Building Bridges between Cultures through Geographical Education

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TEACHING EUROPEAN CULTURE IN THE PAGES OF PORTUGUESE GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS

Cristiana MARTINHA

ABSTRACT

Our paper informs the Geographic Education community about how current textbooks on the Geography of Portugal (after the curriculum reform of 2001) present questions of "European Culture" to students in Basic and Secondary Education. We begin with a theoretical introduction to the issues of what constitutes "European Culture" and assess if this is factual and a matter for education, especially for the discipline of Geography. This theoretical discussion links notions derived from reflections on the "Idea of Europe", "European Citizenship" and the "Education of Europe", where it joins the importance that the discipline of Geography has in this context of education and training European Citizens. We will present our analysis based on a set of categories used to analyze the content of textbooks. The categories were used to construct a database. We present the main ideas associated with European Culture in these textbooks and the different "European cultures" that they select. In the discussion we present and reflect on the question on whether there is a "European Culture" common to all countries of Europe. We emphasize that in order to understand the European Culture, Geography textbooks (that guide what teachers teach in their classrooms) are used with middle school students, and to call the attention of all that Geographical Education is vital to the teaching of this "Culture". The future of Europe depends on this education.

Keywords: European Culture; Geography Textbooks; European Citizenship

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses some of conclusions reached in a Masters research project (Martinha, 2008). The work explores and categorizes the way the issue of Europe was taught in Portuguese Geography textbooks between 1980 and contemporary times. The methodology used a content analysis of ten textbooks, representative of each curriculum reform period and course of study. Features noted included the use of the text and its editorial diversity. Eight categories of analysis were explored:

1. The problematic of the European limits and the dual vision of Europe-EU;
2. Integration/Constitution Process of the European Union;
3. European Organisations;
4. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Portuguese insertion in the European Union;
5. Variable Geometry Europe;
6. Problems, Dangers and Challenges of European integration;
7. Political Organization of Europe – Geopolitical position of Europe in the world context;
8. The exercise of European Citizenship – the European Values.

To carry out the analysis a database in FileMaker Pro was constructed as an important tool in the content analyse of textbooks.

2. THE TERRITORIES AND THE TEXTBOOKS

As noted by Xosé González Souto, “There is no doubt that Geography teaching about different territories can cause phobias of some countries over others, resulting in conflicts between countries [...] in other institutions, it is to create a territorial identity, such as the Council of Europe and the European Union, which may focus on the design of a western European culture that “sees” the others with a certain superiority.” (Souto González, 2002, 135, our translation).

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It is important to discuss this reflection and the related question posed by M. Manuela Tavares Ribeiro when she asks if “Are not continents mythical constructions? Today, we know that it is not geography that determines, that defines, but a particular idea one has of geography, a “geopolitical imaginary.” (Ribeiro, 2003, 80, our translation).

Because of that, Francisco Rodríguez Lestegás asks: “How can we propose a representation of the European space from an image so confusing? [...] How can we teach something that exists more as an ideological and political project and as a problem, than as reality?” (Rodríguez Lestegás, 2006, 852, our translation).

So, we can say that Geography is very important for the creation of European Citizens. It is possible, if we work to develop a European Citizenship model, to build a good concept of Europe and strong teaching programs about Europe for our pupils. In the textbooks that are analysed in this paper, we seek to discover how the European Culture is taught. This is the object of study of this presentation.

3. SOME IMAGES AND REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE PORTUGUESE GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS

If some of the textbooks analysed there is no exploration of disparities between European regions in general. Secondary Education textbooks show it, articulating this reality with the existence of structural funds. Some of the texts aim to show that there is a hierarchy in the development of European Regions (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Illustration of the level of development of the Regions of Europe, in a textbook of 12th grade](image1)

The vision of Europe given to students in secondary schools varies according to whether the programs feature scientific-humanistic courses or technological ones. In the last type, this aspect is more intense. We highlight the innovativeness of some textbooks for encouraging students to critically reflect on the future of Europe, and exploring problems, potential and challenges with innovative design. Such texts are configured as tools of reflection, questioning and promotion of active citizenship by students. Some of the problems/dangers/challenges addressed are the continuing enlargement of the EU or security issues, migration and aging in Europe.

About the geopolitical future of Europe, the analyzed textbooks questioned mainly on the political future of the EU, more or less federalist (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Illustration untitled "United Europe?" in a textbook of 12th grade](image2)
With the 2001 reorganization of the curriculum in Portugal, the teaching of Citizenship and Symbols of the EU gained ground in Geography at school, especially in 3rd cycle of basic schooling. The symbols involved are the flag, European Day, the national anthem and the Euro (Figure 3). What we saw was an evolution of the teaching of European integration and structural funding towards an effective European Citizenship education, by Geography at the beginning of the 21st Century.

![Figure 3. The symbols of the EU, EU, in a 7th grade textbook.](image-url)
4. THE EVOLUTION OF CONTENT ABOUT EUROPEAN CULTURE IN THE ANALYSED PORTUGUESE GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS

The level of treatment of different topics in the analyzed textbooks is the following (Table 1):

Table 1. Synoptic table of treatment of the various topics discussed in textbooks

The construction of this synoptic table was based on two different criteria: firstly, the comparison of the contents of the textbooks according to various analysis parameters; secondly our personal opinion on the degree of depth that would be required for the skills to be acquired by the pupils and the necessary knowledge about Europe for pupils to act as citizens.

By analyzing this table we can conclude that the issues more intensively treated by textbooks were "The Process of Integration/constitution of the European Union" (with 5 textbooks evaluated with "Very Good"), "The Advantages and Disadvantages of insertion of Portugal in the European Union" (with 4 textbooks evaluated with "Very Good") and "The exercise of European Citizenship – the European Values" (also with 4 textbooks evaluated with "Very Good"). However, we regret that issues such as "Europe of variable geometry", "Problems, Dangers and Challenges of European Integration" and "The Political Organization of Europe – Geopolitical position of Europe in the world context" are insufficiently treated in many of the textbooks reviewed. The themes less discussed were: "European Organisations" and "Europe of variable geometry".

However, a closer examination can be done by reordering the textbooks in chronological order (editing). Thus we have (Tables 2 and 3):
Table 2. Synoptic table of the treatment of the various topics discussed in analyzed textbooks (in chronological order of editing).

Table 3. Synoptic table of the treatment of the various topics discussed in analyzed textbooks - chronological evolution.

We note that in the 1980s preference was given to knowledge of "European Organisations" and "Integration/Constitution Process of the European Union". In the 1990s the focus was on teaching of the "Integration/Constitution Process of the European Union", the "Advantages and Disadvantages of insertion of Portugal in the European Union" and "The Political Organization of Europe – Geopolitical position of Europe in the world context". In the early 21st Century continuing importance is attached to the teaching of the "Integration/Constitution Process of the European Union" and "Advantages and Disadvantages of insertion of Portugal in the European Union", but the teaching of the "The exercise of European Citizenship – the European Values", is only rarely covered in the textbooks of the 1990s.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After completing this research, there are some important issues to reflect about:

1. In Portugal, the teaching of the European Culture gained weight especially after 2001. What is happening now in others European countries?
2. The dominant view is that we have several “Europes” within Europe. Is this the view in other countries?
3. There is also the idea that Europe is not united, and this raises the question if it will ever be?
4. There is a very big concern in teaching the symbols of the EU.

These points make us think about a very important question; what is the future of the teaching about Europe in Geography?

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Analyzed Textbooks: