

## Review of the Book:

### **Ross, Alistair (2015). *Understanding the Constructions of Identities by Young New Europeans: Kaleidoscopic selves*. New York/ Abingdon: Routledge, 217 pp.**

The issue about the search for identity brought out by the Modern Period is discussed not only within Europe but also in the whole World. Instead of accepting the identities of the previous periods, young people construct their own identities and thereby reproduce the societies. This situation also causes the social reality of the new generation to become the dominant discourse instead of the previous ones' social reality. With this change, the values, life styles, aesthetic sense and paradigms of the previous generation are criticized by the new generation and are reproduced in a different way. The book "Understanding the Constructions of Identities by Young New Europeans" was written by Alistair Ross, who is Emeritus Professor of Education at London Metropolitan University, UK, and Jean Monnet Professor of Citizenship Education in Europe and exactly promises to understand this change.

The focus group of this study are 974 young people, aged between 11 and 19, from 15 European countries that have either joined the European Union since (Bulgaria, Cyprus, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) or were candidate countries in 2012 (Croatia, Iceland, Macedonia [FYROM] and Turkey). Between the years 2010-2012, approximately 160 focus group discussions were conducted by the author; these discussions were conducted in different countries, 49 different locations and 97 different schools.

In terms of European identity, the age of the young people participating in the study and the timing of the focus groups are important. 12 of the countries in the study are post-Communist states and this generation of young people is the first to have been born since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and were affected by its consequences. The other three countries are in various states of social and economic flux. The basic question here is how these young people construct their own cultural and European identities in the countries they live in, during the accession negotiations of their own countries to EU. The viewpoints of the young people to country borders are more fluid and flexible than those of their parents and grandparents. There is a consistent generational change in the ways they discuss their local, regional, national and sometimes European or even global identities. The themes that interest many of these young people are; the sense of agency and the degree of attachment to both their own country and to Europe. Moreover, the construction of identity, multiple identities, "modern" nationalism and patriotism are themes that stand out in this book. The fact that the interviews made with the participants and the focus group discussions are given within the text and that the identity descriptions and the different viewpoints are shown to the readers, provides significant data for researchers,

educators, sociologists and law-makers. These interviews can also be used for teachings material in citizenship education classroom.

In the first part, the conceptual dimension of the identity is discussed. This discussion includes significant discussions for Europe in terms of ethnic and national discourse. The relation different ethnies entered into with different states, on the one hand, made multiple identities a theme to be discussed and on the other hand, it produced different local identities in different discourses. This situation makes it compulsory in Europe to make the identity discussion in both perspectives, cultural and citizenship. This makes the existing identity discussion a conflict between exclusive and inclusive identity approaches.

In the second part, the way how the young people in the study constructed their national identities is analysed. Bruter (2005) says that constructs of national and European identities can be seen as having cultural and civic components. Similarly, Ross defines the nation as a cultural construct. In this discourse, whether the national identity belongs to citizenship, to being part of the same "blood", to live in that country or to speak the same language is expressed differently by different people. This reveals the fact that national identities have multiple perceptions. The following example is important in terms of expressing this situation.

Ligia T(♀14) declared herself Romanian, Although "I personally am half Romanian and half Russian, but I don't really speak Russian. My mother and my grandmother speak Russian, but my father is 100 per cent Romanian, so-yes".

(Ross 2015, p. 67)

Nation as a cultural identity refers, to on the other hand, the discourse of othering locals who aren't part of their own countries and this internal othering is a result of defining "we" category. The cultural identity is the identity that enables people to say "we" and it creates the basis for the sense of attachment. "The bounding construct" is a construct that combines singular individuals in a common "we", in both being bound by common rules and values and being based on a common knowledge having experienced within a common history and a person's understanding of his own. This bounding construct brings out the different constructions of identity processes through the conflict between we and the other. The possibility of temporary or permanent migration can be considered as having both a conflict reducing role and a role that gives other countries a chance to enhance the others' attachments: the combination of economic difficulties and the European Union's labour market mobility policy means that migration is a real possibility for young people and this is a facilitating factor for the European identity. As Ross states, the way young



people construct their national identities and their “becoming other” discourse change from context to context.

In part three, the European identity is discussed, how European identities are constructed or rejected; by using the interview examples, within their subcontexts. Young people used ‘Europe,’ sometimes, to express the European Union and sometimes a wider (or a narrower) variation of this. This situation means that individuals associate institutional elements of Europe with their identities while defining their European identity. In this way, the cultural characteristics of European identity are less prominent. The European identity also makes the European culture a theme to be discussed. The young people who participated in this study are ambivalent about the meaning of the European culture and there is an uncertainty about who and what a European might be. Being European wasn’t just seen as a geographical identity, it also meant displaying particular behavioural characteristics – and some participants even felt that their own societies currently fell short of these. At the end of this part, the generational different perceptions about the European identity are discussed. According to the results of this study; many young people believe that they have a better European orientation than the older generations in their family.

At the end of the book, Ross defines the identity as kaleidoscopic identity. In the discussion with Bauman, Ross states that defining the identity as liquid like Bauman (2000) has done causes imprecision. Defining identity like this means that the identity has no shape, is subject to physical laws of fluidity and merely fills the available spaces.

As Pamuk (2014) defines, identity, which can be defined as an individual’s positioning against the other according to the discourses s/he interacts in, occurs as a fact that is contingently reconstructed. This momentary identity is constructed according to the social context, which is formed in a particular context by individuals. The experiences and beliefs of the young people are combined in a certain context and this context defines the identities as compatible and rational. This construction differs according to the audience, time and location.

However, despite the all flexibility, there is a context young people construct their identities. It is possible to evaluate this discourse as the state of being in contingently identity change within the young people’s construction of their identities. Of course, in such a study the different generations’ way of constructing identities can’t be categorized; however this study conducted with 974 participants presents deep information about the construction of the European identity to the readers.

#### Reference:

Bruter, M. (2005) *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*, London: Palgrave Macmillian.

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Pamuk, A. (2014) *Kimlik ve Tarih: Kimliğin İnşasında Tarihin Kullanımı [Identity and History: Using History in the construction of identity]*, İstanbul: Yeni İnsan Yayınevi

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