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## **Beyond Description: Civic and Political Education in Europe – Dialogue and Comparison**

### **Keywords**

Art, civics, education, self-reflection, identity

When we first initiated this issue, Europe was only beginning to make sense of the Brexit referendum. Many scholars in the UK and across the continent were asking themselves the same question – how to make sense of the new developments; did we do anything wrong, did we do anything differently? We felt that, in the turbulent times of a rise of right wing movements, xenophobia, but also in times of growing heterogeneity of the societies within and beyond Europe citizenship education as a project challenge practitioners and researchers alike. On the one side, good practices need to be discovered, described and possibly used in other contexts. On the other, ways need to be found to engage in a meaningful dialogue between different actors representing different political and cultural contexts. As acutely aware as we were of the division between ‘traditional’ and ‘post-communist’ democracies, we realized that in both, the very essence of European democratic arrangements was at stake. The rapid developments in the last year confirmed the necessity to abandon the ‘one-way’ talk between Western and East European countries. In the face of growing distrust towards traditional politics, growing polarization and fragmentation and loss of ground by political parties, maybe it was time to learn from each other? As ‘old liberal’ countries in Europe faced new challenges, the post-communist experience with transforming educational systems became increasingly relevant.

Macro-political changes and changes in the agenda of political elites with respect to civic education, pose new challenges to all actors of civic education, while pointing to necessity to develop new approaches towards promoting civic education and providing competences. The further challenge is the new or re-orientation on the agency of students with respect to the contents and methods of civic and citizenship education. Students are not only citizens to be, they are citizens now, and they have their own conceptions of the political participation, of being citizens and of forming the way they learn about citizenship (Millei & Imre 2016; Zimenkova & Kilian 2016). These challenges are faced by civic education re-

searchers and actors alike, in search of common goals, albeit departing from different systemic frameworks. This entails the need to develop adequate comparative approaches which go beyond spelling out differences, but also reveal commonalities, as a prerequisite for mutual learning. On the other hand, equally important, diversity and idiosyncrasies between different countries become explicable against the backdrop of common themes. This kind of comparative work can enable the successful adoption of good practices and approaches between countries, not only and not even predominantly at the national level, but rather at the level of specific institutional and didactic approaches.

Initially, we looked for scholarly work aimed at a systematic comparison between Western and East-European countries. As we have started to work on this edited volume, we realized that the first step towards future comparative work was to find a balance between relevant international interdisciplinary contributions to civic and citizenship education. On the one side, country reports, providing the reader with the necessary detail and depth of context to make sense of developments in particular countries; on the other side, analyses of particular aspects and levels of citizenship education, often taking a critical stance towards existing practices and policy solutions. Looking closely at these various approaches and levels of abstraction as well as their theoretical and political points of departure is necessary to engage in a more systematic comparative work in the future.

The special issue of the JSSE seeks to suggest some responses to these challenges by combining the search for workable comparative approaches with country reports and to continue and deepen the dialogue on pertinent issues of civic education in Europe. The articles in the issue present a diversity of perspectives and levels of analysis. First, a theoretically driven plea for a democratic deliberation oriented curriculum in the Netherlands (Guérin). Next, a rich and empirically informed case of implementing citizenship education in post-communist Croatia (Kekez et al.), followed by a more straightforward country report on the state of affairs in Italy (Bombardelli et al). A paper by Coleno et al highlights the sometimes troublesome connection between economic and civic-democratic discourse in citizen education textbooks. Finally, we have two articles that touch upon the theme of social justice and citizenship education in two very different ways – one demonstrates, through a large-scale macro-analysis of comparative data, how school segregation enforces undesirable social attitudes in European youth (Kavadias et al.) and the other (Gessler) uses a qualitative in-depth

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approach to draw attention to overlooked minority and refugee groups in 'mainstream' citizenship education curricula. The levels of analysis range from classroom didactic strategies (Guérin), via particular themes in civic education (Coleno et al.), through perspectives and students and teachers (Gessler, Kekez et al., Kavadias et al.) to policy implementation and macro-political processes at the national level (Kekez et al., Bombardelli).

In her article "Group problem solving as a different participatory approach to citizenship education" Laurence Guérin departs from the context of citizenship education in the Netherlands, but does not aim to produce a country report. This theoretical article suggests a method of group problem solving as an approach to citizenship education. Focusing on the articulations of democracy in the learning setting and curricula, and referring to hidden curricula, Laurence Guérin focuses on the link between the choice of a theoretical perspective on democracy influences the learning goals and educational approaches in citizenship education. The author elaborates on challenges, faced by civic educators in democratic settings worldwide, while using the theory of deliberative democracy. The question of the conceptions of democracy and deconstructing the visions of democracy, lying behind the mainstream approach to citizenship education are at focus of this highly relevant work. Here, the author goes beyond the reconstruction, but seeks to demonstrate, how the conceptions of democracy are transferred into the educational principles. To do so, Laurence Guérin has chosen an interdisciplinary approach, attaching political philosophy, cognitive and educational psychology. Having in mind the development of citizenship education approaches, which would be compatible with or supportive for the deliberative conceptions of democracy, the author poses the group problem solving as an alternative participatory educational approach to citizenship education. This approach is based on four educational principles: argumentation, connected learning, decision making and thinking together.

The readers might also be interested in reading soon empirical reports on the implementation of this model in practice (the challenging and impressive work in progress Laurence Guérin is occupied with currently). The implementation might be especially challenging for two reasons. First, the vision of deliberative democracy promoted in the paper does not seem to be supported by the majority of Dutch teachers. Empirical research suggests that most of them adhere to mainstream, rather traditional ideas of representative democracy of Dutch Society (Jeliazkova, 2015a, ch.6). Second, and probably more important, both the author's observations and practical testing of the suggested approach fall largely outside the official citizenship education curriculum in the Netherlands, which remain oriented mainly towards providing information about the working of official political institutions and traditional channels of representations and thus does not allow too much space for deliberative democratic practices in regular classroom settings. For the time being, the models are being

implemented in the social sciences and sciences lessons and in the secondary schools during a project related time slot. Hence, the agency of teachers and schools as singular actors is essential in order to promote deliberative models of education. Here we detect one more idea for comparing civic education across countries, looking at the roles and own agenda of civic education actors within or despite the (set or fragmented) official curricula.

The implication for citizenship education which L. Guérin draws from her research is the necessity to discuss the conception of democracy, used by the central actors of citizenship education (and here we have references to the central questions Anka Kekez, Martina Horvat and Berto Šalaj put in their paper on the Croatian case). Generally, the challenge of addressing and enhancing agency and autonomy of the students takes up a central perspective in the paper of Laurence Guérin, creating direct links to the article of Susann Gessner on Teaching Civic Education in a Migrating Global Community and has also direct relevancy to the questions, Dimokritos Kavadias, Kenneth Hemmerecht and Bram Spruyt pose in this volume, why demonstrating the impact of how institutionalized academic segregation on democratic learning. The questions of deliberation and student's perspectives and autonomy are essential for civic educators, these questions are seemingly one of the main common denominators civic educators share.

The same problem is faced by Anka Kekez, Martina Horvat and Berto Šalaj. In their paper on "Civic Education in Croatia: At the Margins of the System" the authors look at the ways of transformation of civic education in Croatia. Croatia as a young democracy has aligned its transition and consolidation with development of education conceptions, targeted to support the creation of a democratic civic culture. While combining the existing studies and providing own impressive analysis of documents and internet sources as well as interviews with teachers, Anka Kekez, Martina Horvat and Berto Šalaj tell a troubling tale of the rise and fall of civic education in Croatia. The authors demonstrate how, by adopting vague and non-binding policies, the Croatian political elite has displayed a lack of political will to develop a systematic and quality-based civic education. The authors claim that, even though in the most recent five-year period the need to change the educational path became part of the political agenda again, the reform process resulted in deepening the ideological divides in Croatian society. The reform changed responsibilities and agencies within the civic education: the adoption of an interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approach placed the responsibility for carrying out civic education in the hands of teachers and non-government organizations. Teachers are in desperate need for guidelines, structure and resources to incorporate civic education into their subjects, and the NGOs cannot reach a sufficient percentage of youth who then miss the opportunity to acquire key democratic competences. The most important implication of this empirically informed policy study is that it demonstrates how citizenship education can become



the focus of deep ideological divides on the very essence of educational systems, in times of trans-formation. High hopes by teachers and policy makers alike to influence social and political development in one direction or another are projected onto this one theme – civic education, turning it into a battleground of religious, nationalistic, and liberal forces. By contrast, in most Western countries, citizenship education still occupies a relatively marginal position, in spite of declarations stating the opposite. The lesson from Croatia is that in turbulent times it may not be even possible to stick to a depoliticized, 'safe' and mainstream version of citizenship education. This Croatian case study demonstrates how the agency and changing stake holders within the educational system directly impact civic education, a conclusion reinforced by the findings on the direct link between educational segregation and democratic attitudes (Kavadias et al.)

In their paper on "Segregation and socialization: academic segregation and citizenship attitudes of adolescents in comparative perspective" Dimokritos Kavadias, Kenneth Hemmerecht and Bram Spruyt deliver an impressive insight on the issue of the impact of the organization of education in European societies on the civic attitudes of adolescents. The authors take up a critical position, highlighting black spots of the civic education research, as they focus on the impact of educational systems on attitudes or democratic values. For this special issue of the JSSE, which considers the questions of comparability of civic education research across countries, the perspective, suggested by Dimokritos Kavadias, Kenneth Hemmerecht and Bram Spruyt must be considered as a crucial one. The authors use material of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (2009, see JSSE 1-2012 "Comparative Studies of Civic and Citizenship Education") relying on multilevel models with the goal to demonstrate the relation between the practice of segregating children on the basis of their scholastic achievement on attitudes of adolescents living in different educational systems. While having taken into consideration impressive amount of data, the authors demonstrate, how students differ in their conception of fellow citizens, according to the ways in which educational systems select and differentiate throughout school careers. The authors make a strong case about the negative impact of academic segregation on such core values of the democratic societies, like attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities. This meta-level analysis bring about structural elements into the considerations of the possibilities to develop democratic attitudes, and opens up the discussions on right to participate (in education and in politics) and sense of political efficacy, which (can be) shared by the students within the highly segregating educational systems. An overall perspective on the educational system as a whole, thus moving beyond specific curricula and classroom practice, is essential in order to understand the place and the degree of influence of civic education on European youth. The paper provides tools and ideas for the utilization of large datasets for cross-

national comparisons, allowing for the development of a multi-layer approach. In the light of the paper's conclusions, the exemplary research on students' agency and students own perspectives provided by Susann Gessner, Laurence Guérin's focus on deliberation, and the Italian report by Olga Bombardelli and Marta Codato, demonstrating the diversity of practices of civic education, all suggest ways to ultimately address the issue of segregation and social justice through taking democratic values seriously. One can argue that deliberative approaches towards civic education might work to address segregation, provided that the perspectives of teachers and students are carefully studied and taken seriously in new institutional arrangements. As the paper by Kekez et al. makes clear, we need to look at the institutional arrangements promoting citizenship education, and they go far beyond the direct implementation of curriculum of curricular themes. General flaws or trends in a national education system may have a more profound influence on students' political growth and development.

In her article on "Teaching Civic Education in a Migrating Global Community: How Can Students with a Migration Background Contribute to Didactics and Civic Education Theory?" Susann Gessner addresses the learning needs and experiences of young migrants and poses pertinent questions related to the intersection of globalization, political radicalization, and citizenship education (for similar topics see JSSE 3-2015, Education for National Belonging: Imposing Borders and Boundaries on Citizenship, 3-2014, Young Europeans in an Era of Crises: Citizenship Education in a New Perspective, 3-2012, Citizenship and Community, 1-2007, Europe as an Educational Framework: Cultures, Values and Dialogues). Concentrating on the 'political' as an important category of civic education, the article touches upon the agency of the students, who are addressed as stakeholders, called for determining their own individual notions of 'political'. The article draws on qualitative research, and explores students' own perception of their learning process, especially the knowledge, interpretation and perception of civic education (lessons) by students with migration history in Germany. Susann Gessner discusses the implications of her findings for civic education didactics: mainstream didactic approaches can be enriched and improved if they take into account the rich experiences of students with a migrant background. Students perceive the content of civic education and its settings as 'outsiders', and, in this sense, their perspective can be enriching and even transformative for civic education practices in Germany. Departing from the specific experiences of young migrant students within German school civic education, Susann Gessner calls for revising the vision of the (migrant) students as contributors to the didactics of civic education and thus touches upon questions, relevant for the didactics of civic education in a rapidly globalizing Europe: how to discern, acknowledge and embrace multiple perspective on citizenship and participation? How to go beyond traditional indicators of youth engagement such as voting behavior?



The example of the Brexit referendum makes two issues visible: first, youth did not care to vote, in large numbers. Second, volatile voting, in many cases hijacked by dubious political agendas, puts the system of voting and representative democracy to a test. While touching on political agendas, this paper stands thus in direct connection to the highly relevant work by Yves-Patrick Coléno and Hervé Blanchard.

The theme of the need to take a critical stance towards dominant political ideas is highlighted from a different angle by Yves-Patrick Coléno and Hervé Blanchard. They analyze the impact of mainstream economics in "Teaching about the 'economic crisis' today. The example of French 'economic and social sciences'". Their research is focused on exemplary ways of teaching in the interdisciplinary school subject Economic and Social Sciences (SES) at French secondary schools. They show that approaches to teaching the crisis can be traced in the use of words and explanatory patterns of syllabuses and teaching material. The authors show how the hegemony of mainstream economics is preserved and how the placement of specific notions in the present lexicon is backing it. Their approach understands subject matter contents as "the product of a dual process of didactization and of axiologization of reference knowledge" which is intertwined with the values of the respective society. More generally, the authors draw upon the theoretical approach of semantic holism. Their findings reveal the predominance of standard economics approaches and of a syncretic type of presentation in the teaching resources. In general, the causation of economic crisis is often externalized and attributed to external shocks and financial excesses whereas the genuine mechanisms of the market economy are believed to secure equilibrium via self-regulation. There is, however, also some evidence of pluralism and reference to heterodox economic thinking, but these approaches are placed outside the core knowledge presented by a textbook. The paper of Coléno and Blanchard on economic crisis in education continues a key topic of the JSSE. Readers may remember the special issues 2-2013 "Crisis and Economic Education in Europe", 1-2010 and 2-2010 "Civic and Economic Education and the Current Financial Crisis" (part I and II). Sociology too is part of the subject Economic and Social Sciences, the interested reader may refer to the paper of Elisabeth Chatel "Sociology in French High Schools: The Challenge of Teaching Social Issues" published in JSSE 4-2009. The JSSE will continue to present research on pluralism in economic education, this will be the main topic of issue 3-2018. The authors focus on text analysis underscores a theme also found in the papers of Laurence Guérin and Susann Gessner in particular – namely, that current citizenship education curricula fail to adequately reflect the rapidly changing political, social and economic landscape of European countries. By adhering to 'mainstream', 'uncontested' topics, these curricula miss the chance to initiate and to structure discussion on the big relevant topics of our time – globalization, climate change, radicalization, migration and economic crisis.

İrem Pamuk and Akif Pamuk in their report on the 6th International Symposium on Social Studies Education organized annually by the Association for Social Studies Educators (ASSE), under the title "Rethinking Social Studies and Citizenship in Turkey", provide an inspiring overview to the symposium, "Rethinking Social Studies". The detailed summary of the symposium, the lines of argumentation and the main foci of this important event provided by both authors, give the readers of the JSSE exclusive insight into the central topics and developments of the civic education in Turkey. Within the context of our special issue, the focus on processes of globalization, (forced) migration as well student agency seem to be common denominators for civic education (worldwide). Our readers are well aware of the challenges to civic education and civic education research in Turkey at the moment. We believe that the presence of the report in this issue underscores the importance of developing and maintaining a scholarly community and dialogue on civic education not only beyond country descriptions, but also beyond Europe.

In the country report session of the issue, we present "Civic and Citizenship Education in Italy: Thousands of Fragmented Activities Looking for a Systematization", written by Olga Bombardelli and Marta Codato. The last time readers of the JSSE had a chance to read a country report from Italy was already over 14 years ago (the report can be found under Losito 2003). This impressive update we are able to publish in the current issue discusses interesting developments in Italian civic education. Overall one can say, that there is a certain interest in Italy for this educational activity, anyway it needs strong improvement. Complaints about the limits of civic and citizenship education in the Italian school system are common in the country, for example, on the daily paper *Corriere della sera*, Antonella De Gregorio talks about the lacking lesson of civic education and calls it „chimera subject" (De Gregorio, 2014). The report lives up to the challenge to describe how civic and citizenship education takes place in Italy, particularly based on an analysis of the official guidelines by the Ministry in this field, an interesting view of the literature on the topic within the last 30 years. Beside official documents, the authors include informal observations of daily teaching at schools. Olga Bombardelli and Marta Codato focus on the curriculum, the school culture, as well as on experiences of participation inside schools. While investigating teacher training and other influences on teachers, the authors demonstrate impressively the diversity of the daily practice, as there are thousands of activities for civic and citizenship education without a systematic design. Again, coming back to our question of comparability within citizenship education, we face some main challenges of these kinds of approaches, when we look at the Italian report. If the curricula across Europe and beyond might be seen as comparable, then we as empirical researchers still face the question of how to approach, systematize and to compare the diversity of school (and non-school) approaches and activities, in which students are intended to learn how to be citizens

(sometimes developing agency as citizens despite the educational settings, while fighting for their own rights against the rigidity of educational institutions; cf. Zimenkova/Kilian 2016)

The volume brings together contributions, addressing different scopes of research, based on different materials, ranged from empirical studies up to theoretical contributions. Some contributions seek to develop approaches to citizenship education, relevant for all country contexts. The others seek for dialog with the 'others' – neighboring countries, other professionals, etc. The issue also incorporates contributions which demonstrate the essentiality on country specifics and further ones point to the common structures, relevant on the meta-level for all civic and citizenship education practices. Macro political developments, like globalization and glocalization processes (Sklair 1999, Swank 2002), including global migration (Cohen 2006, 2008), the rise of the nationalistic and right-wing /European-parties, the economic crises but also democratic transformations are relevant for the authors of this issue. The articles provide new essential scopes for comparison. The common denominator of the articles we gathered in this volume can be seen as a focus on global challenges civic education face, and, although many of the papers in this volume refer to the single country contexts, they shall be seen as a review of global challenges relevant for all civic educations and didactics.

Further commonalities in the contributions to this volume are the questions of deliberation and student's perspectives and autonomy; these topics are essential for civic educators and researchers in civic and citizenship education, and seem to be not only one of the main common denominators civic educators share but also one of the main motivations to do research and to develop new educational approaches. Looking at the students' agency and students' autonomy, we cannot but refer to the conceptions of the "political" as an important category of civic education (Zimenkova 2013), if we see "political" as empowerment, as capacity to insubordinate (Gallagher 2008) and hence the capacity to decide, whether one wants to adopt to the existing systems (of representation exemplary).

Turning back to the initial idea, comparative work might not (yet) be happening in the systematic way, against the backdrop of a shared framework and analytical instruments. Rather, comparative work in civic and citizenship education, at least at the moment, is more like making sense of the patchwork rather than searching the one best approach. The volume we present allows for associations and links across countries, themes, and levels of analysis. They are all needed if we are to move forward: in order to adopt specific didactic practices, one needs a grasp of the overall institutional and political context within which they place.

A few final questions arise and deserve to be addressed in future scholarly work:

In post-authoritarian countries, we witness a great deal of 'window dressing' and lack of commitment and political will (cf. Kekez et al.) to invest in citizenship

education. Are things different in the 'older' democracies? Our preliminary answer is that, for in 'old liberal' democracies as well, contested and critically oriented forms of citizenship education are less likely to be promoted by established political elites (cf. Guérin). We believe that move towards depoliticization of civic education is essentially the same in western democracies, but developments in post-communist countries just expose it in a more acute, sharply visible way. Or is it about agency within the civic education system? (cf. Olga Bombardelli and Marta Codato). Thus, what is perceived as de-fragmentation or non-systematization of civic education in European countries might be just a sign of institutional resistance to suggested change, mainly from actors outside the mainstream educational system?

The overall question of comparison would be then: how to frame the processes of transformation, globalization, Europeanisation, social justice, in our research and practice on civic education? (cf. Susann Gessner, Kavadias et al.). How can we frame civic and citizenship education as a reflection of conflict, polarization, high hopes and emerging visions on the future of Europe?

We made an attempt to highlight some of common themes and the readers of this volume will certainly find many more interesting angles. We envy you a bit, as you will have a great journey within the current research on citizenship education, and we are certain that this will contribute to the ongoing dialogue and exchange of ideas and good practices on the pages of this journal and beyond. And it is what this issue is about.

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