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## Citizenship Education in Croatia: At the Margins of the System

- Since 1999, Croatia has had several policies of citizenship education, but has lacked political devotion to it.
- Neither of the policies resulted in a systematic integration of citizenship education in the school system.
- In practice, teachers are placed in a challenging position as they lack suitable education and resources.
- Non-formal education programs are numerous, but with insufficient continuity and outreach and therefore cannot compensate for the system's deficiencies.
- Both Croatian youth and adults face an inadequate level of citizenship competences.

**Purpose:** This paper unfolds the ways in which Croatia, as a young post-communist democracy, has aligned its transition and consolidation with the development of education programs that would support the protection of human rights and the creation of a democratic political culture.

**Design/methodology/approach:** By combining the existing studies with the authors' own analyses of documents and internet sources, as well as interviews with teachers, this paper reveals that by adopting vague and non-binding policies, the Croatian political elite has demonstrated a lack of political will and courage over the past twenty-five years to develop a systematic and quality-based citizenship education.

**Findings:** After long-term negligence, in the most recent five-year period, the need to change the educational path has gained prominence on the policy and political agenda. However, the reform process did not result in bridging, but in the deepening of ideological divides within the Croatian society. With the officially adopted interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approach, the responsibility for carrying out citizenship education was placed in the hands of teachers, with civil society organizations taking a compensating role. Whilst the former lack practical education, as well as guidelines and resources to incorporate citizenship education into the subjects they teach, the latter are incapable of reaching out to a sufficient share of the youth population. The outcome is that the youth continuously displays inadequate levels of citizenship competences.

### Keywords:

Citizenship education, Croatia, models of citizenship education, teaching practice, citizenship competences

### 1 Introduction

Citizenship education in Croatia was not a part of the country's educational policy until recently. In socialist Yugoslavia policy-making was dominated by the Communist Party rule, which proved to be more inclined

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towards a symbolic instead of an active civic participation in the political process. Education was therefore based primarily on political indoctrination and participation was encouraged almost exclusively in the form of solidarity work actions. The opportunity to change the educational path was created in the beginning of the 1990s when Croatia became an independent state. This was accompanied by the transition from a planned to a free market economy and the switch from the authoritarian single party regime to a democratic multi-party system. Out of the transitions listed, the most important one for citizenship education was the later, given that it included not only the change of political institutions and rules of conduct, but also the necessity to invest efforts in the creation of a democratic political culture that would support the democratic system.

This paper seeks to unfold the ways in which this necessity was addressed by describing the development and implementation of educational programs that envisaged the development of citizenship competence of the youth. While regarding social and citizenship competence as one of the key competences of lifelong learning (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006), this paper is focused on the concept of citizenship education which includes both human rights education and education for democratic citizenship. Such education is supposed to enable young people to gain knowledge, to obtain skills and abilities, as well as values



and attitudes necessary for an active and informed participation in a democratic pluralistic society and its democratic processes.

By combining the existing studies with the authors' own analyses of policy documents, curricula and internet sites of non-formal providers, as well as with interviews with teachers, this paper unfolds the nuances of the Croatian citizenship education from both the policy perspective and the practical one. The first part of the paper provides readers with definitions of citizenship education and presents the models of citizenship education that are used as a framework for the analysis of citizenship education policy and practices in Croatia later in the paper. In this section, the discussion on citizenship education dimensions and models is complemented with the reflections on the current state of play of citizenship education in European countries. The following section addresses the sequencing of citizenship education curricula introduced in the school system after the communist period. Three different programs that served as a policy framework for citizenship education over the past eighteen years are analysed in this section in the light of positions held and pursued by political and other actors in their adoption and implementation thereof. By analysing the role teachers and non-formal educators play in shaping educational practices and in compensating for the policy's deficiencies, the fourth and fifth sections of this paper will serve as supplemental insight into citizenship education policy and curricula. The last section discusses the implications of the paper's findings and offers readers concluding topical thoughts.

## 2 Theoretical framework

Prior to describing the developments and current state of play in citizenship education policy and practices in Croatia, it is necessary to explicate the understanding of the citizenship education that this paper is based on. The existence of diverse practices in naming and labelling this segment of education amplifies the need for conceptual explicitness. Along with citizenship education, those scholars and practitioners who deal with this topic thus also use terms such as civic education, political education, education for democratic citizenship, human rights education etc. (Šalaj, 2005). However, such terminological plurality is rarely accompanied by specific definitions. Concepts are instead employed as if they were intuitively understandable. In order to avoid this, in the segments below we will examine various understandings of citizenship education, along with elucidating the one used in this paper.

### 2.1 Understandings of citizenship education

Prior to analysing the term "citizenship education", it is essential to define it. A study by T. H. Marshall entitled *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* and published in 1950 makes for a good starting point. It recognises citizenship as a universal status of equal rights and responsibilities of all fully-fledged members of a community. In other words, all those who enjoy the same status are equal in terms of both the rights and the

responsibilities connected with that status. Marshall's theory of citizenship is evolutionary since it claims that the rights of citizens stemming from their citizenship status had expanded over time to include more rights, but also to become more inclusive towards other groups. In the 18th century, the struggle for civil rights was initially "won"; this implies winning those rights indispensable for obtaining individual freedoms such as freedom of thought, right of conviction, right to property, etc. Furthermore, throughout the 19th century, political rights were built into the citizenship status, allowing for citizen participation in executing political power-either as members of a political body with political power or as voters deciding on the composition of that political body. According to Marshall's model (1950), societal developments in the course of the 20th century led to gradual inclusion of social rights into the citizenship status, which incorporates the right to take part in the social inheritance of a community to which an individual pertains, but also to live in accordance with the standards of that particular community. Marshall also believed the concept of citizenship to be fully developed only if it contained civil, political and social rights. Based on those three elements, Marshall discusses the concepts of civil, political and social citizenship. Even though there are certain critics of this theory, one of its elements - on the multidimensionality of citizenship - is almost consensually accepted (example, Heater, 1990; Veldhuis, 1997; Turner, 2001; Isin, 2009). In addition, despite some differences in discussions on citizenship, there are indeed two noticeable common characteristics. The first common understanding is the conceptualisation of citizenship as a multidimensional term by all of the authors. The second element highlighted by most authors is the view of the political component as an exceptionally important element of citizenship.

What are the consequences of these citizenship theories when we discuss education that carries the label of citizenship education? It is clear that each dimension of citizenship brings with it a particular set of rights and responsibilities. It is therefore important to instruct the youth on how to use their rights and fulfil their obligations. When we take into consideration the multidimensionality of the citizenship concept, citizenship education programs need to reflect this complexity and incorporate a number of dimensions - the political and civil dimension, the human rights dimension, the social, cultural, economic and ecological one, etc. - depending on the citizenship concept on which a particular program is based. Nevertheless, one should also add that another type of education is also quite often understood, conceptualised, as well as performed under the term "citizenship education". The starting point of those programs is the equation of the concept of citizenship with its political dimension, i.e., with what citizenship theories delineate as political citizenship. If we acknowledge the word "citizenship" primarily in its political dimension, as the principal organization of modern democratic political systems in which the citizen is

observed as a political subject with his or her rights and responsibilities towards society and decision-making processes, the main goal of citizenship education programs would be to prepare citizens for the role of political subjects. In this case, the goals of political education and citizenship education are virtually the same. Within the later concept, however, focus is placed on the sphere and the process in which citizens participate (*politics* - political education), while the former concept focuses on the subject who participates in the political sphere (*citizen* - citizenship education). It therefore seems justifiable and functional to differentiate between the terms "citizenship" and "citizenship education" in the narrow sense, in which the word "citizenship" boils down to its political dimension, making "political education" and "citizenship education" virtually synonymous. The other semantic dimensions would in that case be included in the wider meaning of those two terms to encompass not just the political, but other dimensions as well, such as the legal, social, cultural, ecological one, etc.

By analysing Canadian experiences with citizenship education, Yvonne Herbert (1997) came to a similar conclusion and she identified that two different meanings may be attributed to it. She wrote: „Some consider that citizenship education has to enable full participation of citizens in the political life of a state, while others think of a much wider concept of citizenship education, so as to enable the development of not only a citizenship mentality, but also to provide future citizens with moral and social responsibility“ (Herbert, 1997: 94).

In this broader meaning, along with the political, the term primarily includes human rights and legal dimensions because without them a citizen cannot be a political subject. Moreover, it includes a social dimension emphasizing joint participation of citizens in a society, as well as other important dimensions. Those are the (inter)cultural one, or the understanding of one's own culture and identity whilst living with diversities and accepting them as one's equals; the ecological one, implying the understanding of the interdependence of people and the environment, as well as the importance of sustainable development; and sometimes even the economic one, meaning financial literacy, understanding economical influences and work-related issues.

Recent studies on citizenship education in European countries (Eurydice, 2005 and 2012; Ainley, Schulz & Friedman, 2013; Šalaj, 2015) illustrate how a vast majority of countries opted for a wider conceptualization, with the term citizenship entailing the combination of dimensions such as the political and human-rights one, the ecological, social, communicational and intercultural one. This paper adopts such a broader understanding of citizenship education focussed on the young person as a citizen with their rights and responsibilities; on the promotion of human dignity, human rights and freedoms including sustainable development, equality and accountability (Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016). Since such a conceptualisation encourages the synergy of formal and informal education

- which in turn builds a bridge between schools and the civil society (Ćulum & Ledić, 2010) - the paper explores not only institutionalization and implementation of citizenship education in primary and secondary schools, but also its provision beyond schools as such.

## 2.2 Models of citizenship education

As our empirical analysis of institutionalisation and implementation of citizenship education in Croatia primarily focusses on models of citizenship education, it is important to explicate briefly the way in which we employ the term *models*. While the concept itself here refers to possible modes by means of which citizenship education may be integrated in the school system, the differentiation among models relates to variations in the understandings of the characteristics and relevance of citizenship education (Šalaj, 2002b). The overview of these variations can be structured to form three main models of citizenship education.

The first model does not envisage specific arrangements for citizenship education within school curricula, but treats it through so-called hidden curricula and extracurricular activities. It is based on the assumption that students will gain social and citizenship knowledge, competencies and opinions throughout the whole process of schooling. It is assumed that certain elements connected with the school system are more than enough to develop social and citizenship competences such as, for example, everyday school and classroom atmosphere, a school's organization or the way in which students and teachers interact with each other. The precondition for this model is that the school be organized in a democratic manner in order to encourage students to develop a democratic political culture. In the second model, citizenship education is viewed as an educational principle to be integrated in the overall curriculum or, in other words, to be formalised as a cross-curricular theme. The assumption of this model is that citizenship education is to function in an interdisciplinary manner and as a principle to permeate all existing subjects of the school curriculum, from mathematics to art studies. However, special attention is thereby placed on subjects such as history, mother tongue, literature and foreign languages since they are considered the most suitable for implementing citizenship education. The third model is the most straightforward one; citizenship education in the formal curriculum has its own place in the shape of one or more separate school subjects or of an integrated social sciences course (Šalaj, 2002b).

Which model of implementing citizenship education is the dominant one in Europe? Recent studies of citizenship education models (Eurydice, 2005 and 2012; Šalaj, 2015) suggest that most European countries have opted for the model of teaching separate subjects, but usually combining them with the cross-curricular model in lower grades. Only a small number of countries decided to rely fully on the cross-curricular model, i.e. on the one with no individual school subject foreseen for the implementation of citizenship education. In the following

section, we will illustrate the latest developments and the current state of play regarding citizenship education in Croatia.

### 3 Citizenship education in policy documents and intentions

In the atmosphere of state-building, war, cumbersome transition and slow consolidation, various public policies in the first decade of the 1990s often revealed ethnic intolerance, politicization of religion and de-secularization (Kasapović, 2001), among other features of defunct democracies. In this sort of a policy-making context, the desired development of democratic political culture to reflect itself in the educational policy was addressed only by the introduction of the school subject *Politics and Economics* at the secondary education level. Even though the subject was introduced in all high-school types, its effects were very limited as it was only partially dedicated to citizenship education, but was instead designed to be focused on facts and knowledge while being taught during one school year and one hour per week only. At the level of compulsory primary education, citizenship education was introduced neither as a separate subject, nor as a part of an integrated social sciences course. The subject that encompassed certain elements of a more broadly conceptualized citizenship education was the subject *Nature and Society*, implemented in the first four years of elementary education (Šalaj, 2002a and 2002b). At the upper elementary school level, socio-humanistic education of students was reduced to the subject *History*, while some elements of social skills development were envisioned via arbitrary school projects and the optional confessional subject *Religious Education* (Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014; Zenzerović Šloser, 2011).

The window of opportunity for a more comprehensive integration of citizenship education in the formal educational system—at least in terms of the general political climate—came with the dawn of the new millennium which marked the beginning of deeper democratization processes and Croatia's efforts to become an EU Member State.

#### 3.1 The years 1999-2010: A national programme without an implementation plan

The first indication of grasping the importance of adequately adapting the educational system to enable the development of youth citizenship competences emerged in 1999 with the adoption of a program under the promising name *National Program of Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship* (Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014). Even though this curriculum was not obligatory, it did encourage the implementation of human rights and democratic citizenship education in preschools, primary and secondary schools, through various optional ways: interdisciplinary, to encompass all subjects topically related to human rights; through optional courses or subjects; via extra-curricular activities and projects; and as an educational principle integrated into school curricula as a whole. The Program consisted

of the following elements: (1) Education for human rights; (2) Education for democratic citizenship; (3) Intercultural education; (4) Education for peace and non-violent conflict resolution; (5) Education for sustainable development; (6) Education for the prevention of prejudice and discrimination; (7) Exploration of humanitarian law and practices, and the like (National Program of Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship, 1999; Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016).

Such a comprehensive design was nevertheless not accompanied by operationalization of conditions to enable a quality-oriented implementation. Prerequisites for such an outcome were again not met in 2006 with the introduction of the new Program for Primary Schools, which is still valid today and by means of which some segments of citizenship education are represented in the subjects *Nature and Society*, *History*, and *Geography*. Moreover, none of these subjects placed enough focus neither on democratic attitudes, social skills development, human rights protection, political and media literacy, nor on preparing the youth for democratic citizenship, participation through volunteering and social engagement (Šalaj, 2002b, Novak, 2009; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016). On the very surface, the situation in high schools seemed to be more encouraging as there are subjects directly linked to citizenship education, primarily the subject *Politics and Economics*, but in some types of schools also the subjects *Sociology*, *Ethics*, *Philosophy*, and other related subjects (Šalaj, 2002a and 2002b). However, the latter group of subjects only reached some students—and this still remains the case—given that the high school system provides a significantly different type and scope of knowledge in a gymnasium-type comprehensive high-school education as opposed to vocational education and training and arts education (Babić & Šalaj, 2011, Kovačić & Horvat, 2016).

Due to its non-compulsory character, the National Program of Human Rights Education was mainly implemented in a voluntary manner by enthusiastic teachers via school projects and extracurricular activities done in small groups of interested students who had the privilege to be included. Whilst conducted only in a limited number of schools, the Program failed to provide adequate space for a majority of students to participate in citizenship education. At annual meetings or the so-called "Smotre" (reviews/musters), good practices were presented, but the Program was introduced without plans for any systematic monitoring, implementation support or evaluation. There has been no publicly available evaluation of the Program's content thus far. There is also no systematic information available on the extent to which its elements were implemented. The availability of the latter insight would be very important as sporadic awareness gained via annual reviews of best practices showed that project focus was often placed on a single dimension of citizenship education such as ecology, national identity or patriotic education.

### **3.2 From 2010 to 2014: Curricula with experimental implementation**

Changes towards a more focused and binding approach emerged in 2010 with the adoption of the National Curriculum Framework. By identifying citizenship education as a separate educational area, it created preconditions for the development of a new citizenship education curriculum. To foster this process, the Government established the Commission for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship Education in the same year. The Commission gathered not only representatives of state bodies, but also primary and secondary school teachers, professionals from civil society organisations and members of academic and professional communities. The role of the Commission was to promote human rights and democratic citizenship education at all levels of the educational system and in all forms, varying from formal to informal education, with its most important task to develop a program for the citizenship education reform. In this process, a Curriculum for Citizenship Education was developed and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports endorsed its experimental implementation in the year 2012 (Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014; Šalaj, 2012).

As governmental efforts towards this new educational path were strongly influenced by the conceptualisation of citizenship education provided by liberal university professors and human rights organizations, the aim of the new Curriculum was to facilitate the education of well-informed, active and responsible citizens who would participate in the decision-making process and contribute to the development of democracy. The Curriculum aimed at the development of democratic attitudes/values and skills, as well as the acquisition of facts and knowledge. Along with strengthening the understanding of and responsibility for human rights and freedoms, human dignity, basic principles of democracy and the rule of law, such a conceptualisation of citizenship education also addressed a variety of global social challenges, including the environmental crisis, globalization, mass migration and the rise of intolerance and violence (Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014). In view of that, the development of students' citizenship competences was foreseen by the Curriculum via six structural dimensions: the human rights dimension, the political, social, (inter)cultural, environmental and economic dimension (Curriculum for Citizenship Education, 2012).

The experimental implementation of the new curriculum was co-financed by the European Union project "New era of Democracy and Human Rights in Croatian schools" led by the Croatian Youth Network and its partner civil society organisations active in the fields of democratic citizenship and human rights (GONG and Centre for Peace Studies). Important guidance to schools and teachers who piloted the new approach to citizenship education was provided by engaged members of the academic community, while broad support was ensured through the GOOD Initiative, a network of grassroots civil society organizations and experts advocating for

implementation of citizenship education programs in Croatia. The Curriculum was experimentally introduced in 12 schools (8 elementary and 4 high schools) in the school year 2012/13 and 2013/2014 as a cross-curricular theme covered for one hour per school week, as well as a separate subject or extra-curricular activity for certain age groups (Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014).

This new path of citizenship education did not stir much political controversy and public polemics in the very beginning, but as its experimental implementation progressed, it kept gaining the support of various educational policy stakeholders, as well as the disapproval of those more conservative catholic religious groups, civil society organisations and political parties of the right. The latter groups were initially focused primarily on criticizing and questioning the need for a Health Education Curriculum that was introduced and implemented at the same time and in a similar way as the Curriculum for Citizenship Education. However, by the end of the pilot period of both of the curricula, those voices were advocating for a stronger curricular position of patriotic education and less emphasis on citizenship and health education and other educational dimensions promoting diversity, especially in relation to sexual orientation.

In such a political and social atmosphere laden with ideological clashes, the left-wing Government and its Ministry of Education gave their nominal support to the experimental implementation of the new path of citizenship education, but as the 2013/2014 school year approached, they demonstrated a reluctance to codify any prerequisites for its systematic integration in the educational system. This affected the solicitation of insights gained through the monitoring and evaluation of the Curriculum's implementation conducted collaboratively by the state Agency for the Training of Teachers, the National Centre for Evaluation of Education, and the Research and Education Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb. Data and findings collected were supposed to be used as a baseline for the work of the Expert Group mandated with the task of making final curricular revisions. The proposal of the Expert Group was published and made available to the public, but no public discussion comments or results have since been published or utilized, with the Ministry of Education and the Agency for the Training of Teachers displaying a lack of interest for using the said evaluation findings. Instead, with an escalation of the political situation, the new Education Minister launched the new curricular reform process in quite a different direction.

### **3.3 Since 2014: a cross-curricular approach without a comprehensive curricular reform**

With the political change of the person heading it, the Ministry of Education assigned their experts and advisors from the Agency for the Training of Teachers with the task to design a new citizenship education program. The program introduced in the academic year 2014/15 was based on an interdisciplinary and cross-curricular model

while being focused on describing contributions to citizenship education in terms of content already existing within various other subjects (Program of Cross-Curricular and Interdisciplinary Content for Citizenship Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, 2014). The program included none of the student and teacher suggestions from the previous experimental implementation phase, nor did it offer any new content connected to human rights, intercultural education or citizenship participation.

Soon after the development of this Program, the Croatian Parliament adopted a new Strategy of Education, Science and Technology (2014) which included the measure called the Comprehensive Curricular Reform. This reform envisioned the education system comprehensively moving away from the program-based to the curriculum-based approach and was focused not only on the content that had to be taught but also on measuring student achievements.

In the beginning of 2015, a working group of seven experts was set up by way of a public call to lead the curricular reform to be implemented in classes throughout the country. The process was organized in a very participative manner, with over 50 working group experts consulting all stakeholders while insisting on education as a public good of national interest, to rise above all political and individual interests. The expert working groups for early and preschool education, as well as primary and secondary education, which started their work in February 2015, were composed of 430 school and university teachers. The main goals were to renew the education in Croatia to become age- and interest-appropriate and to better prepare learners for the workplace, for further education, as well as for contemporary life challenges, along with defining clear learning outcomes and new changing roles for teachers and educational institutions.

The said working groups designed the overall framework and a range of new national curricula for different levels and types of education, including early and preschool education and upbringing, primary education, comprehensive or so-called gymnasium-type education, vocational education and training (VET), and art education. National documents covering seven curriculum areas were also developed and accompanied by 29 subject curricula. Those areas were polytechnics and information science; physical and health education, mathematics, language-communication, natural sciences, art and social sciences, and humanities. Moreover, seven curricula for cross-curricular topics were created and they encompassed the following: learning how to learn, entrepreneurial skills, personal and social development, health, sustainable development, the use of ICT, and citizenship education (Comprehensive Curricula Reform, 2015).

While keeping the cross-curricular approach to citizenship education, the comprehensive curriculum was changing the overall paradigm of curricular functioning by making it supportive in terms of integration of cross-curricular topics into different parts of the educational

process. Following the publication of document proposals, both expert and general public consultation processes were foreseen. Public consultation was available through the central government portal for online consultation, while the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education was to organise expert consultations among VET-schools.

Trial implementation of the new comprehensive curriculum was expected to commence in the school year 2016/17, with full implementation to start in 2017/18. By gaining high visibility and wide-ranging public support, the new education reform succeeded in ensuring acceptance by both trade unions and employers' associations for the first time. However, following the elections in November 2015, in an attempt to manipulate the reform process, the newly elected conservative coalition government began to categorise the process as overly ideologically driven. The Parliamentary Committee on Education sought to appoint 10 more experts without a clear procedure to precede their appointment and thus essentially rendering the work to date void. In protest over this political meddling, the existing working group presented its resignation to the Education Minister.

Such a course of events triggered a wide a public outcry and the second most massive citizens protest in the past 25 years. Under the motto "*Croatia can do better!*", an estimated 50,000 Croatians gathered on Zagreb's main square on 1 June 2016, as well as in other towns and cities in Croatia outside of the capital to protest against political interference in the long-needed educational reforms in the country. The protest was initiated by the GOOD Initiative and supported by over 300 groups including civil society organizations, unions, sports clubs, and local parents' organizations. "*Croatia can do better!*" had a simple message: to make education a priority for this country. Despite the size and messages of the protest, citizens' demands and the curricular reform were overshadowed by new internal political crises in the months to follow, culminating in the early elections in September 2016, bringing into power the same conservative coalition but with a changed leadership. The new government announced its plan to continue with the comprehensive curricular reform, but has appointed new members to the leading expert group, some of which have already publicly expressed attitudes against the need for such a reform—or have only been advocating the need to reform towards a more STEM-oriented curriculum.

#### 4 Citizenship education in teaching practices

The lack of a policy framework to enable systematic implementation of citizenship education in primary and secondary schools places teachers in a particularly demanding position as they are ultimately the ones autonomously shaping ambiguous standards and content of citizenship education provided by the State. What is more, they also often single-handedly create teaching time, didactic and methodical materials and other resources not provided by the State. Even though the fulfilment of such a demanding role requires extraordinary

competencies, Croatian teachers often lack proper opportunities to develop them. This problem was vibrantly addressed by the study of competences required to teach citizenship education. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Zagreb and has revealed serious deficits in the knowledge, attitudes and skills of future primary school educators (Velički & Šenjug, 2010). Along the same line, when asked about the experience of implementing the first curricula dating back to the year 1999, primary school teachers and principals indicated in 2009 that they neither felt fully qualified to successfully implement it, nor did they have any systematic support during the implementation process (Novak, 2009). The problem was captured even more clearly by the evaluation study conducted after the experimental implementation of the 2012 Curriculum in which only one fifth of teachers engaged in its implementation stated that they felt ready to successfully fulfil tasks attributed to them at the beginning of the experimental school year (Spajić - Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014).

To confront this issue, a wide range of activities aimed at teacher empowerment was set to accompany experimental implementation, but as the Curriculum never reached its full implementation stage, those activities had very limited encompassment and duration. The same scenario unfolded with respect to the pilot post-graduate study on citizenship education initiated in 2010 by the Research and Education Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of University of Zagreb, although never having grown into a permanent educational program. With such little formal systematic support or incentives to engage in citizenship education, teaching practices inevitably vary significantly. As the evaluation study of the experimental Curriculum indicated, in the period between 1999 and 2014, over 40 per cent of teachers had no experience in teaching topics related to human rights and democratic citizenship, with 20 per cent possessing experience of 10 years plus. The same study also revealed that even though citizenship education in Croatia was and still is primarily designed as cross-curricular, students usually identify only one subject that contributes to citizenship education. In elementary schools *History* was the subject they most often mentioned, with *Politics and Economics* holding this place in high school (Spajić-Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014).

The significance, as well as the insufficiency of the latter subject for the development of citizenship competences of Croatian youth was also confirmed by the research on views and beliefs of its teachers (Jeliazkova 2015; Jeliazkova & Kekez, 2012). The study was based on interviews conducted in 2012 with 17 secondary school teachers from different Croatian cities and of a different educational profile (sociology, law, philosophy and political science), as well as with a varied number of years of work experience. As the interviews took place just before the experimental Curriculum of 2012 was set in motion, the study reflected high hopes all of the interviewed teachers were placing on this

proclaimed new educational path. Even though the profiles of teachers interviewed ranged from "guardians of liberal democracy" to "patriotic conservatives", they all strongly emphasized the need to shift the focus of teaching and learning away from knowledge and uncritical acceptance of facts (Jeliazkova 2015; Jeliazkova & Kekez, 2012). While reflecting on their experiences of teaching in private or public comprehensive ("gymnasium") and vocational schools, they pointed to the significant problem of an unequal approach to citizenship education in different school types. In doing so, those teachers validated schools as platforms for raising democratic citizens, with citizenship education as a tool to reduce the ever-present alienation from politics. By stressing a high presence of unwillingness to engage in the political life of the community among students attending vocational schools, they saw the 2012 curricular reform as a path towards a more inclusive citizenship education.

Since the said interviews were conducted, the citizenship education framework underwent many changes, but neither of the teachers' two expectations were met. While the focus on knowledge still prevails over the focus on development of democratic attitudes and skills, longitudinal studies with high school graduates keep indicating the persistence of a problematic relation between the type of schooling and student knowledge and attitudes (Bagić & Šalaj, 2011; Bagić & Gvozdanović, 2015; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016). Young people attending three-year vocational programs in general terms hold more ethnocentric, xenophobic and homophobic attitudes. They also have less knowledge and fewer opportunities to develop citizenship and social competences during their formal education. The differences in opportunities for the development of basic knowledge and skills through a variety of school programs are so large that indeed some researchers question whether this phenomenon actually leads towards social segregation (Bagić & Šalaj, 2011; Bagić & Gvozdanović, 2015; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016).

## 5 Non-formal citizenship education

Limited integration of citizenship education in Croatian schools has triggered a rather extensive development of non-formal education programs organized by civil society organizations (CSOs). In the design and implementation of these programs, the civil society was and still is extensively collaborating with experts from universities across country, among which the most active ones proved to be professors and researchers from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Rijeka University, as well as researchers from the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. To foster the progress of citizenship education, Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has established the Research and Education Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship, and the Faculty of Political Science, conversely, the Centre for Lifelong Learning. Those two centres often act as



partners of the numerous educational programs led by CSOs. These non-formal programs in practice serve as compensation for the lack of educational opportunities for teachers and students of Croatian elementary and high schools.

Educational activities oriented towards the development of a broad range of citizenship and societal competences among children and the youth are offered by the Forum for Freedom in Education (FSO), Croatian Youth Network and GONG. In their trainings, campaigns and creative competitions, all of the three CSOs promote and use the modern conceptualisation of citizenship education which emphasizes a participatory dimension: the importance of involving young people in the life of the school and community (Šalaj, 2005). In addition, the Croatian Youth Network, together with its member organizations, has since 2010 been the organiser of Youth Studies, an educational program for Croatian youth covering a wide range of topics including youth and society, youth work, youth and public policies and participation in policy- and decision-making processes. Youth Studies aim at giving concrete knowledge and skills which are to help participants in working with other young people, including advocating for youth policy and youth participation in decision-making processes.

By targeting the strengthening of the role of education in forming a democratic culture, the FSO also works with teachers by offering them a three-fold professional development program, which encompasses trainings on law in everyday life, anti-corruption education and education on the European Union. The FSO is also engaged in the implementation of the European Parliament Ambassador School Programme that aims to raise awareness of high school mentors and students on European parliamentary democracy. In addition, FSO provides teachers and other experts with basic and advanced courses on mediation, enabling them to be listed in the Registry of Conciliators with the Ministry of Justice. To compensate for the inadequacies in formal teacher education, GONG has since 2012 been running the "Citizenship Literacy" educational program" to foster the development of teacher competences in youth citizenship education. The program lasting 40-50 hours in total is organized at least once a year for groups of teachers (20-25 participants) and it includes three modules: politics; the media; and EU literacy.

There are two other organisations -the Centre for Peace Studies and the Nansen Dialogue Centre Osijek - which place explicit focus on conflict resolution topics and the (inter) cultural dimension of citizenship education. The Centre for Peace Studies conducts the "Peace Studies" interdisciplinary program which seeks to understand the cause of a conflict, to develop approaches to prevent and stop violence, war and serious human rights violations whilst building sustainable peace-fair systems and societies strong enough to resist violence, inequality and injustice. Through its education program "Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region", the Nansen Dialogue Centre, based in the multicultural and war-inflicted Eastern region of Croatia, works with

children in multi-ethnic communities. The program envisions the development of better understanding and respect for others and for mutual differences that are important for building dialogue, relationships and cooperation in an intercultural society.

The Centre for Women's Studies Zagreb's educational program women and gender studies also shares the said focus on human rights. Furthermore, there is a number of other education programs offered by different civil society organizations such as the Green Action and ZMAG, which are active in the field of sustainable development. Citizenship competence-building through volunteering is strongly encouraged by the Croatian Network of Volunteering Centres encompassing four regional centres in the cities of Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek, as well as eight local centres offering children and youth a combination of volunteering and educational opportunities. Along with CSOs, competence-development is often supported by the work of different professional organisations such as the Croatian association of social pedagogues/ social educators who provide students of the first few grades of elementary school with a "Training of life skills" focused on their social skills development.

Lastly, some educational programs and activities for social skill development are also offered by religious organizations whose work is largely inspired by the teachings of the Catholic Church. The emphasis there is more on topics related to social solidarity and human dignity and life from conception onwards, but the scope of their trainings does not include gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, LGBT or minority rights. In a similar vein, some religious and war-veteran civil society organisations express devotion to patriotic education, which in some forms includes citizenship activation of ex-military officers in teaching on projects about the War in Croatia from 1991 to 1995. In terms of a general societal context since the year 2013, Croatia has been facing a strong conservative backlash against reforms aimed at introducing citizenship and health education, as well as at activities of protection of minorities from discrimination.

## 6 Conclusion

Even though citizenship education can function through a cross-curricular educational principle or through a hidden school curriculum, comparative research increasingly shows that the dominant model in countries across Europe is the one in which citizenship education is designed as a separate subject or as part of an integrated social sciences course. In such form it is mainly positioned within higher grades of primary education and in secondary education (Eurydice, 2005 and 2012; Šalaj 2015). Croatia, on the other hand, seems to be drifting in quite an opposite direction (Vujčić, 1993, Šalaj, 2002a, 2002b and 2008; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016).

The synthesis of different research results presented in this paper reveals that by adopting vague and non-binding policy documents and by shrinking the implementation of more focused curricula initiatives, the

Croatian political elite has over the past twenty-five years demonstrated a lack of political will and courage to developed a systematic and quality-based citizenship education. After long-term negligence towards education policies, in the most recent five-year period the need to change the approach to citizenship education and education in general has been raised, but the reform process actually resulted in the deepening of ideological divides within the Croatian society. With the officially adopted interdisciplinary and cross-curricular model and the very questionable sequel of the curricular reform itself, the responsibility for carrying out citizenship education has been placed in the hands of all the teachers. As in this model, the citizenship education process is neither aligned with the responsibility of any specific teacher, nor is assigned with clear outcomes; its implementation can hardly be monitored or supervised (Ravitch, 1995). Implementation impediments in the Croatian context deriving from the educational model as such are overburdened by a lack of education, of guidelines and resources which could enable teachers to effectively inter-link cross-curricular content and incorporate citizenship education into individual subjects they teach.

In such a setting, citizenship education is reduced to some segments of political, ecological and social education while critical thinking and the topics of human rights - minority rights in particular - intercultural education, democratic values and skills for citizen participation in decision-making processes keep being neglected. In practice, as various studies keep revealing, the subjects *History* and *Religious Education* are recognized as those that cover segments of patriotic education on all educational levels (Bačić, 2011; Zenzerović Šloser, 2011; Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014). Citizenship education, nevertheless, keeps being pushed towards the high school level and squeezed into *Politics and Economics*, a subject whose share in the overall curriculum is so little that it cannot even sufficiently foster the development of a basic knowledge and understanding of political processes (Šalaj, 2002b; Jeliazkova & Kekez, 2012; Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015). There are no *Social Studies* classes in Croatia; only *Sociology* classes are offered in comprehensive schools (*gymnasium*-type high schools) for one school year only. Even though the missing structural and functional dimension of citizenship education is partially compensated by the wider spectrum of subjects or non-formal education programs, the former is not implemented in all schools and the latter is not present in all parts of the country and does not include a sufficient percentage of participating youth.

The vague design and unsystematic integration of citizenship education in the Croatian educational system, unfortunately, does have rather sharp and systemic consequences. As different studies have shown, Croatian young people and adults are left with an inadequate level of basic knowledge and skills necessary to participate in a democratic pluralistic society and in democratic processes in an active and informed way (Ilišin & Radin,

2007; Novak 2009; Bagić & Šalaj, 2011; Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanović & Potočnik, 2013; Spajić- Vrkaš, Rajković & Rukavina, 2014; Ilišin, Gvozdanović & Potočnik, 2015; Bagić & Gvozdanović, 2015; Kovačić & Horvat 2016). By providing a vivid reflection of dimensions bypassed by the formal education, these studies have detected that the least developed competences are in the fields of human rights, cultural diversity, public policies and political processes. Moreover, a consequent research of knowledge, views and beliefs of Croatian high school graduates has revealed that the lack of knowledge and skills is regularly accompanied with discouragement in citizenship participation and the worrisome presence of undemocratic attitudes and values. The latter may include social distance towards minority groups and diversity, or even go as far as the glorification of fascism and support of discrimination, exclusion, censorship and the use of violence (Bagić & Šalaj, 2011; Ilišin, Gvozdanović & Potočnik, 2015; Gvozdanović & Bagić, 2015; Kovačić & Horvat, 2016).

The Croatian society is, as the presence of ideological divides indicates and citizen surveys confirm, still burdened by the consequences of two previous wars on its territory and their different interpretations. Young people learn specific interpretations primarily from their families, with the influence of the media and peers to be taken into account as well. The weakest link in this sensitive aspect of political socialisation, nonetheless, is the corrective influence of schools which provide insufficient space for learning about war-related facts and their critical analysis (Perasović & Vojak, 2012). At the national level, social trust is eroding and the lack of a personal belief that a citizen has the power to influence positive changes is accompanied with the lack of interest for participation in political processes (Ilišin & Radin, 2007; Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanović & Potočnik, 2013; Ilišin, Gvozdanović & Potočnik, 2015). This is particularly true when it comes to youth and it leaves us with the concern that the Croatian society neither recognizes the need to develop citizenship and social competences of its young people, nor encourages their inclusion in political processes.

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