter and hence also the creation of inclusive spaces of discourse.

Participants in both workshop phases ascribe an important role to educational institutions, and especially schools, in counteracting these barriers and meeting these challenges. Schools are presented as places of learning in which both basic knowledge of democracy and important skills for responsible participation in a democratically-constituted society should be imparted. At the same time, the contents learned in schools also have the potential to raise awareness, so that social challenges, such as the identified structures of social inequality, can be recognized, named and negotiated in public discourse with a view to finding solutions. This is seen, above all, as the specific task of civic education. Nonetheless, both the potential of civic education and the quality of the aforementioned course contents are also measured by their methodology or the way in which they are didactically elaborated and conveyed.

As mentioned in the introduction, however, especially teachers and other actors involved in the work of civic education face the challenge of not only being poorly equipped materially, but the problems begin with a lack of plausible narratives of cohesion. In the next section we

will show how two prominent democratic theoretical approaches were evaluated in the workshops regarding their potential to react effectively to this problem.

Discussion of two democracy-theoretical responses to existing problems

From the perspective of democracy theory and civic education, these challenging phenomena are usually met within civic education in two very different ways: one calls for the defense of (neo-) liberal values, to which there is supposed to be no alternative, and recognizes this defense as a democratic duty. The most prominent of these approaches is probably so-called "constitutional patriotism" (cf. Habermas, 1992; Müller 2007), which provides the guiding principles of German civic education. Its emphasis on processes and institutions is the starting point for the criticism undertaken by the second kind of approach – commonly referred to as 'participatory', 'agnostic' or 'radical democracy theories' (Comtesse et al., 2019; Sant, 2019) – which see in these phenomena a sign of the need for a reorientation of thinking about democracy and for new styles of democratic education. In opposition to political science approaches, which, as Cornelius Castoriadis (1990, p. 56) puts it, "know what is and what is to be done" and which are mainly concerned with the search for ideal sets of rules or procedures for decision-making processes or the analysis of certain political fields and institutional conditions, as well as their quantitative and qualitative evaluation, theorists such as Claude Lefort (1989), Jacques Rancière (1988) or Chantal Mouffe (2005) proposed a sort of thinking about democracy and the political that presents itself as a questioning, a doubting, and therefore as an inclusive and emancipatory activity. Instead of normatively justifying certain narratives and institutions and evaluating them "objectively," it is important to critically examine their (mostly unquestioned) foundations in theoretical terms and repeatedly subject them to democratic renegotiation in practical ones. In what follows, we want to look more closely at these two approaches, and their consequences for understanding civic (identity-forming) education, from the perspective of democracy theory.

In a subsequent step, they will then be juxtaposed with the perspectives of the participants in the two group workshop phases. To this end, first the citizens from Dortmund of the first project phase will express themselves and then (as a response to them) the experts in civic education. Using the results, we will then be able to show that the discussions conducted in the group workshops implicitly refer to the democracy-theoretical reflections presented previously. Moreover, in this respect, the citizens from Dortmund and the experts in civic education appear to have a clear preference about what conception of democracy underlies negotiations on social cohesion.

Constitutional patriotism as a liberal version of civic, identity-forming, education

The notion of "constitutional patriotism" represents a kind of German peculiarity. Formulated by Dolf Sternberger in the 1970s, it was prominently deployed by Jürgen Habermas against growing nationalistic and national-liberal ideas of cohesion and belonging in the course of the so-called *Historikerstreit* ("historians' debate"). This approach attempts to meet the threat of the exclusion of certain individuals and groups on the basis of cultural, "natural," i.e., racist, or other ideological mechanisms of in- and exclusion and, on the contrary, to create or secure a sense of belonging and cohesion not via ethnic or religious conditions, or any other conditions that are branded as "emotional", but rather by way of the rational affirmation of one's own constitution and its underlying values, which are assumed to be universal. And it is precisely here that the two fundamental problems of this conception in particular and of the habermasian approach in general become apparent: the focus on rationality and the claim of universality.

"Constitutional patriotism" approaches start from the assumption that the German constitution (like every other constitution) is the product of particular historically-evolved values and ideas, but that its underlying values are, nonetheless, universal. Everyone is supposed to be able to understand that this is the case in a rational fashion, i.e., by way of reason. It is not only the fact that non-rational components of social cohesion are largely bracketed or problematized in this, as some have suggested, "technocratic" conception that has proven to be problematic or even dangerous for inclusive democratic coexistence; so too, and above all, has the claim to a rational universality and the possibility of an ideal space of communication, in which every participant will be convinced of the rational and hence universal validity of certain arguments by the "unforced force of the better argument", as Habermas would say.

Hence, this ideal of a political space understood as a communicative process guided by a universally-valid rationality of communication has been rejected by numerous critics as a logo- or eurocentric 'professorial creation', which in its conception of political debate depicts an ideal that is not even realized in university seminars – or indeed especially not there. A further criticism is directed at the institutional focus of this conception, since it tends to overemphasize the importance of the constitution and the paternalistic state (literally, 'father state' – *Vaterstaat* – in German) for social cohesion and a sense of belonging. These criticisms provide the context for the emergence of radical democratic approaches, which have largely formed in opposition to the "triumph of the post-political vision" (Mouffe, 2005). But first we want to have a look at the discussions in the workshops, during which similar criticism of the notion of a liberal constitutional patriotism and its universalistic-rationalist basis could be noted.

Citizens' response - cohesion through emotions: a rejection of the concept of a purely rationally inferred constitutional patriotism

In terms of the citizens' perspective from the first phase of the project, two key objections to the overemphasis on constitutional patriotism can be presented here. *Firstly*, it should be said up front that the sense and purpose of a democratic constitution for securing social coexistence was at no point called into doubt by the participants in the group workshops. A democratically-constituted state is seen rather as a structural precondition for the shaping of desirable social cohesion by citizens. Nonetheless, the research findings do not provide confirmation of the assumption that desirable social cohesion can be produced by affirming constitutional patriotism. On the part of the researchers, on the one hand, this assessment is supported by the fact that the German "Basic Law" (i.e., the constitution) was not itself invoked in the first group workshop phase in the negotiations on what cohesion in fact is and how it could be substantively shaped. On the other hand, the citizens refer to the problematic of the purely rationally accessible approach of constitutional patriotism that was addressed above. Cohesion, as well as desirable coexistence in a shared space, is always framed by the citizens from Dortmund as something that can be emotionally experienced and is negotiated on the basis of this individual experienceability. Hence, the discourse on cohesion that draws on feelings eludes the purely rational claim of constitutional patriotism. At this point, we can thus establish the justified thesis that the pure affirmation of the "Basic Law" does not give rise to any sense of belonging in the form of desirable cohesion.

This points to the *second* key objection: namely, the role of emotions, which is highlighted in the group workshops using *three criteria*. Cohesion is thus something that – like democracy itself – is, in the first place, shaped, as well as lived and felt, by people themselves. *Firstly*, this can be noted in terms of linguistic aspects. At many points in the negotiations in the group workshops, there is thus talk of a *sense of belonging*, a *sense of cohesion* or *community*, or of *experiencing cohesion*, for instance. Cohesion – or also the absence of cohesion, in the form of moments of social division (e.g., experiences of exclusion, disintegration or discrimination) – is always framed in terms of or associated with something that can literally *be felt*. *Secondly*, throughout the group workshops, a shared reference to individual needs as an additional aspect of the emotional component of cohesion can be noted. Thus, participants negotiate a basic human need for belonging into multiple sorts of communal relationships. Desirable cohesion thus fulfills the above-mentioned emotional need: namely, apart from assuring one's belonging (to a community), also feeling *safe*, *secure* or *protected*, for instance.

Thirdly, it cannot be merely a matter of safeguarding individual needs here. Rather, the principle of reciprocity has to play a central role. Thus, cohesion and attention to human needs

can only come about when members of a community secure this attention precisely by providing it to one another.

Educators' response: the necessity of direct democratic educational approaches in contrast to the overemphasis on constitutional patriotism in civic education

It has to be said up front that the experts in civic education see little benefit in attempts to design didactic methods and course contents that specifically aim at creating social cohesion. In their view, social cohesion is more a potential result of successful democratic coexistence, and it is only thus that a legitimate basis for an inclusive negotiation of desirable cohesion can be created. Like the citizens in the first group workshop phase, the educators thus regard the importance of a democratically-constituted state and the wide acceptance of basic democratic values in the population as fundamental. The imparting of precisely these basic values is even seen as the key component of their work in civic education. This is why recourse to the basic democratic order is at the center of the course contents with the help of which a variety of aspects of democratic practice are covered: like, for instance, the ability and willingness to engage in dialogue, tolerance, and (both social and political) participation. But the civic educators by no means regard this as automatic. In the daily practice of teaching, educators are increasingly confronted rather by a more substantial challenge: for basic democratic values to be affirmed, the members of a democratic community have, namely, to identify with precisely this community and, thereby, also with the values in question. But, like the citizens in the first workshop phase, the civic educators find that such identification is being made difficult by increasing processes of disintegration, which they attribute to growing structures of social inequality.

A liberal version of civic, identity-forming education, which is based on a purely rational affirmation of one's own constitution and its underlying, supposedly universal, values, is regarded as unsuited for meeting the aforesaid challenges. The educators thus cite *two* key objections.

On the *one* hand, in their view, course contents in the context of civic education cannot be limited to a rationalized imparting of procedurally-oriented knowledge about institutions and the organizational and functional principles of the constitution. These contents have rather to be accompanied by and translated into concrete social questions, which students can follow and reflect upon from the perspective of their lifeworld. The educators derive from this the need for conceptual reflection on the democratic values to be imparted, as well as on the concepts with which civic education works. Thus, it strikes them as unhelpful to stress the importance of democratic values like *tolerance*, *participation* and *dialogue*, when it remains unclear how exactly these concepts are to be understood. In the educators' view, such aspects of democratic

practice have therefore to be examined in terms of what they in fact imply and how they can be translated into phenomena of the lifeworld. They thus reject the assumption that the affirmation and recognition of a supposedly rationally-ascertainable catalog (for instance, a democratic canon of values or formal democratic principles) can give rise to an identity-promoting form of social belonging or an inclusive form of social cohesion.

On the other hand, and closely connected to the foregoing, the civic educators share the belief in the importance of emotions that was expressed in the first group workshop phase. They place particular emphasis on this in light of the current challenges to which civic education is supposed to respond in practice: declining acceptance of social diversity, othering processes, exclusionary identity constructions based on disparaging a construed alien group, populist narratives like "the people versus the elites", and the sense of paralysis and resignation of people affected by social inequality – all these challenges have to be addressed in the context of democratic education. And all of these social phenomena are framed as crisis phenomena that, in large measure, have recourse to emotions. Hence, in the educators' view, civic education that could create an identity-promoting form of inclusive democratic belonging, which could ultimately give rise to a form of social cohesion in turn, cannot avoid the sphere of the emotions. The educators are by no means suggesting here that emotionally accessible narratives of populism should be countered with other populist narratives, for example. It likewise is not a question of banning procedurally-oriented knowledge about institutions and the functional principles of the constitution from the curriculum. Rather, for the abovementioned reasons, they reject an overemphasis on such course contents. Ultimately, they argue, in the context of civic education, democracy has not only to be taught and learned, but it has also, and above all, to be lived.

A radical democratic counter-proposal

The rejection of supposedly universal values and truths, whether God-given or rationally comprehensible, as the basis for social coexistence goes back to the earliest extant approaches to political thought in the West. In its own self-conception, attic democracy, in opposition to which Plato develops his vision of a "perfect society" – and a related idealistic political science –, consists of its citizens, as gets expressed in the principle of political 'equaliberty' (*isonomia*), and it is not based on a genuine order or a rational affirmation of institutional elements of the state: like, for instance, the constitution, a representative parliament or a (constitutional) monarch. Politics in ancient Athens is a process in which cohesion comes into being and is put to the test; for the *agon*, i.e., the arena of political contest, is an open space that is organized by Athenians in accordance with the particular matter of dispute. The Germanic-Celtic *Thing* assemblies

[*Thingversammlungen*] are also sometimes regarded as an early manifestation of this understanding of political assembly and negotiation, in which, as Tacitus (2000) reports, it was more about "influence to persuade" than "power to command" (p. 19). Hannah Arendt (2016), one of the most well-versed experts in this kind of political "speaking and acting together", recognizes a kind of primacy of political community in such institution-critical, inclusive, and egalitarian forms of collectivization, since they always emerge where people – without being ruled and without ruling others – organize their collective political life, as she writes in *On Revolution*.

Similar approaches, some of which were developed in drawing on Arendt, are commonly referred to nowadays as "grassroots", "deliberative", or "radical" democracy. Representatives of these currents include Claude Lefort, Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe. Their approaches to thinking the *political* are opposed to every sort of scientistic-positivist political science "that knows what is and is to be done" (Castoriadis, 1990), political science that makes it its task to develop the anti-political vision of a perfect society or theoretically to lay down and rationally to justify conditions for an "ideal space of communication", instead of setting about to remove the obstacles to participatory communication that is free of domination.

Contributors to this discourse recognize Habermas, above all, as one of the most prominent representatives of post-political democratic theory. In *On the Political*, Mouffe (2005) calls him one "of the most sophisticated defenders of the moral superiority and universal validity of liberal constitutional democracy" (p. 83). This "type of reasoning" blinds him to the agonistic character of the political, in Mouffe's view. This reasoning gets expressed in precisely those theorems of an "ideal space of communication", of the "unforced force of the better argument" and, above all, in the rationalistic demands on participants in political discourse. On her reading of the habermasian texts, "those who put into question the possibility of such a rational consensus and who affirm that politics is a domain where one should always expect to find discord undermine the very possibility of democracy". As proof, she cites a passage from *The Inclusion of the Other* that reads:

> If questions of justice cannot transcend the ethical self-understanding of competing forms of life, and if existentially relevant values, conflicts and oppositions must penetrate all controversial questions, then in the final analysis we end up with something resembling Carl Schmitt's understanding of politics. (Mouffe, 2005, p. 13)

And it is precisely Schmitt's understanding that Mouffe (2005) draws upon in her "left schmittian" agonistic theory of the political. For, on her account, the political is characterized by a constitutive "antagonistic dimension" and it is only by including the latter – i.e., "Schmitt's emphasis on the ever present possibility of the friend/enemy distinction and the conflictual nature of politics" which "constitutes the necessary starting point for envisaging the aims of democratic politics" (p. 13) – that political thought and action acquire emancipatory potential. The other must not be forced to submit to the (rationalistic-universalist) logic of the self in the

political space, but rather the rules of political agreement and opposition must be renegotiated in each concrete case by the participants and with respect to their particular interests.

The political thought of Paul Feyerabend (1982), which has received little attention in radical democratic discourse up to now, also opposes an idea of free, participatory exchange to rationalistic theories of communication *à la* Habermas. On Feyerabend's account, it makes no difference whether one claims to know the truth per se or to propagate a particular methodology that is suitable for objectively distinguishing between true and false (rational/irrational, scientific/unscientific). Both assumptions are untenable and, furthermore, anti-democratic. By contrast, an "open exchange", as presented by him in *Science in a Free Society*, is only directed at the practical utility and the consequences of individual decisions and is interested less in "the truth of propositions" than in "[making] my opponent change his mind" (p. 147). The habermasian claim to the "rationality" of discourse, i.e., of its parameters, its participants and their arguments, is, on the other hand, an expression of the claim to superiority of a particular tradition: here, that of (Western) rationalism. A "rational" society thus cannot be a free society because its basic structure is pre-framed by a tradition. This confluence of rationalism and liberalism is one of the fundamental problems with the predominant ideas and practiced forms of democracy for Feyerabend, since most liberal thinkers "regard rationalism (which for many of them coincides with science) not just as one view among many, but as a basis for society. The freedom they defend is therefore granted under conditions that are no longer subjected to it." (p. 76).

Citizens' response: necessity of an inclusive discourse as an essential basis for social cohesion

We were already able to establish that no overarching definition of cohesion can be derived and formulated from the analyses of the group workshops with citizens from Dortmund. Moreover, it is also not possible to compile any catalog that could claim to take all facets and forms of cohesion into consideration, which is also due to the heterogeneous composition of the individual workshops, as well as the diversity between the various workshop groups in comparison to one another. In light of the negotiations over cohesion, there also does not appear to be any purpose in doing so, since the participants themselves did not attach any importance to elaborating a "rationalized" and universally valid definition of the concept or a fixed catalog. Agreement upon a desirable form of cohesion, which is uniformly reflected in the workshops, emerges rather out of the process of negotiation. It is apparent here that inclusive and accessible discourse is at the center of the negotiations on the creation and shaping of desirable cohesion. Thus, all the key issues concerning for example:

- the rules and conditions under which a desirable form of cohesion could be negotiated;
- the concrete shaping and negotiating of cohesion, especially with regard to social diversity, heterogeneity (of values) and dissent;
- the (structural) preconditions for an inclusive negotiation of cohesion in a commonly shared space.

point to the need for accessible discourse. They thus shed light on a communicative process on the basis of which the preconditions are first created that allow people to shape a worthwhile form of cohesion in their commonly shared lifeworld. Moreover, this in no way means that it is assumed in the workshops that there will not be any dissension among different individuals, groups or communities in such discourse. In a democratic order, it is rather even an absolute necessity that divergent views, goals and convictions (whether of a private, ideological or political nature) can coexist as equals. What is of decisive importance is thus not *whether*, but rather *how* dissension is lived and negotiated. Hence, what is fundamental for the citizens is that participants in discourse:

- provide one another respect, empathy and openness, and thus also assure mutual attentiveness to their respective needs;
- have the authority to ensure that they themselves appear as the key, active shapers of a community aimed at cohesion.

Inclusive discourse thus fulfills the key preconditions that make a desirable form of cohesion possible – being heard and experiencing the resonance of one's contributions; action based on reciprocity; mutual attentiveness to (emotional) needs – and thus also forms the basis for being able to reflect the most varied needs of the heterogeneous urban space.

The commonly expressed necessity of this sort of discourse thus points to a democratic form of coexistence, as well as referring explicitly to successful democratic practice that is actively lived by the citizens in their commonly shared local space of experience.

Educators' response: living democracy instead of just learning about it. A local-focused approach

Discussing the opportunities for shaping innovative educational formats, the educators take up the necessity of inclusive discourse as a key component of democratic practice that was expressed by the citizens. Previously, it was possible to establish the need for experientially-

related formats and methods of civic education that link up with students' lifeworld. The educators suggest that this should take place by involving local structures. In their view, the local level thus offers multiple possibilities of participation with respect to a form of democratic practice that is close to people's lives, as well as offering the opportunity to reach a target group that is as heterogeneous as possible by using course contents that are conceived in terms of their lifeworld. The educators mentioned three opportunities presented by such an approach in this regard.

Firstly, democratic action and participation can be tried out and learned by taking part in local problem-solving. Thus, formats could be developed in which classical formats of civic education in the classroom are supplemented by non-formal and informal educational approaches. On the educators' account, the focus here would have to be placed on the involvement of students in designing these innovative approaches. This could conceivably be done by having students undertake to determine the challenges and needs of their own neighborhood and then discuss them in a deliberative process with a view to finding solutions. By way of example, the educators mention a teaching or learning unit in which students identify the need for a new playground or sports field in their neighborhood. In this context, students can then determine how the need could be formulated and to what institutional actors it could be addressed. Students could thus learn democratic procedures by trying them out locally in their own concrete practice. Alongside this process, students could then learn in classical teaching formats how political participation on the local level reflects crucial elements of a democratically constituted society.

Secondly, local forums for dialogue or inclusive meeting formats could also be created: forums and formats that are organized and conceived in cooperation with the students. The focus here could, for example, be on event series cutting across school types, which take place regularly in selected local venues on the basis of a network of city schools. Thus, students could decide on their own political topics of local (but, optionally, also national or global) relevance, elaborate them thematically and negotiate them together with students from other schools, types of schools and grades in local forums for dialog. In addition, key thematic blocks in civic education that are highly relevant to current events – like, for instance, right-wing extremism, of which there is a very active scene in Dortmund – could be dealt with by involving individuals who are directly affected. Students could, for instance, work on this thematic block in dialogue with victims of right-wing extremist violence or former members who have renounced the violent right-wing scene. Furthermore, another topic of civic education, like the challenges of an increasingly growing global movement of refugees from crisis regions, could be addressed by inclusive meeting formats. Efforts would be made to achieve this then based on an exchange as equals with local refugees, so that insight into individual biographies or the conditions under which they fled their home countries could be obtained in discussion *with* them and not *about* them.

Work in civic education that has recourse to the local sphere could thus help students, *thirdly*, to understand themselves as an integral part of the city and of a democratic society and hence to feel included. And precisely such *feeling included* is presented by the educators as a highly promising approach to forestalling processes of disintegration, promoting successful democratic coexistence, and thus creating a basis for social cohesion.

With respect to the approaches to democratic theory that have been discussed, we can thus note a clear preference in terms of the reflections to which both the citizens and the experts implicitly refer. By emphasizing the importance of broad public discourse at the local level, of meeting places and forums with low-threshold access and an open design, as well as the focus on promoting democratic learning in the concrete practice of the lifeworld, participants in the group workshops draw on radical democratic theoretical approaches. According to the latter, democratic coexistence and the negotiation and shaping of social cohesion in society are always the product of inclusive processes of negotiation to which all citizens should have equal access. Nonetheless, participants also identify crucial barriers in this respect. Thus, in the view the experts in civic education and the citizens from the first group workshop phase, both the development of (physical) meeting spaces in the urban context and the possibilities of an inclusive dialogue are endangered by processes of segregation. Thus, they argue, it is difficult to *feel included* or to feel part of an urban community of equals, if (physical) meeting spaces are lacking, dialogue between residents of different neighborhoods is impeded or residents of worse-off neighborhoods have the feeling of being second-class citizens. Therefore, inclusive exchange in the urban context, in their view, requires the creation of accessible places or venues like, for instance, green spaces, parks or event venues for civic education activities (with "accessibility" being understood in the group workshops as the absence of monetary barriers like high ticket prices). Whereas citizens and educators regard themselves as expert in and responsible for the negotiation of both desirable social cohesion and successful democratic coexistence in their shared spaces, the problem of segregation is treated otherwise. The responsible parties in this regard are also named in the workshops: in terms both of responsibility for *creating* the barriers that can be perceived in processes of segregation and responsibility for *overcoming* them. On the one hand, private economic interests are pointed to here. The primacy of profit-maximization in the real estate sector is the principal target of the participants' criticism. Nonetheless, it is not only private-sector actors who are cited and clearly named as the main culprits. Thus, alternately, participants criticize the unwillingness or inability of governmental institutions to elude the profit-maximizing sphere of the private sector and to fulfill their mission as corrective on behalf of the common good.

Conclusion

In general, social capital and reducing economic and social inequality (or increasing social mobility) is ascribed great significance in the conceptualization of social cohesion: either as condition for or goal of social cohesion. The spatiality of the city, and especially the role of civic education in the urban space, comes into play here: segregation and disintegration impede the possibility of generating a social capital that can bridge differences. There are hardly any physical spaces in which people with very different socio-demographic characteristics (can) exchange views about how they would like to live together in their shared urban environment. Even in neighborhoods characterized by heterogeneity and diversity, the social capital that could serve this bridging function does not come into being automatically: inclusive spaces are needed, in which encounters and processes of negotiation take place, in order to create the possibility of wanting to achieve collective goals.

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