

Creating Narratives of Cohesion within Citizenship Education? Civic Learning Spaces and Deliberation as an Answer to Disintegration and Radicalisation in Urban Communities

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1. Approach and Research Objectives

ZuNaMi (*Zusammenhaltsnarrative miteinander erarbeiten - Creating narratives of cohesion together*) is an action-research based project initiated by the University of Muenster, the TU Dortmund University and the Foreign Institute of North Rhine-Westphalia. It seeks to create narratives of cohesion for an inclusive society and to apply these narratives to citizenship education. Due to the project partnership between two universities and one organisation for civic education, the project combines theoretical and practical approaches.

Contemporary crises, socio-economic and cultural divides within the EU and Germany are inevitably connected to intergroup conflicts and segregated identity building. All those phenomena are framed through narratives about “we-and-the-others” which have an essential relevancy for citizenship education (Kearns 2014, Zick/Küpper 2012). The limited acceptance of diversity as well as a low national identification and orientation on living together are central factors causing disintegration, social exclusion and othering in German society. Heterogeneous urban spaces face phenomena of disintegration much more intensively than rural communities. The area of the old industrial town of Dortmund is a well-known locus of social disintegration and socio-spatial segregation (Kurtenbach 2016, Borstel/Luzar 2012). Contrarily, the region of the Ruhr District is widely known for its long history of immigration and integration over the last centuries. With its location in the city of Dortmund, the ZuNaMi project strives to find these narratives of cohesion and separation.

2. Normative Perspective

Narratives of societal cohesion (and separation) are seen as phenomena of second order, i.e., artifacts which can be (re)constructed, analysed and processed in a theory-based way. The term „narratives of

¹ The names were listed in alphabetical order.

cohesion“ is to be seen solely descriptive as a normative collective self-representation and the construction of meaning of societies and their social practices (Taylor 2004).

The project frames societal cohesion as essential for the development of resilient social ties, efficient connectedness to the community and an orientation towards the community welfare. Because these aspects are relevant for social practices, cohesion is more than the pure affirmation of a common status quo or an imagined community. In the case of Germany, the prevailing narratives of cohesion are in most parts historically biased and therefore not adaptable for a heterogeneous 21st century society. Therefore it is a major challenge for social sciences to explore and to reflect on these narratives in a theoretical and empirical way. Furthermore, the research is in the midst of the social reality as we will be discussing with both, town citizens and education system stakeholders.

Concepts of narratives of cohesion disseminated in civic education processes can contribute to resilience to crises and ruptures on the one hand and to the sustainable strengthening of societal cohesion on the other hand (Negt 2010). Nevertheless there seems to lack 1.) a theoretical and empirical positive foundation of these narratives which can be integrated in multicultural societies' civic education, and 2.) an adaption to a practical approach which is capable to anchor professional action in educational institutions effectively.

In more and more parts of the society democratic promises made by actors of political education appear to be - for various reasons - implausible (Blühdorn 2013) which creates a situation of increasing helplessness and normative dilemmas for teachers and other multipliers of civic education. At the same time, guiding principles in German civic education are predominantly oriented towards institutions and procedures („Verfassungspatriotismus“, cf. Habermas 1992) and teachers hesitate to implement ‚Great Narratives‘ about state and society like the French “Grand récit du commun” or the American Exceptionalism (Lange 2015, Klee 2008).

Therefore, it is not expedient to generate new concepts of belonging and participation for an inclusive citizenship education solely from a historical or theoretical perspective. On the contrary, democratic commitment and identity-related demarcations (Williams 2007) can only be explored where they are explicated and debated on at a performative level and manifest themselves in the form of narratives of cohesion or segregation. By doing this, the ZUNAMI-project reacts to the perceived gap between the processes of disintegration and othering and the existing approaches of citizenship education (in Germany) which seem to be inadequate to catch up disintegration and radicalisation.

3. Operationalisation

Hence, the project seeks to create civic learning spaces within the civic society of Dortmund. The citizens are called to develop narratives of cohesion within group workshops that function as deliberative communication spaces. The participation of citizens does not solely serve the research goals, but the deliberative practice itself also shall stimulate transformative actions. At a level of theoretical reflection not only the narratives themselves shall be reconstructed but also the mechanisms of their creation.

The group workshops will be divided in three sections with different participants. The first phase will consist of six workshops comprised of “average” citizens of the town. The objective is to find and

reconstruct narratives of cohesion articulated by them. During the second phase's workshops, these narratives will be discussed with selected citizenship educationalists with regard to the question of how the explored narratives can be transferred into new concepts of civic education. Finally, participants of the first and of the second phase will discuss and evaluate the generated concepts of civic education and thus testing their applicability and acceptance.

The project is currently in the starting period. As the deliberative approach is central for the methodology and for the acceptance by the inhabitants of Dortmund the following presentation focuses on our work in progress and calls for critique to improve the research design. For the time being, two testing workshops were held and the first research workshop is in preparation.

3.1 The idea of the group workshops in phase 1

As it was said before, the citizens of Dortmund are called to develop narratives of cohesion within group workshops that shall function as deliberative communication spaces. The group workshops will take place as "artificially composed groups" (cf. Loos/Schäffer 2001, 43) bringing together heterogeneous participants active in different types of associations in Dortmund. Therefore, the groups are "artificially" composed of participants who do not know each other on a private level, but are connected by a common interest or a common activity (membership of a club, etc.). Each workshop is supposed to consist of eight participants and one moderator of the ZuNaMi team.

The participants will be recruited from different collective spaces of the everyday life, i.e. from gardening and sports clubs, religious communities, pubs, music and art associations or youth oriented places systematically taking into account spatial segregation in Dortmund. The invitations emphasize the project goal and the open nature of the processes. ZuNaMi does not seek to invent new narratives, but shall explore already existing narratives of cohesion. For this purpose, the researchers will use elements of the group discussion, as this method serves to capture implicit knowledge or collective experiences of the participants. For this purpose, the communication process of the participants shall be only initiated by the researchers so that the group determines the content that is central to them. Thereby the communication within the group is able to resemble a normal conversation (Loos/Schäffer 2001, 13; Liebig/Nentwig-Gesemann 2009, 104).

The main goal of the group workshops is to bring people from heterogeneous groups together in a discussion about the mutual future and a desirable everyday practice. They will be provided with a moderated, prepared and open space to discuss the future of society/urban space and develop future-oriented ideas, values and concepts. Therefore the group workshops also borrow some elements of the "Future Workshop" since the participants will not only focus on current problems and events but mainly on the creation of forward-looking narratives of cohesion (Maier 2014, 515f.).

3.2 Warm-up with Pictures

In order to initiate the group communication the moderator will propose the use of images. Images have always been considered symbolic and meaningful objects of human perception, thought and action and, moreover, are individual witnesses of thoughts and experiences (Dörner 2012, 291f; Rustmeyer 2003). Additionally, images comprehensively represent and constitute the individually perceived reality (Bohnsack 2004, 3). The researchers will provide a certain number of images (30 to

40) and the participants are asked to choose one image to which they are able to find an individual connection, gain an emotional approach and talk more about the pictures from their first-person perspective and the relation to their everyday life and Dortmund. Therefore, images are provided that do not claim any direct social association, i.e. with recognisable existing places like a certain park which might be associated with a drug scene etc. The images will be more open and abstract so that each participant can choose an individual access to a particular image, connected to communities and cohesion or separation (i.e. railroad tracks, a football on a field, a flower etc.). Thus, the individual interpretive openness of the images represents a safe space for the participants to speak about urban communities with or without personal attachments and favours a relaxed and lively conversation situation (Degele et al. 2009, 376). Also, the other participants and the the moderator can react to the picture and to the narration being connected to it without coming uncomfortably close to the speaker as a person.

3.3 The Structure of a Workshop

Moderation

In their moderation role, the researchers focus mainly on time management and the instruction. Accordingly, the researchers observe the discussion from the outside and decide only on a case-by-case basis whether they intervene in the discussion process by a question in order to bring the discussion back to the main topics. The “off topic” discussions are going to be put on a special sheet, so they are not lost.

Preparatory stage

In order to guarantee a fluent conversation, the number of participants of each group is a maximum of eight people. The images will be mixed in advance by the researchers and spread out on tables. Each participant takes a picture of their choice.

First Stage: Warm Up

Each participant will present their selected image to the group and will report why they have chosen it and what they associate with it personally and in connection to the city. Therefore, the images serve as an uninhibited entry into the discussion as well as an auxiliary tool.

Second Stage: Discussion

Afterwards the participants are asked to discuss, also by using the images if they want, the following questions: “Is there a cohesion in Dortmund?”, “How would you describe the specifics of cohesion in Dortmund?”, “What is missing in Dortmund?”, “Where do you see boundaries of coexistence?”, “Where do you see best practices or possibilities to eliminate these boundaries?”. They are called for developing an image of an ideal urban society.

Third Stage: Mind Map

After discussing characteristics of cohesion and division, participants will consider how cohesion could be promoted and improved. Therefore, the ideas and concepts will be summarised and written down by them. The main objective will be to put all relevant terms and categories in relation to social cohesion on sheets of paper (one term / category per sheet). Afterwards, the participants are asked

to create a mind map to structure their results as the creative workshop part of the discussion. The summarized results of the discussion as well as the mind maps will be part of the data analysis.

Afterwards: Analysis

The intended data collection will be done by documentation and audio recording of the group workshops. After the transcription a sequential analysis, integrating elements of conversational analysis will be performed (Oevermann et al. 1979). Combining the mind maps and workshop results with the results of the sequential analysis is essential for two reasons. First, the narratives the people of Dortmund have or seek to create can be demonstrated and second, the procedural character of narrative articulation and creation can be reconstructed. The procedural character helps to understand mechanisms of how cohesion narratives emerge, the reconstruction of these mechanisms is of crucial importance for creating teaching materials of civic education.

With our project we hope to contribute to different questions which are raised at this conference. We want to mitigate inequalities in civic and political engagement with the deliberative approach, the transformative action element and the access for participation for everyone. We want to integrate people from different groups and different stakeholders throughout the city and social spheres in the research process. Through the bottom-up creation of knowledge about cohesion narratives we hope to find the concrete situations people are dealing with and the way they are talking about it.

If we are successful we might create new narratives which lead to the acceptance of diversity and an orientation to living together peacefully. This would promote an inclusive urban society where people feel that they are belonging there which might prevent them from radicalising.

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