



# Civic Learning with a Transatlantic Lens

A U.S. – German exploration of educating for democracy



Arbeitskreis deutscher  
Bildungsstätten e.V.



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# About TECE

As the Transatlantic Exchange of Civic Educators (TECE) comes to a close after a year of vibrant exchange, this publication seeks to look at what has been accomplished and future directions of the work. The overarching goal of this unique project year has been to investigate the feasibility and value of German-American exchange in the field of civic learning and to identify which topics and formats are most relevant for further exchange. The project has taken initial steps to build a network of multipliers in the field, to encourage and support the development of partnerships for future projects and to expand opportunities for transatlantic professional development to new audiences.

The project has centered around a core group of TECE Fellows, all professionals working toward the civic development of young people in a diverse

array of non-school settings. Across 11 online workshops and events, 18 days of in-person seminars, and many hours in individual and small-group meetings, participants have had the opportunity to look beyond national discourses to critically question and think innovatively about youth civic education. The TECE network also extends beyond this intimate group, having reached other civic learning professionals in Germany and the United States through public events, site visits, and expert meetings.

In the following publication, we take a comparative look at civic learning from German-American perspective, hear directly from TECE Fellows about the outcomes of their work together, and look ahead to the future of transatlantic civic youth work.

## April & May 2021:

Project launches with two public events featuring experts from CIRCLE, DJI, and more

## September 2021:

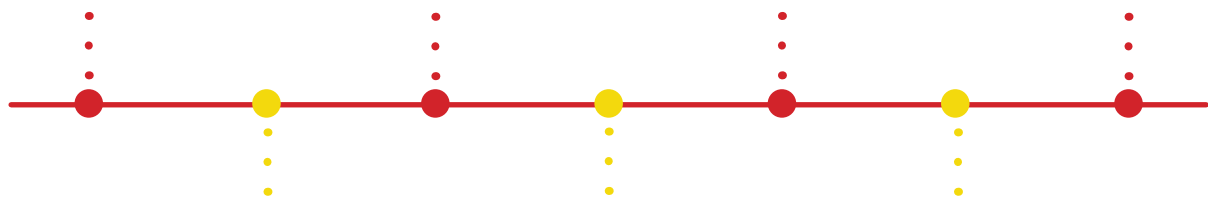
Panel discussion - Civics in the Hot Seat: Civic Education & Politische Bildung Under Pressure

## November 2021:

Fellows travel to Weimar, Erfurt and Berlin for 9-day meeting

## May 2022:

Fellows travel to Boston, MA & Washington DC for 9-day meeting



## July & August 2021:

TECE Fellows meet for four online sessions to kick off the fellowship year

## October 2021:

Guest presentation – The Legacies of Reeducation in Germany and Beyond

## January-April 2022:

Fellows meet regularly online for facilitated seminars



# Welcome



In his 2021 remarks on “America’s Place in the World,” President Biden stressed the need for nations “working together and in common” to solve global challenges: “We can’t do it alone.”

Yet while we share pressing challenges, we also share fundamental values: equality, democracy, and freedom. The current critical moment propels the transatlantic partnership forward with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency to protect and strengthen democracy.

Civic education and youth engagement are pillars of democracy. In this context, the Transatlantic Exchange of Civic Educators is timely and profoundly important. It is about fostering connections: about expanding existing alliances and forging new partnerships across institutions, professional fields, and communities.

To U.S. Ambassador Amy Gutmann, elevating every voice means Innovating Inclusively: “To leverage our alliance to address global problems, we will need out-of-the box thinking, new solutions, powered by the next generation.”

What powers the next generation is a deep commitment to themes that affect their lives and futures as citizens and members of the global community: climate protection and sustainability, social justice, and human rights.

Engagement in Northern Germany fills me with optimism about young people actively shaping 21st century transatlantic relations. The launch of youth-initiated projects like Youth Lead the Change Germany and the Transatlantic Student Initiative at the University of Kiel powerfully demonstrates young adults’ agency. The founders and participants of these projects have themselves become facilitators of dialogue by setting their transatlantic agenda and defining participatory democracy. Similarly, the Youth Advisory Councils that the U.S. Embassy and the Consulates offer to school students take young Germans seriously as transatlantic conversation partners.

Democracies offer young people a path forward to fulfill their aspirations, hopes, and visions for the future. Democratic engagement is the most powerful tool for young adults to shape their future and drive positive change. It defies autocrats’ false promises. It offers potential and impact. It is assertive and inspirational.

Communities thrive when its members experience a connection to each other and feel heard and seen. The transatlantic community is no exception. How can we strengthen transatlantic exchange among young people and civil society? By exchanging knowledge and expertise, best practices, innovative ideas, and new formats for civic learning and youth engagement. And by sharing networks, platforms, resources, and mentorship to hone leadership skills that empower those who power the transatlantic future. This German-American cooperation will be guided by what is at once an acknowledgment of our interconnected world and an expression of strength steeped in unity and commitment to our partnership and our democratic values: “We can’t do it alone.” But we can do it together.

## **Darion Akins**

U.S. Consul General Hamburg



Our democracy based on the rule of law is not something that can be taken for granted, as we can see from the populist developments in Europe and America and the threat emanating from authoritarian regimes such as in Russia or China. Democracy is coming under pressure to prove its worth. It is a matter of explaining it again and again and making it visible. Individuals must become active citizens who fill our self-determined way of life with commitment and vitality.

The United States, with its tradition-steeped institutions, is often a role model in this regard. Who does not recall Tocqueville's marvel almost 200 years ago at the huge number of associations of American citizens? Yet the relationship between state and citizen is not unconditional, not an intrinsic development. Rather, it has grown amidst historical and cultural processes that lead to a constantly evolving political culture comprising, in addition to a universal core, regional and national elements. It is not a relationship that is simply there or not there, but one that has to be learned and taught.

That is why civic education is key in formal and non-formal learning environments, in youth and adult education – not least with an eye to our transatlantic partners.

Civic education can and is designed to overcome a lack of communication. In view of the huge influence of social media in political opinion-forming, the compression of ideas and positions into just a few characters or images, it remains fundamentally important that education is a corrective force,

that it expands horizons, that it teaches citizens to be receptive to more complex arguments and encourages them to participate in social and political life. Dialogue-based thinking, and thinking in terms of alternatives, remain necessary for democracy. These need to be learned, because one part of civic responsibility is the ability to speak and voice one's opinions. Anyone who wants to convince needs arguments, and anyone who wants to argue needs words. Without words, one withdraws into a cocoon, or resorts to physical means. We need to nurture this ability to engage in dialogue at transatlantic partner level too – with openness and respect for the other side's cultural context.

Civic education needs to reach a broad target audience. It is not sufficient for so-called young elites or functional elites to have a voice. It is important for our societies that large parts of them are heard. In terms of transatlantic civic education, this means reaching new target groups, taking the issue to sections of society where it is not on the agenda, where the barriers are higher. In Germany, that would be, for example, East Germany and non-academic circles. In the United States, one needs to reach people in the flyover states, and people from a non-European background.

Finally, civic education must counter obliviousness to history – both one's own history and the other side's. For us in Germany, the memory of the Holocaust is and will remain crucial. Without wanting to equate the two, the United States is still dealing with the legacy of displacement, slavery and racial segregation. Looking at history is not a matter of rattling out numbers, but of linking and understanding developments, strengths, but also disasters and crimes against humanity. In short, it is a matter of immersing oneself in the factors shaping the other's political culture.

Transatlantic civic education thus makes it possible to do something that is extremely valuable for democracy: to look beyond the confines of one's national borders. I am very pleased that TECE is working towards that goal.

#### **Michael Georg Link**

Member of the German Bundestag and  
Coordinator of Transatlantic Cooperation

# Looking Transatlantically at Civic Learning

## Civic Learning in the USA – 5 questions for Kristen Cambell

To gain insight into the state of civic learning in the United States, we hear in this interview from Kristen Cambell, the CEO of PACE, a philanthropic laboratory for funders seeking to maximize their impact on democracy and civic life in America.



### How do you interpret ‘civic learning’ ?

I consider “civic learning” to be the range of educational experiences that prepare people for participation in America’s democracy (by which I mean informed engagement in both the processes of representative government *and* the voluntary associations within civil society). Civic learning can occur both in and out of classrooms, and can include knowledge building and experiential learning, civic simulations, leadership development, civil discourse, and more – and they can occur at all stages of life. The purpose is to build the knowledge and skills to ensure informed participation in civic life, and to instill the values and beliefs that it is important to do so.

### What do you see as strengths of civic learning in your national context?

Thanks to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, there are many forms of protected expression, which means there are lots of avenues and venues to learn and engage in community and in public life. It also means we have the opportunity to educate not only about our *rights*, but also the *responsibilities* that come with them. I think civic education is a great way to encourage people to continually discern and balance individual freedoms and collective well-being, which are values that are always going to be held in tension with each other but – in my view – are key to responsible (“small-c”) citizenship in a (small-l) liberal democracy.



### **What are the biggest challenges for the field and practice of civic learning today?**

Civic learning receives broad public support, and many people believe it is one of the most promising tools and assets to create the “more perfect union” to which our Constitution aspires. But despite this broad agreement, civic education has been politicized (and in some cases, weaponized) within the current social and political discourse. There are different and divergent views on the purpose and ultimate goal of civic learning, especially in a school-based context. While I believe there is fairly broad agreement that civic learning is about building knowledge, skills, and dispositions for active citizenship, there is wide disagreement on what theories of change are most appropriate to inspire them, and whose responsibility it is to do so. While perhaps this is less of a challenge in private or out-of-school civic learning contexts because they don’t face the same governmental constraints, the opportunities for engaging in them are often limited and not equally afforded to all (or even most) people, with significant disparities in access based on race and class.

### **What topics do you see as particularly important in the years to come?**

The idea of democracy itself is being deeply interrogated, and many people – especially young people – are questioning whether it matters or is important to live in a democratic society. America has made significant progress and advancement over time, but there are a lot of ways our system is not living up to its aspirations; many people don’t feel it is delivering in tangible ways that make their lives better. But this isn’t just true in America; it’s increasingly a global sentiment. Democracy may well be “the worst form of government... except for all the others.” But we need a robust education experience (including robust civic learning!) to help people understand why it is important, especially as we see indicators of declining freedom, and willingness to accept authoritarian tendencies that threaten our liberty, safety, and security.

### **What gives you hope for the future of civic learning?**

The amount of attention and interest being devoted to civic learning right now is inspiring – certainly higher than I’ve seen in my career thus far. I think there has been a real shift in awareness and understanding of its value across society – and what is at risk if we don’t teach it. People used to say the skills that civic education builds (like critical thinking and the ability to work in groups with different people) were “soft,” but I think we’re now realizing those are the “hard skills” we all need for constructive and productive engagement in increasingly diverse societies. There are a lot of good faith actors trying to identify the quantum leaps to advance this type of education for more people; we have to figure out how to embrace civic friendship in order to meet the needs of our Republic, so we can keep it.

# Looking Transatlantically at Civic Learning

## Politische Bildung in Germany – 5 questions for Kirsten Dallmann and Tim Scholz

In this interview, Kirsten Dallmann and Tim Scholz discuss essential questions about politische Bildung from the perspective of out-of-school/non-formal civic education. Kirsten Dallmann is the chair of the AdB Commission for European and International Education and director of Bildungsstätte Bredbeck, a residential civic education center in Lower Saxony. Tim Scholz is the pedagogical director of the Jugendbildungsstätte Kurt Löwenstein in Brandenburg.



## How do you interpret 'politische Bildung' ?

**Kirsten Dallmann:** We understand politische Bildung as putting our participants in a position where they see themselves as political actors. One of the goals of our educational work is to make people aware that all action is political. That of course includes explicit political action, i.e. voting or getting involved in parties, but that's not all. Our work also deals with issues of power and issues of diversity as central topics. In our case [as an out-of-school / non-formal residential education center], we work relatively closely with schools, so that learning in school and learning outside of school are intertwined.

**Tim Scholz:** I think politische Bildung should strengthen people's perception of themselves as political subjects. It is very important to recognize one's own interests and needs and to make that the starting point of the education process, eventually reaching the question, "how can I myself stand up for my own interests and needs?". I believe successful politische Bildung is always about experiencing self-efficacy. The difference between "politics" and "the political" is also very important. I think it's important to focus on the question of democracy as a form of life, not only as a form of government and rule.

## What do you see as strengths of civic learning in your national context?

**KD:** [The field in Germany] is simply much more institutionalized. The model of [out-of-school/non-formal] educational institutions does not exist in other countries with which we cooperate. One you know that this system of out-of-school, non-formal civic education exists, you can benefit from it lifelong, whether you're a student or already in the working world. You can always find formats where you can develop further, learn more and participate for very little money. [In other countries] there are really great opportunities, but they are more dependent on who you know, where you live and what your status is. However, just because it exists doesn't mean it reaches the average cross-section

of the population. So we are still a long way from being able to say that it is universally established.

**TS:** As Kirsten says, Germany has a very well-developed infrastructure for politische Bildung, which is unique in the world, i.e. the structures of educational institutions but also of funding programs. This infrastructure lends also to a relatively high level of expertise available through many professionals who are real experts in this area. There is a very differentiated landscape of educational actors with very different political ideologies, but also different approaches to the work, and I think that is quite remarkable.

## What are the biggest challenges for the field and practice of civic learning today?

**TS:** One thing I am concerned about is the shift in the last few years toward a funding logic [from public and private funders] which prioritizes prevention work, for example, prevention of extremism. I believe, instead, that politische Bildung must be an open-ended process, which doesn't serve to only prevent extremism and radicalization. Connected to that, I find the discussion that has been pushed very strongly by the AfD and other groups on the question of neutrality in civic education important. Civic education cannot be neutral in the sense that it stands for human rights and democracy and [in out-of-school contexts] it is carried out by a pluralistic, diverse range of organizations and actors that demonstrate a diversity of opinions. I think we also have the challenge of reaching out to society as a whole and offering politische Bildung that is tailored to target groups that feel decoupled from society, those who no longer feel represented.

**KD:** On the topic of funding for politische Bildung, I think it would be better if there was more trust in funded institutions to fund more long-term work. Similarly, many funders are always looking for innovation, which is not necessarily a guarantee that something will improve and see new results compared to proven models and formats. More broadly, I also see huge social challenges at the

moment, and I believe politische Bildung is really challenged to adapt to them. In terms of the climate crisis and now with the war [in Ukraine], I think these are major challenges that not only affect society as a whole, but also civic education.

### **What topics do you see as particularly important in the years to come?**

**TS:** I think one big question is that of sharpening media literacy and judgment. In this day and age of social media, conspiracy narratives and fake news on the Internet, young people and also adults don't know where to find valid information. We have a similar problem in the sense of piercing echo chambers and one's own "bubble". I think one more important point is that democracy historically has had to be learned again and again. We face tough questions about how to increasingly deal with autocratic structures not only outside of Europe, but also within. How do we deal with these autocratic regimes and how can politische Bildung contribute to social change? We also have to look at our own society: for example, how can we win back people to democracy and prevent them from turning to right-wing parties?

**KD:** We now face war in Europe, and we have to deal with that actively, also in politische Bildung. I think this raises many questions to which we cannot simply respond with the standard answers of recent years. More directly addressing sustainable development and diversity should also be priorities.

### **What gives you hope for the future of civic learning?**

**KD:** I'm not really that concerned about the future of politische Bildung, because there are so many important topics to address. I have experienced a real willingness to continue to actively deal with difficult issues with colleagues in the field, which I find reassuring on the one hand and also inspiring. Recently, we have also established contact with a younger target group of elementary school children. I find that when one works with this age

group, also on political issues, one cannot lack for hope for the future.

**TS:** Despite a difficult, complex world situation, working with young people in a week-long seminar, it is impressive what you can achieve. Certainly there is the question of how sustainable a week-long seminar can be, but through it, you can give an initial impulse and orientation into a complex world. It gives us a sense of optimism that it can improve.



Photo by Andi Weiland | [andiweiland.de](http://andiweiland.de)

# Elevating Youth Voices

## From Public History to Civic Engagement

Authors: Navina Engelage, April Grayson, Gabrielle Lamplugh, Elena Neu, Teresa Pfaffinger, Sarah M. Surak



Photo by AdB

What can civic educators from Germany and the United States learn from young people about history-focused civic education practice? This article outlines a TECE thematic working group project centered on the common interest of history as an entry point to dialogue and civic education.

From the outset of our project, we hoped to gain a better understanding of the work of our colleagues, as well as our own work as civic educators. We recognized some significant differences between youth work in Germany and the U.S., but the most profound is Germany's much more structured and defined guidelines, definitions, and funding designations. In Germany, civic education is a professionalized field of formal and non-formal education. The field is primarily government-funded while remaining strictly non-partisan in line with the so-called *Beutelsbacher Consensus* that builds the normative framework for all civic education in the country. Operating largely outside of the school curriculum, civic education tends

to be project-based and organized by non-profit organizations.

In the U.S., civic education stretches across a wide spectrum, including in-school, after-school, extracurricular, and event-based programming, offered by organizations ranging from nonprofits to museums and universities. In addition, curriculum standards related to social studies and civics are not standardized across states, and school teaching requirements vary throughout the country. Some programs that span across states include YMCA's Youth in Government program, the Center for Civic Education's We the People program, and events including National History Day and Constitution Day. And while the school-based civics curriculum varies, organizations such as iCivics, Educating for American Democracy, Mikva Challenge, and Generation Citizen have developed supplemental curriculums that are used across the country.

## Roles of Public History

Public history is an important space for the formation of civic identities in Germany and the United States. In the U.S., public history spans myriad spaces and applications. Everyone from museum curators to park interpreters to researchers may consider themselves “public history” professionals. As a field, it is difficult to define; however, the qualities often associated with “public history” programming are that it is accessible and digestible, often local in focus, and typically views history from the perspective of everyday people impacted by particular events.

In Germany, public history learning outside of a school curriculum often takes place through national and/or international remembrance work projects and with a strong focus on the historical reappraisal of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Projects working on the topic of the German Democratic Republic and Reunification are also prevalent, and the topic of German colonialism has become more common in recent years. There is a strong culture of remembrance in Germany which is reflected in the large variety

of memorials, meeting centers, archives, and associations, as well as its own refined pedagogy.

The TECE fellows from the U.S. remarked on the impact of public history work in their personal lives and communities and advocated for it as a tool for civic education. They also shared their experiences partnering with students to create public history projects. Although not the norm in the field, the U.S. participants have co-created curriculum with students who provided new perspectives and critiques that professional historians have overlooked.

Within our working group, our project began with the idea of using our collective experiences to provide resources for facilitating conversations around public history. In particular, we hoped to share different methods prominent in each country. We also recognized many similarities that tied us together in our practice as facilitators, including some of the exercises we use in our own programming.

Early in our conversations, those in the group working from the U.S. began sharing new reactions to our work from some participants. While many of the best practices and exercises we had come to rely on for years continued to have a deep impact, we were noticing patterns of resistance to some, particularly from younger participants. This throughline encouraged us to ask what had shifted and how our practices could and perhaps should adapt.

*“ While many of the best practices and exercises we had come to rely on for years continued to have a deep impact, we were noticing patterns of resistance to some, particularly from younger participants.*



Photo by April Grayson

The resistance took various forms across our personal practices, but with common themes. One fellow working in the U.S. noticed resistance to unstructured dialogue, with younger participants wanting more guardrails and guidelines for discussion of difficult issues and histories. She also noticed emerging tension between the desire for perspective sharing and a belief that certain perspectives are not appropriate to express, especially in relation to how they may harm others. Another fellow from the U.S. noticed that, at times, some participants, especially younger people more experienced in social justice issues, whether through education or lived experience, began pushing back on the appropriateness of personal story-sharing as a tool in public history and

dialogue approaches. This was echoed by another American fellow who emphasized a movement towards not relying on the narratives of participants facing multiple forms of oppression to “do the work of teaching” others in the group to help illustrate discrimination and experiences of trauma.

During our first TECE exchange in Germany, we led a session using several tools we have relied on in our practices. Within the fellowship group, we received some pushback similar to that new pattern we had discussed in our preparatory sessions. Over the weeks following the meeting in Germany, we continued to discuss how to more effectively address new challenges posed in our own work.



## The Interview Project

After a period of discernment, we realized that if we wanted to share resources that support youth programming, we need to ask youth about their own experiences and elevate their voices. We recognized that our diverse individual networks, as well as the TECE network, provide a unique opportunity to interview young people representing both Germany and the United States. Thanks to the colleagues in our network, we were able to connect with young people from a variety of backgrounds, representing diverse geographic regions, who have a wide range of experiences.

To help determine who to interview, we brainstormed which youth perspectives would be most helpful in answering our own questions. One important criterion was that each interviewee had previously participated in a public history program before becoming a practitioner in the field of civics. We set the age parameters for our interviewees based upon the EU definition of youth, interviewing young adults up to age 29.

We settled on interviewing five people for the initial phase, three participants living in Germany and two living in the United States. Each interview was conducted in the participant's primary language, recorded on Zoom, and lasted approximately one hour. A team of two fellows conducted each interview, including the person who had the initial contact or program experience with the interview participant.

As a group, we drafted a series of questions, translated from English into German, and distributed these questions to the participants before the interview. We began by asking participants to introduce themselves and share how their experiences in public history programs influenced the activism, organizing, or other program leadership they engage in today. Most of our questions focused on best practices and lessons learned, paying particular attention to the impact of the programming on the participant experience and the logistical facets of the work. We

were especially interested in how the respective programming influenced each participant's sense of self and the world.

Given our initial small and large group observations – that younger participants were raising new questions about public history and dialogue work – our closing questions asked participants for their insights on “messy” and challenging situations or conversations they encountered. We gave special attention to experiences in which groups identified as racially different, groups made up of participants from different countries (especially with a history of animosity, colonialism, or war), and groups with participants across a large age range.

## The Voices: Themes in Youth Responses

After recording the interviews, our group reflected on each participant's perspectives and identified themes that emerged. We edited our videos to highlight these themes, as we believe they help us better evolve to meet the needs of a new generation. The emerging themes included four major topics:

**Safe Spaces:** While many of the “best practices” used in our work have encouraged sharing a diversity of perspectives, even those that may not be mainstream or socially acceptable, interviewees elevated the importance of establishing more comprehensive guidelines for participation in civic spaces. Many of the interviewees spoke about the value of creating safe spaces within group dialogue. While the traditional approach has often been to let all voices be heard, the interviewees lifted up the need to create spaces that prioritize listening to marginalized voices and those affected by traumatic experiences. They also emphasized the need to offer support after challenging conversations in the form of “aftercare”, which is not simply a “debriefing”.

**Youth Agency:** While many civic organizations work with youth to complete projects, few co-

create programs with youth or give youth agency over projects. The young people we interviewed advocated for greater youth agency and voice. They spoke about the importance of taking youth perspectives seriously and recognizing young people as equal and influential members of the community. They also raised the importance of material support to better enable under-resourced youth to participate in programming, including transportation, food, and at times even compensation to offset costs to the family or loss of wage earning.

**Intergenerational Work:** The interviewees unanimously agreed that intergenerational work is valuable, as it grants access to broader conversations and deeper mutual understanding, even within one's own communities and circles.

One participant went as far as suggesting that just as trauma can be passed on from generation to generation, so can approaches to healing. Intergenerational work is key for history-focused civic education, as storytelling and truth-telling is a highly effective tool for understanding one's identity and culture.

**Mentorship:** Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized the importance of having a strong mentor or role-model in inspiring their engagement. Mentorship not only impacted the interviewees themselves, but each also believes it to be essential in preparing young people for civic leadership. They advocated for one-to-one mentorship with adults they could identify with and desired more professional channels for educators and facilitators of color to mentor youth.



Photo by Adam Westbrook

## Lessons Learned

During this thematic working group collaboration, several differences between approaches to public history in Germany and the U.S. became visible. That is true for the context in which civic education takes place in general, as well as what we learned from our interviews.

When directly comparing the answers of the United States and German interviewees, we found that U.S. youth are more accustomed to having conversations surrounding difficult histories and analyzing how they tie into their own identities today. This became apparent in the language they used and in the sophistication with which they discussed these topics, which is most likely a product of an ongoing learning process in this context. They also connected history to current events, policy, and the contemporary political climate. This in no way suggests that the German interviewees lack such sophistication but merely underlines that the conversations around history in combination with one's personal identity were different for the participants based in Germany.

In Germany, projects looking at history, especially in the context of remembrance, do so with specific educational objectives, which can but do not by default include questions of personal identity. This is especially the case for discussions that do or could include reliving and overcoming personal trauma, although issues such as racism, xenophobia, sexism, and the like are addressed. Furthermore, concepts like "safe spaces" are not as prominently discussed in Germany – and in fact, one German interview participant used the term "safer space" in English – even though the methods to create such spaces are similar, if not as explicitly stated, in praxis.

In the U.S., topics involving trauma and painful histories are more commonly part of discussions of public history, even though youth workers and facilitators are no more trained in addressing trauma than they are in Germany. Concurrently, young people in the U.S. are increasingly

demanding that programs address issues such as racism, sexism, anti-LGBTQ attitudes and policies, xenophobia, and current events around the teaching of history.

Another difference that came to light was the particular importance of "community" and local communities in the U.S. context of history-based civic education. Remembrance work or history-focused civic education in Germany takes place on more of a meta level, without ties to a specific community. It is therefore not surprising that such a sense of investment and responsibility for one's own or particular communities was less of a central focus for the German fellows in the group when it comes to their civic educational programming.

Overall, working in this thematic group helped all participants reflect upon our own work and look at our own practices from a different angle. The experience was energizing to us as facilitators and affirmative that public history in civic education is important and empowering to young people. The findings from our video series were reinforced as many aligned with those presented by other thematic working groups, whose research took a different form. We look forward to continuing our interviews and building on the foundation we laid during this fellowship. Moreover, we hope that additional resources allow for us to continue to collaborate with others and develop a set of best practice recommendations focused on the experiences of young people.



You can access the video series mentioned in this article and produced by the authors by scanning the QR code.

# Polarization in the United States and Germany

## Discursive Solutions for Civic Educators

Authors: Laura Tavares, Christina Wiley, Emma Humphries, Sarah Wagner, Christian Johann

Toxic and combative discourses make it harder to compromise and govern, thus posing a challenge to democracies and diminishing trust within societies. Improving civic discourse through civic education can therefore be a vital asset to protect and strengthen democracy and increase trust within communities. In this contribution, TECE fellows comparatively explore political polarization in the U.S. and German contexts, looking specifically at toxic or hostile civic discourse as a sign of polarization.

For our work, we understand polarization according to the Merriam Webster definition as “a state in which the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer range along a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes” therefore hindering civil and constructive discourse and consensus making in society. While a certain level of polarization can be helpful to mark differences between political parties and opinions, it can also impede crucial conversations, inhibit effective policy making, and, over time, erode faith in democracy.

### **How Polarized is the U.S.? Polarization in the U.S.: Signs and Level of Polarization**

At a time when it seems that Americans cannot agree on anything, everyone agrees that the political culture of the United States is monumentally toxic. The causes and manifestations of this ubiquitous toxicity are many: fractured political caucuses, 24-hour cable news, contested elections, misinformation, incivility, echo chambers, inefficient government, 19-month elections seasons, rampant conspiracy theories, decreasing levels of trust in democratic principles that were once just assumed to be sacred, and an increasing belief that democracy is a bad form of government. This list barely scratches the surface.

One thing lies at the heart of this virulent enumeration: polarization.

Actually, hyperpolarization would be more precise. According to data from the Varieties of Democracy Institute, which ranked the level of polarization in various countries on a scale of 0 (opposing



Photo by AdB

political groups interact in a friendly manner) to 4 (opposing political groups interact hostilely), the United States is well above the 3.5 point and inching its way toward the highest, most hostile mark (Edsall, 2022).

To put it in a more descriptive way, according to a 2022 article from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “[...] polarization at the mass level is pushing Americans across the country to divide themselves into distinct and mutually exclusive political camps. The rise of an “us versus them” mindset and political identity in American sociopolitical life is evident in everything from the rise of highly partisan media to the decline in Americans’ willingness to marry someone from the opposing political party. Even more concerning, these dynamics are contributing directly to a steep

rise in political violence.”

These toxic levels of polarization are also present in Congress, where on average, Democrats and Republicans are farther apart ideologically today than at any time in the past 50 years (Pew Research, 2022).

Beyond the polarizing trends already mentioned, one could argue that the structure of the American system was designed this way. Perhaps not crafted to intentionally sow division, but nevertheless, the United States has a “rigid two-party system that facilitates binary divisions of society. For example, only five of twenty-six wealthy consolidated democracies elect representatives to their national legislatures in single-member districts” (Carnegie, 2022). To make matters worse, elections in the

## Related projects & organizations”

### → [The Better Arguments Project](#)

The Better Arguments Project is a national civic initiative created to help bridge divides – not by papering over those divides but by helping people have Better Arguments.

### → [Braver Angels](#)

Through workshops, debates, campus engagement, and more, Braver Angels helps Americans understand each other beyond stereotypes, form community alliances, and reduce the vitriol that poisons our civic culture.

### → [One Small Step](#)

One Small Step brings people with different political views together to record a 50-minute conversation—not about politics, but about who we are as people.

### → [Living Room Conversations](#)

Living Room Conversations works to heal society by connecting people across divides - politics, age, gender, race, nationality, and more – through guided conversations proven to build understanding and transform communities.

### → [Inclusiv](#)

Formerly known as Civic Dinners, Inclusiv is an engagement platform designed to help companies, universities, and communities increase understanding and collective action around important topics.

United States are typically determined by first-past-the-post plurality. This means that a wide and diverse range of social and political views are more often than not reduced to a single partisan dispute.

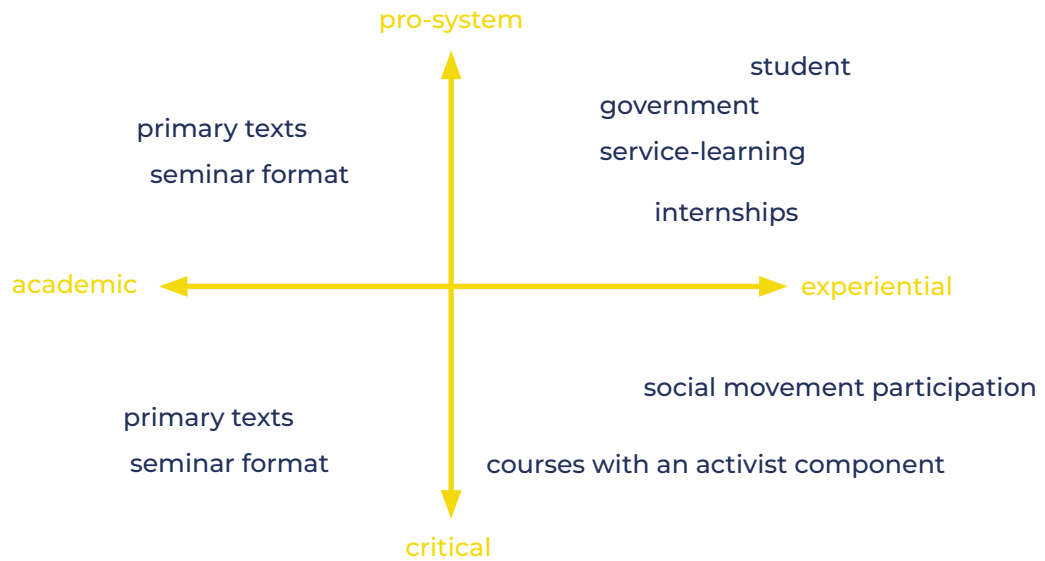
“75% of Germans share the “feeling that public debate has become increasingly hateful” and 42% of Germans believe that they “cannot express opinions freely in the current political system.”

(More in Common, 2019)

## Polarization in Progress? Emerging Divides in Germany

Although not (yet) rising to the levels seen in the United States, the headline in the weekly newspaper DIE ZEIT stated at the end of 2021: “Political polarization is increasing in Germany.” Citing a study by the conservative Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the article described that while the majority of Germans represent political opinions located in the center, fringe positions have increased over the past few years. Due to this increase, political polarization is regarded as a problem in Germany, but it is not seen as the most pressing issue – yet. The policy issues that do seem to cause concern and have a polarizing effect on citizens and voters are social inequality, immigration policy as well as climate change. Compared to the data and insights on polarization from the United States, the situation in Germany is not as toxic yet. This can be attributed to, amongst other factors, the different political and institutional settings in Germany. A proportional election system encompassing a broader variety of political parties, publicly funded media institutions as well as federal and local grants for civic education all seem to play a role in lower levels of polarized discourse.

Yet concerning developments should not be



Two dimensions in the debate about civics (Levine, 2021)

ignored: 75% of Germans share the “feeling that public debate has become increasingly hateful” and 42% of Germans believe that they “cannot express opinions freely in the current political system” (More in Common, 2019). Reports from More in Common or the Bertelsmann Stiftung look at polarization from the angle of social cohesion and the widening of social fractures, including factors such as trust in institutions, solidarity, or faith in democracy. Here, the most recent 2022 publication from the Bertelsmann Stiftung attests to a significant decrease regarding trust in government and faith in democracy.

In an essay on the subject, Paula Köhler convincingly argues that the main challenges might not be polarization per se or a dramatic split of German society into two groups which are diametrically opposed. Rather, she states that one-third of Germans feel less and less represented by the political class and system and another group, roughly one-third as well, is becoming louder and more belligerent in the public discourse. To the latter point, a vocal minority drowning out other voices and groups and filling the public debate with their antagonism, has a disproportionate effect on society. So how can such a heated debate and discourse environment be effectively improved for both countries?

## Civic Education as an Antidote to Polarization?

Those alarmed by toxic polarization and signs of democratic decline often point to education as a potential solution. In a rare instance of transpartisan agreement, Americans across the political spectrum agree on the promise of civic education as a solution to what ails the nation’s democracy. When presented with seven solutions that included “a year of national service” and “less money in politics,” 57% chose civic education. What’s more is that civics was preferred equally by Republicans and Democrats (CivXNow, 2020).

The promise of civic education as a solution is complicated by the fact that Americans also disagree about the form it should take and the goals it should pursue. With this matrix, scholar Peter Levine has identified two important dimensions in debates about civic education. There are tensions surrounding the practice of civic education: should it be primarily academic, characterized by close engagement with primary sources and seminar-style discussion, or should it focus on experiences, participation in real or simulated democratic processes, or even activism? Another set of tensions surrounds the implicit or explicit stance that civic education takes in

→ [OpenMind](#)

OpenMind helps learners build positive skills and habits for constructive dialogue across 8 online lessons and 4 (optional) peer-to-peer conversations.

→ [Heterodox Academy](#)

Heterodox Academy is a nonpartisan collaborative of 5,000+ professors, educators, administrators, staff, and students who are committed to enhancing the quality of research and education by promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher learning.

→ [National Institute for Civil Discourse](#)

NICD has developed a multi-faceted strategy to channel Americans' yearning into a coherent and powerful force. In addition to inspiring and organizing everyday Americans, our strategy is designed to encourage elected leaders to put country ahead of partisanship.

→ [Deutschland spricht](#)

Every year, thousands of people meet for a political debate as part of Deutschland spricht. The dialog format was launched by ZEIT ONLINE in 2017 and, since then, more than 90,000 people have signed up for a one-on-one conversation with someone who thinks completely differently about political issues.

relation to current systems and structures of society and government. Should civic educators aim to inculcate patriotism and teach students to participate in existing systems, or should they invite students to critique and even deconstruct those systems in the service of greater justice? In the United States, these tensions often track along partisan lines, and the resultant controversies have led to a general neglect of civic education overall (Educating for American Democracy, 2021).

Growing awareness of toxic polarization, and even the specter of political violence, has created a new sense of urgency about civic education in the United States, just as concerns about democratic decline and shrinking civic spaces have within Europe. One thing is clear: if civic education is to combat toxic polarization, it must be expansively defined, encompassing knowledge of the systems and processes that relate individuals to their governments, the skills to navigate those systems, and the dispositions that foster more respectful, tolerant, and engaged relations *among* people themselves.

## Programs and Reflections for Practitioners

For civic educators engaged in transatlantic exchange, it was of great interest to us to see which lessons can be learned from the United States regarding the study and teaching of civics in polarized times. Can civic education make a difference and if so, what can it look like in Germany? Through the TECE collaboration – including our experiences of dialogue across lines of difference within the program itself – we came to focus on efforts to improve discourse as a promising, if complex, approach to combating polarization. As scholar Sarah Stitzlein observes, “Good civic reasoning and discourse can keep democracy healthy by welcoming a plurality of perspectives, highlighting shared responsibilities for sustained and improved living, integrating citizens into decision-making about the future of communities, and building a collective sense of ‘we’” (Stitzlein, 2021, p.176).





Photo by Andi Weiland | andiweiland.de

In the United States, we encountered a veritable cottage industry of discourse-related projects and organizations; some addressed to the general public and others to higher education, youth, or schools specifically. Many – including The Better Arguments Project, Braver Angels, and Living Room Conversations – follow a formula of bringing together viewpoint-diverse groups for intentionally-crafted and normed discussions of controversial public issues. In addition to dialogue experiences, these organizations offer frameworks, training, and other resources to help participants engage in civil dialogues, whether planned or spontaneous. Another organization, Open Mind, also seeks to cultivate participants' self-awareness and understanding of cognitive biases as a key first step for healthy discourse. Diverse identities, perspectives, and ideologies are key ingredients in these efforts, and assembling a representative

group can be a challenge. Other discourse-based projects, like “Real Talk for Change” at the MIT Center for Constructive Communication, focus on improving communication between people and their governments, including candidates for office; to create spaces where often-marginalized voices can feel free to speak, this project intentionally works with homogenous groups.

Another persistent challenge in civic discourse projects is navigating power dynamics. Some projects use the framing of “conversations” rather than “debates” to avoid setting an adversarial tone, while others embrace the notion of “argument” as a way to invite authentic differences of opinion to surface. It can be a struggle to define norms that establish a truly open and equitable space. Better Arguments, for example, advocates that participants “embrace vulnerability” – a big ask



Photo by AdB

for those already marginalized, or those who fear repercussions for sharing a minority viewpoint. Even the norm of “civility” is contested. Critics suggest that calls for civility can privilege dominant forms of communication, exclude those with fewer linguistic resources, and can be weaponized to contain or stifle justified outrage. Calls for civility can be repressive when the context of a debate is itself inequitable. In addition, a constant challenge is to ensure a diverse field of individuals is represented in the conversation and that it is not just an amplification of already dominant voices from the majority group.

And then the issue of outcomes arises. Participants in our group questioned the utility of discursive programs advocating for difficult conversations which require time and emotional energy, yet potentially do not offer appropriate support in managing outcomes or leave the participant questioning what it was all for in the end. Special attention needs to be paid when already marginalized groups feel that they do have to put

in additional emotional and educational labor without being compensated or without proper after care. Finally, civic educators employing these formats should also emphasize the building of key skills and disposition, including curiosity, acceptance of “not yet knowing,” tolerance for ambiguity, as one participant of our group put it.

“ One thing is clear: if civic education is to combat toxic polarization, it must be expansively defined, encompassing knowledge of the systems and processes that relate individuals to their governments, the skills to navigate those systems, and the dispositions that foster more respectful, tolerant, and engaged relations among people themselves.

## Conclusion

Discussions in the United States regarding civic education seem to have reached a fever pitch. The attempt to censor or outright ban specific books, the discourse surrounding the 1619 project or topics such as Critical Race Theory are explicit examples of the impact polarization and radicalization can have on civic education. Therefore, it was not surprising to find a variety of programs and formats in the U.S. that aimed at facilitating, improving, and elevating discourse in order to bridge societal gaps and as an attempt to soften the us-vs-them mindset and identity. When looking at Germany, no comparable number of programs is to be found. One example of a discursive format would be *Deutschland spricht*, which uses a survey and algorithm to pair participants for 1:1 conversations and is not hosted by a civic education institute, but by the newspaper DIE ZEIT. For German educators, a glance across the pond and at the numerous programs and formats offered can therefore be a great addition to or extension of already existing German programs. Civic educators can learn from these programs and build upon them, keeping in mind the specifics of their own audiences and the dilemmas arising from these programs, and engaging with U.S. colleagues for best practice examples.

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# What? So What? Now What?

## Learnings from TECE and our vision for transatlantic civic youth work

Authors: Georg Pirker and Katja Greeson

What value does a German-American exchange of civic learning present? How can we contribute to the civic learning of young people directly through transatlantic youth work? After a year of in-depth exchange, project organizers reflect on learning outcomes of the TECE project and present six recommendations for the future of civic learning-focused exchange.

Democratic values destabilized by political discontent. Raging debates over whether and how to confront difficult histories. A political and social landscape transformed by evolving technology. An increasingly diverse population and a yet unfinished pursuit of equality and justice.

Germany and the U.S. face critical mutual challenges, and in both countries, there are significant efforts and calls to react via reinforced and reenvisioned civic education. There is interest on both sides in looking at alternative models for how, when and where we should educate for democratic citizenship and what citizens must know and should apply. Concurrently, we see a need for the transatlantic exchange venue

as a setting of civic learning for young people themselves.

In developing the TECE project, we aimed to respond to these needs by launching a first-of-its-kind professional transatlantic exchange following the model of a fellowship for 'non-formal civic educators'. With this term, which for consistency we will use throughout this article, we refer to out-of-school civic learning and youth development professionals who contribute to the civic and political development of young people (between 14 and 29-years-old). The distinct approaches, structures and thematic focal points of civic education in each country create fertile ground for learning, but we asked ourselves, still, whether there was enough common ground for productive dialogue and for cooperation beyond the sole purpose of curiosity. The primary goal of this pilot project has thus been to investigate the feasibility and value of German-American exchange in the field of youth civic learning and to identify relevant topics and formats. Ultimately, we have hoped to contribute to a field-wide exchange of expertise as well as individual professional development and practical inspiration for future projects between participating practitioners or even direct programs for and with young people.

“ There is a need to establish and grow a new form of transatlantic youth and civil society exchange that makes civic learning a central element of the work.

Based on our 15-month project, we discuss here several key learnings and recommendations for future action. The experience shared by the fellowship participants confirms our initial assumption; There *is* a need to establish and grow a new form of transatlantic youth and civil society exchange that makes civic learning a central element of the work. We refer to this new approach as *transatlantic civic youth work*: this term borrows from the European model of international youth work (IYW)<sup>1</sup> and the civic youth work model from U.S.-based Baizerman and Roholt<sup>2</sup>. Similarly the term links to the European model of youth work as described in the [European Youth Work Agenda](#). Transatlantic civic youth work conceptually builds on the experience and practice of civic learning, (self-) empowerment, and community organizing and promotes the active civil and citizenship rights

of young people through youth-led and co-created youth work processes and structures.

The idea we present here is far from fully developed. Rather, we see it as an initial impulse, which we expect to be adapted and adjusted. In this way, we hope TECE can offer valuable insights for others looking to strengthen transatlantic youth and civil society exchange, enhance the (global) citizenship competencies of young people, and take insight from other approaches to civic learning and youth development.

### Civic learning and politische Bildung: Finding common ground

The diversity of participant professional backgrounds and current work arrangements (in

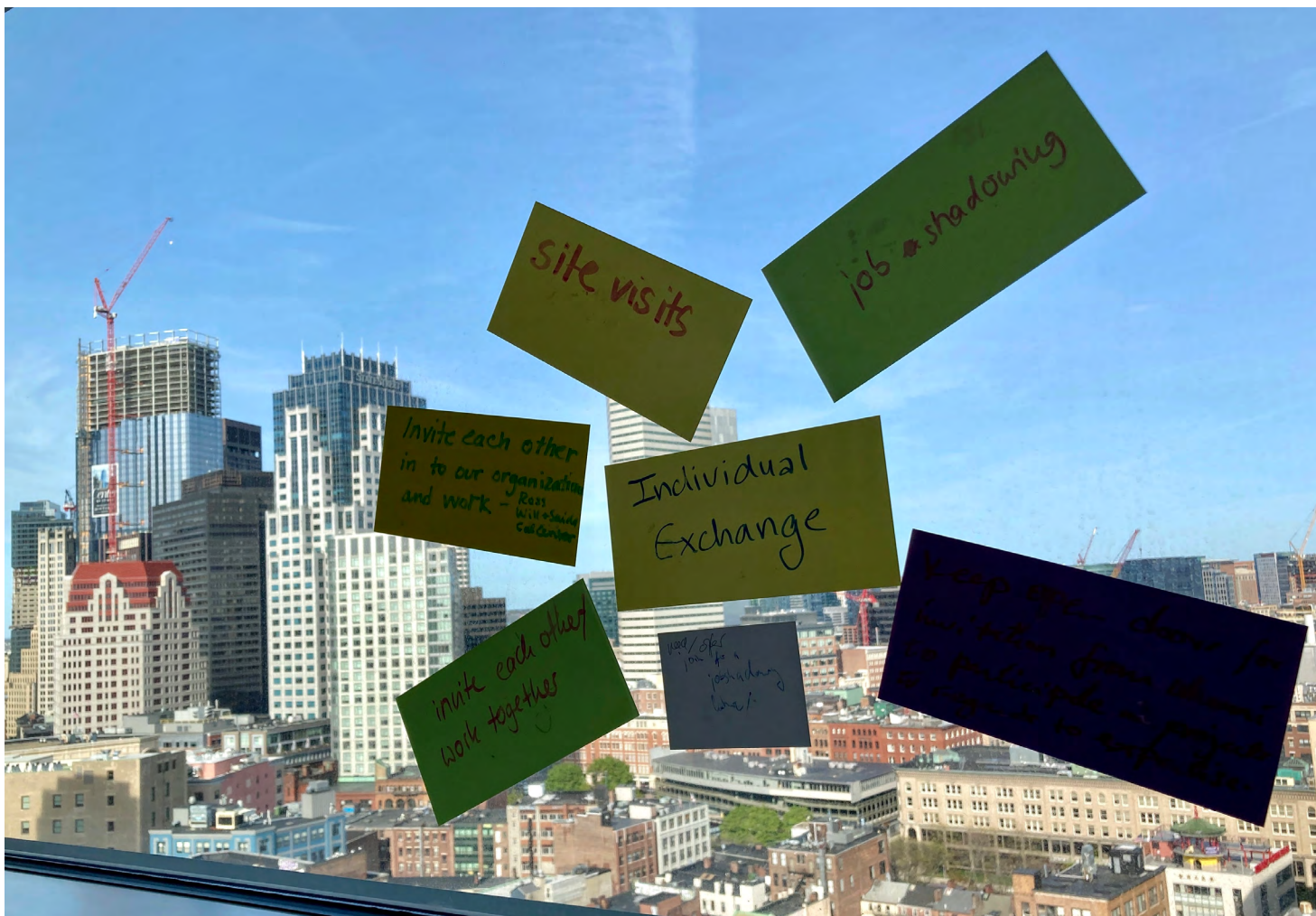


Photo by AdB



Photo by AdB

terms of target group, topic, type of organization) in TECE's pilot fellowship cohort represent the broad diversity of the non-formal civic education profession in both countries. The institutions that support civic learning in out-of-school, civil society contexts vary greatly, as well as the funding structures, network and training opportunities, methodological approaches, etc.

Despite these differences, many common topics arise as challenges for the field and individual civic educators in both contexts: Where should the focus be set in a polarized societal environment - citizenship, democracy, the extreme margins, common ground? Should field discourse focus on a narrow professional definition or widen access? Challenges also arise related to the personal dispositions of civic educators: what role should they play, when is it appropriate to take a personal stand, what attitudes should they take toward active engagement?

To help confront these challenges, we need to bridge substantial differences and potential barriers to understanding to create a common platform for exchange and ascertain how best to bring together organizations with enough in common to orchestrate future projects with young people together.

We have spent a year of mapping civic education ecosystems, seeking to understand new context-specific terminology, and learning novel concepts through experience, practice, and dialogue. Rather than seeing these differences as disadvantages, we view them as unique opportunities to question core assumptions of our own work and our own professional understanding with the asset of an outsider's perspective. As one participant noted, *"When I first saw who was in the group with me, I thought, what's happening here? I don't know how to relate to that, but now I think it was a really good way to see more of the whole field"*

*that exists in the U.S.*” A more homogenous group may be more comfortable or productive in the short-term, but it is the diversity of backgrounds of work particularly that leads to new ideas and an ‘unlearning’ of engrained ones. In organizing TECE, the latter was of particular importance, since, given the contested situation of our democracies, developing new approaches and gaining from others’ respective experiences and approaches is critical.

One example of learning through difference during TECE relates to the concept and term, “non-formal civic education”, which is widely-used in Europe and Germany but not in the U.S. context. This reflects not only a pure difference in language, but also the approaches, institutions and settings for civic learning. By grasping the concept of non-formal education through dialogue and experience with other participants and external guests, U.S.-based participants were able to ultimately challenge and raise critical questions about the value and practice of non-formal education for German participants, who could newly see potential weaknesses or strengths through a comparative lens.

## Benefit of a transatlantic perspective

It is exactly these strikingly different conditions, against the backdrop of many reciprocal challenges, which make a *transatlantic* perspective on civic learning especially meaningful. In discussing the many challenges which influence German and U.S.-American society and the civic education field mutually today, participants were able to consider these challenges in new ways and in some cases identify practical solutions. For example, in discussing the complexities of rising polarization for the civic education field, one external guest introduced the “Weimarer Declaration for Democratic Educational Work”, a set of guiding principles which seeks to proactively defend the work as firmly pro-democracy and pro-human rights (EJBW, 2020). Although this document wouldn’t be directly implementable in a U.S. context, participants noted being able to

see an adapted version as a useful way to navigate their own increasingly polarized professional situations.

A German-American perspective on civic learning is lacking. There is little comparative research and opportunities for exchange of non-formal educators and youth development professionals, civil society organizations and young people in non-school contexts are rare. By encouraging this exchange and opening doors to underrepresented target groups, we have the opportunity to learn outside of national and supranational structures and approaches to critically question basic assumptions about the work. Throughout TECE, discussions about the essential questions of the work – what *is* civic education, *who* should do it, *where* should it be practiced – have resulted in new ideas and deep dialogue.

“ Throughout TECE, discussions about the essential questions of the work – what is civic education, who should do it, where should it be practiced – have resulted in new ideas and deep dialogue.

## Looking to future exchange: Transatlantic Civic Youth Work

### Civic learning at the core

Our vision of transatlantic civic youth work pulls from the international youth work programs at the European (e.g., Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps) and German national (e.g., through the Child and Youth Plan (KJP)) levels. These programs form a variety of constellations, but a core through-line is the aim to provide tailor-made opportunities for learning of active and engaged citizenship, for fostering a global/European perspective, for appreciating diversity and taking responsibility for peace, human rights,

and positive social change. IYW programs are intentional programs for learning and practicing democracy. In other words, the political and civic element and the reflection about experiences gained is an intentional aim, not a byproduct.

That civic spaces are shrinking is a fact. Authoritarian forces in Europe and the U.S. have sought to limit the political and civic nature of civic learning and IYW experiences by discouraging discussion of certain controversial topics and limiting access and funding for civil society organizations. There has been outspoken critique of the increasingly de-polarized nature of European Youth Work programs, indicating the need to actively promote and defend the civic dimension of the work. In the context of German youth work, despite political education being a core field of

activities on the national and international level, the connection to rule of law, democracy, civil and human rights remain vague, which is mirrored in the actors, formats and topics of IYW. In various states in the U.S., meanwhile, strong controversy and, increasingly, restrictions exist related to how to “do” civic education.

Against the backdrop of a transatlantic relationship characterized by a commitment to democratic values, transatlantic civic youth work programs must intentionally and consistently center democratic civic learning, conceptually and concretely. Whether or not individual exchanges or projects focus specifically on civic and political topics, formats should support a learning environment where participants practice democracy by experiencing it, learn to accept



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and value other (global) perspectives and feel empowered as active citizens. Short-term and group exchanges are particularly well-suited for this – exchange formats which are uncommon amid existing transatlantic exchange opportunities.

The civic learning element is particularly important since increasing polarization is vitally endangering the promise of democracy and the pursuit of happiness for young generations, who find themselves in both countries in a minority political position. They are economically and, in terms of their trust in civil/political self-efficacy, highly polarized. Thus, inter- and intra-generational support for democracy with this generational cohort is at risk in both countries and should not be taken for granted. This makes civic learning

an extremely important field for transatlantic cooperation.

### **Considering and reaching new target groups**

Transatlantic civic youth work should recognize the important role that non-formal educators, youth development professionals, and other civil society actors play in supporting the development of the civic and political competences of young people. At present, opportunities for these groups to engage in transatlantic exchange and learn from each other are extremely rare, if possible at all. By opening up these experiences to professionals in non-school contexts, we hope to expand access to underrepresented communities that don't qualify for the many 'elite', application-based, and/or high cost programs that dominate the transatlantic

exchange space currently. These opportunities are not only opportunities for personal professional growth; they also have a massive multiplier potential for advancements in the field and in local contexts. In offering qualifying opportunities to these relevant professional groups, we may also reach underserved young people themselves, who are engaged in contexts outside of the classroom.

### **Youth as co-creators**

In a new vision of *transatlantic civic youth work*, the process of exchange benefits from a more bottom-up approach, wherein civil society organizations and young people themselves develop and grow projects which are integrated with local youth work activities. This international, reciprocal, participant-guided, reflective group-learning fosters civic development – it enables young people to identify themselves and navigate opinions within a global context, to promote tolerance and peace, to discuss and compromise, and to participate and be civically engaged. Critical in this is a greater focus on centering youth. There is high potential for the professional youth work community to create *youth-led* and *youth-defined* spaces for learning and engaging. In this sense, transatlantic civic youth work does not confine itself to preparing young people for *future* citizenship, but views young people as active citizens *now*.

### **Flexibility to innovate**

In-person exchange models are an invaluable format for personal growth, building connection, and deep learning, but the practical challenges associated with transatlantic exchange mean we need to also invest in exploring other formats. Actors involved in international exchange have been particularly challenged during the pandemic to experiment with other models, given associated travel restrictions and COVID safety measures restricting in-person group encounters. Given the challenging practical constraints that specifically impact transatlantic exchange (higher costs, vaster geographical distances, inconvenient time zones), even in a post-pandemic world, U.S.-German exchange will need to rely on innovative

approaches to be accessible, achievable, and sustainable. This can only be achieved when project organizers are afforded the flexibility by funders to experiment in identifying promising methods and concepts, new structures and partnerships through model-projects, which may ultimately be scaled.

### **Funding to support and expand the work**

There has recently been notable political support for intensifying transatlantic people-to-people and youth exchange. Initial steps are being taken to build a German-American Youth Office, echoing the model of other German bilateral youth work offices<sup>3</sup>. These initial steps are promising signs for the future of this work, but certainly not the only way to increase funding opportunities. Realistically, the vision of a more accessible and civically-oriented transatlantic youth work cannot be achieved without increasing funding and making it available to new target groups. The will to do the work on behalf of civil society institutions is there, but insufficient publicly available grants create steep barriers. We hope insights from TECE can guide the development of new funding channels and institutions.

## **Conclusion**

Recent events highlight the importance of civil society and civic education for fostering democratic values and preserving democratic systems, and they emphasize the essentiality of citizens who see themselves within a broader global sphere. Educating our citizens for the current reality must take place with an international perspective. Strengthening and opening new opportunities for transatlantic civic youth work is overdue. To do so, we present the following recommendations:

1. Transatlantic youth work should make civic and political learning a priority conceptually and concretely, clearly centering it as a goal of programming and supporting practitioners and young people to further develop these elements.

2. More opportunities should be made available for new professional target groups to engage in transatlantic exchange, particularly non-formal educators and youth development professionals. In accessing new professional target groups, new groups of underrepresented young people may also be reached.
3. Reaching underrepresented young people with steeper barriers to access should be prioritized. This can be achieved by, among other things, utilizing short term exchange activities (1-2 weeks) and blended learning opportunities. Engaging this target group is particularly critical to the future development of our democracies.
4. Transatlantic civic youth work should promote short-term, group encounters, which are youth-led and responsive to local needs.
5. Transatlantic civic youth work should be afforded the flexibility to experiment with formats with the aim of accessibility, viability, and sustainability.
6. Funders should expand investments in transatlantic youth work to realize the vision of a more accessible and civically-oriented transatlantic youth work. Relatedly, the process of assessing feasibility and establishing a U.S.-German youth office should consider the various and diverse fields related to youth work and civic education. Here we see the highest probability for conceptual spillover and mutual learning for the profession of youth work.

“I have a good feeling, when I go home with more questions than answers” – this sentiment from a TECE participant on the final day of our in-person encounter is an apt sentiment for reflecting on the project as a whole. There is more room for exploration and more work here to be done.

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1. International youth work (IYW) in a European setting is described as “professionally guided activities that take place in international contexts” and are based on “non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation”. IYW is typically a supplement to local youth work activities, via formats such as group youth and youth worker exchange projects, youth participation activities and international public service assignments (YOCOMO, 2020).
  2. Civic youth work is described by Baizerman, Hildreth and Roholt as “small, specific, practical, and often effective practices to invite and support viable, authentic, meaningful, and consequential youth engagement on issues of compelling interest and importance to them”, helping “young people to experience democratic citizenship and not simply learn about it” (2013).
  3. E.g., the German-Polish Youth Office (DPJW), the German-French Youth Office (DFJW), or the German-Greek Youth Office (DGJW).

# Impressions from the Fellows



## Ronald Becker, Die Rederei, gUG

**How will the TECE experience impact your work moving forward?** I will partner with fellows in my work and will chew on so many debates we had about racism, biography work, and so on. We have a reading group that is very motivating.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful and why?** I knew about leadership-focused youth work before, but now I find the idea more attractive.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend related to the topics explored in TECE?** The journal article, “Race before Racism: The Disappearance of the American” by Gavatri Chakrovorty Spivak



## Michelle Chávez, Bildungsstätte Alte Schule Anspach (basa e. V.)

**Why did you choose to participate in TECE?** Since I was at university, I have always liked to participate in exchange spaces with a long-term impact. Now that I am in the professional world, it is more difficult for me to participate in this type of activity because there are fewer offers of this type. Since this program consisted of several online sessions and then two meetings of 10 days each, I thought it was worthwhile because there could be enough time for a meaningful discussion and interaction. Also, many theories and terms that are widely used in the field of civic education in Germany were developed in the USA. For this reason, I was particularly interested in participating in an exchange with civic educators from the U.S.

**What is one major takeaway from TECE?** My biggest learning was that despite the structural differences in the field of civic education in the U.S. and Germany, there are many similarities between the two countries. We share common values and principles that guide our work as educators, such as participation, accessibility and trust. One example of this is the values and principles that guide the work of civic educators. The quest to provide safe and accessible spaces for young people to actively participate was a common denominator I found. Challenges such as limited funding and resources were also a common denominator I identified.



## Navina Engelage, Gesamteuropäisches Studienwerk e. V. (GESW)

**How do you think the TECE experience will impact your work moving forward?** I would like to improve the settings in my seminars to give participants a safer space to express themselves. I will try to be more sensitive in my communication and listen more carefully to my conversation partner. Through TECE, I have gained a better understanding of how background and trauma affects people and influences their actions.

### **How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?**

Civic education should empower the individual as well as strengthen the sense of community, especially in times of transformation. Finding the balance is so important.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** MIT's Real Talk for Change project stands out. It picks up people in their own environment and starts with their experiences.



## April Grayson, The Alluvial Collective

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful and why?** Particularly meaningful for me were the sessions at Cultures Interactive [in Berlin], seeing how the site of memory visits are facilitated at the Buchenwald Memorial, the civic case study exercise with Peter Levine, and all of the walking tours. [Culture Interactive's] approach is very similar to my organization's, but they go deeper by engaging directly with radicalized people and doing extremism prevention and intervention. That's an area where I don't feel confident and would love to learn more about.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** Podcasts I recommend: "1619" (focused on the history of slavery in the U.S. and the continuing generational impacts); "Nice White Parents" (school desegregation and resistance to it in NYC public schools); and "Uncivil" (challenging myths and sharing little known stories about the U.S. Civil War)



## Emma Humphries, iCivics

### **How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?**

I'm not sure it has changed so much as it has expanded in specific ways. For instance, youth exchanges and memory work were never really experiences I considered in the realm of my work. I suppose if someone asked, I would say that they "count" as civic education, but again, I never really considered them in the context of my work. Conversely, I would hope that some of our German fellows may now view, for example, policy work and fighting polarization as directly related to civic education.

**What is one major takeaway from TECE?** There is no excuse for a lack of youth representation in any spaces where decisions are being made that affect them. I would say that my beliefs about youth representation have deepened and expanded. I've always been a proponent, but now I'm a more aggressive one.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** "Hard Questions" by Barbara Pace



## Christoph Hövel, Salvador-Allende-Haus e. V.

**What is one major takeaway from the experience?** The whole TECE program showed me how context matters and that it isn't possible to simply take over certain concepts. The program for me started a deeper examination of those contexts and a proper way of their context-based understanding.

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** I can't say that it did, but it definitely deepened the questions that I still have about addressing difficult questions with other people coming from different backgrounds in connection to a universalist ideal (the general possibility of universal communication and understanding).

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** For podcasts, I recommend "Democracy Now!", "The Dig", "Jacobin Radio", and "Blindspot". Books I'd recommend include "Racecraft. The Soul of Inequality in American Life" by Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields and "Beziehungswiese Revolution. 1917, 1968 und kommende" by Bini Adamczak



## Christian Johann, Europäische Akademie Berlin e. V.

**Why did you choose to participate and what has kept you motivated?** I'm interested in civic education, transatlantic relations and in learning about best practices.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** I liked the textbook approach [civic case studies] we followed at Tufts University. It gave me a sense of how to include working with a text back into my work.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** Malcolm Gladwell's "Talking to Strangers", Richard Powers' "The Time of Our Singing", and Edward P. Jones' "The Known World"



## Gabrielle Lamplugh, Mikva Challenge

**On what topics do you feel your perspective has changed or been confirmed?** I was surprised at how different the approaches to polarization and radicalization are in the U.S. and Germany. In my experience the U.S. has failed to address radicalization, in part because of division on whether/where it exists. However, when it is addressed, it's often through an approach that assumes that developing critical thinking skills or having more information will remedy the issue. Of what I learned about the German approach, it seems there is still a focus on information when it comes to radicalization, but there is just as much a recognition of the social issues and psychological factors that could be influencing it.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** The visit to the Buchenwald Memorial provided deep context for the approach to Holocaust education in Germany and the way that memorialization is approached that I found very different from the U.S. (a focus on facts, figures, and truths rather than emotion). In my experience, a lot of education surrounding enslavement and racism in the U.S. focuses a lot on trying to get students to experience or understand trauma by encouraging them to "live" an experience. But I found the Buchenwald pedagogical guide's points about trauma not being the way to prevent history from repeating itself and not being the way to help students best understand history very enlightening.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend related to the topics explored in TECE?** The podcast, "Revisionist History" offers a lot of insight into complicated issues of race, inequity and education in American history.



## Drucella Anne Miranda, California Center for Civic Participation

**Why did you choose to participate in TECE and what has kept you motivated?** To deepen my learning in promising practices and gain a better understanding of the field. What has kept me motivated is my commitment to making positive impact on young people and the fellows who have encouraged me and believe in me and my work, because this work is ultimately to create a safer world for all of us to exist in in relation with one another and our earth.

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** It hasn't, but I will say it has exposed me to the various approaches people have to reach their goals in an organization or program and pushed me to better or deepen my practice. It was also a humbling reminder we don't have to start in the same place to get going in the same direction.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** The "Free Range Humans" podcast, for people really into education.



## Elena Neu, IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** I think the general hands-on approach in the U.S. is something I find impactful. Giving young people agency within their own communities, in my opinion, is a great way to make politics and democratic values so much more accessible and tangible. I am sure that these efforts exist in German civic education as well, but to a lesser extent.

**On what topics do you feel your perspective has changed or been confirmed?** Going into the program, I had the idea that doing civic education work in the U.S. would be more of a challenge due to the lack of structural support and due to a very heated political climate. Listening to our colleagues, this turned out to be true in a lot of cases, which makes the motivation and effort they put into their work all the more impressive. It also calls for adaptability and innovative approaches that we can learn from in Germany.

**How do you think the TECE experience will impact your work moving forward?** I have made deep connections and friendships with colleagues both in Germany and the U.S. that I hope to bring to fruition in future projects, be it through site-visits, publications, interviews on



specific topics, workshops, etc. Overall the experience has given me an extra boost of motivation to foster transatlantic youth exchange in non-formal education. Let's do this!



## Jackson Opio, Kreisau-Initiative e. V.

### **How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?**

Taking part in TECE has significantly informed and transformed my idea about civic education. I have learnt about civic education in many facets, people approaching the topic from different perspectives - formally and non-formally - engaging in various and simple ways that bring civic education closer to communities and make the topic more relatable.

### **What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?**

The youth-led engagement (participation) approach was inspiring for the empowerment of young people. For example, at the Center for Community Engagement at Suffolk University we heard from students directly or indirectly affected by unjust migration policy who have committed themselves to bringing civic change through active electoral participation and community development. As young as they are in our current polarized societies, taking such responsibility is a bold sacrifice. This indicates that with equal space and opportunities, young people from all backgrounds can do it, but creating space for young people requires shaking off barriers that include those conservative structures which deny honest access to true participation. Meaningful youth empowerment requires that we, the practitioners, take a very honest and open-minded approach to engaging young people in matters that affect their daily lives directly.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** I would recommend Noah Yuval Harari's "21 Lessons of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", "Just Mercy", a film directed by Brie Larson, and "Essential Reading in Children's Participation", an article by Invernizzi, Milne and van Beers.



## Shena Parks, Lou Frey Institute of Politics & Government

### **How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?**

My concept of civic education has broadened. Although I am based in the U.S., I learned as much from the different and varied experiences from other U.S. fellows from different states/regions as I did from the German fellows.



**On what topics do you feel your perspective has changed or been confirmed?** I was unsure of the impact of U.S. politics and how it may influence the work of both formal and informal civic educators in Germany. I did not have any firm ideas about present day Germany except I saw the rise of white nationalism and some of the far-right strategies and talking points from the U.S. popping up in certain regions of the country. I was alarmed to discover how many of the weaponized terms such as “woke” had been decontextualized and used in conversation during some of our group discussions.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** The book ‘Caste’ by Isabel Wilkerson. Also, the thematic working group on digitalization produced a collection of resources that can be found here: [www.padlet.com/Bildung/politicalinformationisbeautiful](http://www.padlet.com/Bildung/politicalinformationisbeautiful)



### Lisa Peyer, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Bremen

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** Since talking to U.S.-American civic educators and institutions, I am reconsidering a) the balance between a “neutral” and a more action-oriented approach to civic education as well as b) the perks and pitfalls of a more educational or knowledge-providing civic education in contrast to a self-engaging civic education.

**On what topics do you have the feeling your perspective changed or was confirmed?** Unfortunately, my impression of the USA as a highly polarized society has been confirmed. The answers and reactions of U.S.-American civic education, nevertheless, gives me hope that there is something we can do, foremost by intensifying dialogue competences and instruments.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** The vital role of Civic Engagement Centers (led by universities or other institutions) on the local level, as well as the variety of topics they are engaged with.



### Teresa Pfaffinger, Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung

**How do you think the TECE experience will impact your work moving forward?** I would like to dive even deeper into the field of political education and keep on learning about different approaches, practices and views. The TECE experience gave me a broader

understanding of my work and to look at it from different angles. There are so many possibilities, depending on the resources and how to connect and engage with (young) people, and I would love to try new things and see how far I can stretch the framework I am currently working with.

**On what topic do you have the feeling your perspective changed or was confirmed?** One of my bigger takeaways is the topic of identity. There are so many different angles to look at it which I didn't see before our workshop, the open space and conversations with the other fellows. My perspective has changed there quite a bit, and I am thankful for the openness of each fellow.

**Did the TECE process align with your expectations going in?** Speaking for myself, I didn't expect intercultural difficulties, because on the surface, the U.S. and Germany feel so close, but like we noticed at the very beginning in Weimar, we needed to get used to each other's customs. I learned a lot from that process.



## Ross VeLure Roholt, University of Minnesota, Youth Development Leadership

**How has your idea of civic education changed since the beginning of TECE?** I am increasingly interested in the idea of motivation and what we can do to invite young people to both understand the talents and strengths they possess and how using these opens up new learning and connection. I have learned more how teaching content can be both a way to expand understood opportunities and a way to maintain power systems that prioritize adult thinking over youth experiences. When we prioritize knowledge, often adults have an advantage. When we shift to talking about experiences and understanding this invites us all as experts in our own experience. Finding ways to bring these together while constantly leaving open the possibility of innovation makes this work exciting, confusing, emergent, and dialogical.

**On what topics do you feel your perspective changed or was confirmed?** I believe that we often spend too much time on the content of civic engagement without attending to the process of being engaged with others around public issues we personally care about. The dramatic learning always came from opportunities to hear about the experience of someone, for them to tell their story – as with the former prisoner at the (Memory and Education Center Andreasstraße in Erfurt).

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend related to**

**topics explored in TECE?** So many...the work by Shawn Ginwright – both “Black Youth Rising” and “Healing Centered Engagement”. Also, the podcasts “Healing Generations” and “Radical Imaginations”.



## Brayan Rosa Rodriguez, *Mentes Puertorriqueñas en Acción*

**Why did you choose to participate in TECE?** I see the TECE program/ community as a safe space to grow professionally and personally. My interest is to inform my role as the board member of a non-profit organization that works with Puerto Rican youth by providing them with an internship placement at a civic-engagement organization and hosting a number of civic laboratories where youth can grow their own projects.

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** I confirmed my original beliefs that the topics of civic education are complex, relate greatly to context (when and where) and are incredibly important for the sustainability of our society. What was surprising for me in the U.S. context was the limited availability of funding (federal government and private) to do this work.



## Caryn Scheel, *Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services*

**Did the process align with your expectations going in?** The variety of experiences in Germany was exhausting in many ways, but also made for a rich and informative program. I hadn't considered, frankly, the central role that history and memory play in civic education, and having a stronger grounding there has enriched how I approach civic education with the youth I work with.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** It was really interesting seeing how different people approached civic learning--many from an active standpoint, some from a reflective standpoint, some more discussion-based, others more participatory.

**How do you think the TECE experience will impact your work moving forward?** Because of TECE, I have a renewed interest in expanding and improving the civic programming we offer young people--and I have new resources and ideas for thinking about what is possible. Already I'm beginning to develop new ideas for partnership

and ways to stay connected with the TECE Fellows in ways that can strengthen this work. It has reinvigorated the notion of partnership and collaboration being the key to making systemic changes.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** Rick Hasen's "Cheap Speech" (2022)

## Sarah Surak, Salisbury University

### How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?

My understanding of civic education expanded dramatically during the TECE program. In working with colleagues and during the two weeks of site visits, I gained a great appreciation of the extensive programming for non-formal youth and adult education in Germany. I hope to continue learning about this approach so that I might work to expand engagement outside of schools, particularly for young adults in the US. TECE also expanded my understanding of the complexity of the landscape of civic education within the U.S. I feel better prepared to work in civic education both at home and abroad.

**What is one major takeaway from TECE?** We face similar issues in Germany and the United States: Polarization, the rise of right-wing populism, and the spread of conspiracy theories. While our institutional and funding structures differ, we have much to learn from each other. Collaborations such as this one provide critical working spaces and support the formation of international networks to strengthen democracy.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful?** It was quite beneficial to hear about approaches in Germany to combat misinformation and conspiracy theories. I believe many methods used in Germany will resonate in the U.S. Discussions in my thematic working group also yielded awareness of how we facilitate youth public history education. We found many commonalities between the two countries, perhaps the most important is that we need to update some of our longstanding methods.

## Laura Tavares, WPS Institute

### How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?

I have a much greater appreciation of the prospects for civic education outside of the formal education system. The project also led me to





think more about youth exchanges as a locus of civic education - while we do have such exchanges in the U.S. (in a more limited way than in Europe), I don't think we typically see them as civic learning opportunities.

**On what topics do you feel your perspective changed or been confirmed?** Many practitioners in the U.S. are exploring links between social-emotional learning and civic education - something that I think can be quite fruitful, especially when we think about cultivating civic dispositions. I was very interested to learn that many German colleagues think that this kind of emotionally engaged work doesn't belong in formal education and isn't the proper work of classroom teachers. I've always taken for granted that formal education should address both the head and the heart, but I did start to wonder if we have too many expectations of school teachers in the U.S. - and, if we could extend our understanding of "außerschulische Bildung" and voluntary education, could we get civic ed out of the crosshairs of the culture wars? I continue to wonder and worry about how the field and practitioners will address questions of politics, rights, and viewpoint diversity. It seems urgent to BOTH stand up against bias and hate (which will often require us to reject "neutrality") AND to make a more open space for civic learning that doesn't assume or prescribe a left/progressive orientation to every issue. This tension seems to exist in both the U.S. and Germany.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** "We Need to Build: Field Notes for a Diverse Democracy" by Eboo Patel



## Annette Ullrich, Stiftung wannseeFORUM

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** One of the most exciting questions in comparison with the USA was: how far may, can, must political education go? In Germany, according to the Beutelsbach Consensus, the so-called "politische Bildung" / political education ends where political action and practical engagement begin. In the U.S., getting involved in political campaigns like voting or community engagement in concrete projects is an important learning area of civic education. Here, young people try out very concretely what social political engagement means with strategies and tools they have learned and approaches and attitudes they have developed. This may also explain different concepts of "politische Bildung" and civic education - and raise questions about how far emancipatory political education can go (see also the Frankfurt Declaration).

**On what topics do you have the feeling your perspective changed or has been confirmed and what concrete next steps do you have in mind?** I took away a lot of ideas, especially for the new wannseeFORUM youth council as an approach to structural youth participation. I want to think about how I can concretely incorporate the collected experiences into our work, e.g. by including our new jugendBEIRAT in possible exchange projects on “youth matters” and civic case studies.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?**

“Praxishandbuch Social Justice und Diversity: Theorien, Training, Methoden, Übungen” by Leah Carola Czollek, Gudrun Perko, and Heike Weinbach



## Sarah Wagner, Atlantische Akademie Rheinland-Pfalz e. V.

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** The project has broadened my horizon regarding creativity when it comes to civic education programs (formats) as well as increased my sensitivity of potential pitfalls when engaging with civic education participants and how to improve our programming to reach a more diverse audience. I also see civic education much more comprehensively, it goes well beyond just regular lectures/seminars/ Model-UN games etc., but can be a more powerful tool for civic engagement and action.

**What is a practice or approach explored during TECE that you find particularly impactful and why?** One aspect I found fascinating was the many programs dealing with discursive solutions to polarization ... especially when seeing the dearth of resources when it comes to discourse programs in Germany. Maybe because Germany is not as polarized yet, but this is why it was especially interesting to learn more about the different approaches and challenges of these programs. I do believe such formats will become more important in the future and that this was a great opportunity to learn more about them and see how they can be transferred to a German context.

**What would you like others to know about your TECE experience?** I am deeply grateful that I have had the opportunity to participate in the TECE program, an in-depth transatlantic exchange that should be continued to create a strong transatlantic civic education network. In times of polarization and radicalization, learning from each other, pooling resources and creating strong, value-based programs should be an obligation for organizations.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend related to the topics explored in TECE?** “Uncivil Agreement” by Liliana Mason



## Adam Westbrook, Suffolk University Center for Community Engagement

**How has your idea of civic education changed during this process?** I think it's expanded beyond what I initially considered civic education to be. I work in a primarily volunteer-oriented, action civics setting that is focused on communities in the United States. However, for 21st century civic education, international and global citizenship will be equally as important.

**What is one major takeaway from TECE?** One major takeaway for me is the importance of seeing digitalization and the current media landscape as both a challenge and an opportunity. Prior to TECE, and throughout the pandemic, I think I was focused on seeing how damaging mis- and disinformation had been for the previous 2 years. However, this program has exposed me to research, data, and organizations that are leveraging technology, addressing mis- and disinformation, and using it to engage youth to organize, push back against oppressive power structures, and is a tool to leverage power.

**On what topics do you have the feeling your perspective changed or was confirmed?** During our session with Cultures Interactive [Berlin], it became clear to me that in American dialogue groups, we have increasingly prioritized protecting the marginalized people in the group, and trying to limit harm that may come from what is said. In the way Cultures Interactive described their approach, it became clear that their approach is less “protectionist” in this regard and are willing to engage some of the real challenging perspectives in a way that there seems to be less room for, currently in the United States. I think both the American and German approaches have something to offer in this regard and can maybe move closer together to have more productive and dialogue that could actually change more perspectives.

**What book, podcast, film, etc. would you recommend?** Just for fun, the “Wind of Change” Podcast: It is a comment on the problematic nature of conspiracy theories, but also a fun trip that can only be described as Gen X rocker meets history nerd meets clandestine intrigue. I highly recommend it!





The Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten (AdB) is a working group of German non-formal educational institutions that focus on youth and adult education for democratic citizenship in Germany, Europe and worldwide. The diverse set of member organizations include youth education centers, international meeting places and foundation academies that focus on political and international education. Since its conception in 1959, the non-partisan organization has offered a forum for expert exchange, training, and policy advocacy. Moreover, AdB is a hub for international work, connecting German member organisations with a larger international sphere of experts in the field of non-formal civic and human rights education. It serves as the headquarters of the European DARE (Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe) network and has conducted numerous bilateral partnerships with countries like Greece, Mongolia, Poland, etc. As an integral part of youth welfare infrastructure at the federal level, the Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.



### Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, housed at Tufts University, promotes the civic and political engagement of young people, studies civic life and its intersections with public and private institutions, and promotes practices that strengthen civic life in the U.S. and the world. With a focus on active citizenship, Tisch College offers leadership programs, service earning programs, and a broad spectrum of internships, courses and events. Tisch College is also home to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), the nation's leading source of research on youth civic engagement and the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE), which conducts research on student political agency and democratic participation on college campuses. CIRCLE is a leading resource for formal civic educators and an array of nonprofit civics-focused organizations across the country and has helped lead the effort to build a more cohesive field.

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