

LEARNING FOR ACTIVE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP STARTS IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

Since the beginning of the modern state and the establishment of mass schools, education has been an important factor that contributes to the strengthening of the ties between political institutions and citizens. The role of education is strengthened by the belief that the lack of civil competences leads to apathetic behaviour of citizens, their low level of engagement and even to distrust of the functioning of democratic institutions. The lack of civil competences presents an obstacle for the active participation of individuals or even of countries engaged in the framework of international organizations. It is clear that only education cannot solve all issues related to the role of active democratic citizen, but it may contribute an important part. This article describes the native and citizenship education in the context of learning about the European dimension of citizenship in Slovenian schools.

Keywords: European citizenship, Citizenship education in Europe, European dimension, Lifelong learning

1. THE CITIZENSHIP IN A NEW ERA

The complexity and variability of the modern world requires new considerations about the world in which we live, about the situation of individuals, social groups, and social processes. It even requires constant considerations about the concepts, which appeared to be solid and fixed. Among them is surely the concept of citizenship and identity. This particularly applies to the globalised and multicultural world, where the line between local – national – global is more clearly delineated (Pikalo, 2011).

The creation of identity is becoming an even more complicated process. A changing world requires that the individual is constantly changing while at the same time keeps preserving himself. The creation of identities is based on the perceptions of knowledge and experiences. Constituent dimensions of ourselves – time and space, disease and health, gender and year of birth and death, sexuality and love – do not present the dates anymore, but the problem of how to respond to them, how to present them (Melucci, 1996). It is therefore not strange that during the process of change, the individual is constantly looking for solid support.

The national identity belongs among this important solid support. However, even the national identity, as the most important form of territorial solidarity based on the idea of a single nation state coupled with experiences and feelings of patriotism and common cultural heritage, is no longer a fixed marker, which leads the citizens (Torres, 1998, p. 187). The processes of globalization and integration of nation states in the wider international integrations make the issue of the creation of national identity more strained.

Close connection between the nation state and citizenship has historically been self-evident. The development of citizenship was a process that ran simultaneously with the creation of the national community. Therefore, the education of a citizen was one of the central tasks of a nation state (Turner, 2006, p. 225). Education played a key role in this process (Ramirez and Bolli, 2007). The processes of initiation and compulsory education were inseparably linked with the creation of a nation state. An important task of the massive and compulsory schooling has been the creation of a civil identity and national consciousness, which connects the individual with the state and consequently forms the national community (Green, 1997, p. 134).

The basis for the forming of curricula, which would ensure the creation of a national consciousness and civil identity, was 'ethnocentric' with a central focus on the distinction between "us" and any other (Green, 1997). Strengthening of national consciousness and citizenship identity in the process of massive and compulsory schooling in Europe has some common characteristics, namely: highlighting the patriotism, the glorification of the culture and history of the nation, and the 'mythologism' of national heroes and events (Keating, 2011, p. 244).

With the processes of globalization and integration of the nation states into the wider international integrations, the question has appeared; is the concept of citizenship inseparably linked with nation state or does the concept of citizenship need to be reconsidered (Turner, 2006 and Keating, 2011). With the strengthening of the European Union and the increased mobility of its people, the questions of national identity and citizenship were not purely academic, but quite specific. The concrete solutions of these issues need to be resolved in many areas of national policies, and at the same time also in the field of education, which has traditionally been associated with the development of nation state.

Renewed conceptualization of citizenship includes a variety of definitions. Some are quite general, namely this is a new form of citizenship, which is not solely defined by the nation state (Delanty, 2000). Other definitions are attempting to explain the relationship between identities and new forms of citizenship, while emphasizing that the identities are no longer necessarily the source of the rights and privileges, which has contributed to the distinction between thenational identity and the national citizenship and enabled the coexistence of both (Soysal, 1994).

Keating (2011) roughly distinguishes between two different approaches, both of which apply to the citizenship education in schools, namely the model derived from the nation states and the so-called post-national model. Distinctions are summarised in table 1.1 (Keating V Pikalo, Ilc in Banjac, 2011, p. 245–6):

Table 1.1: Distinctions between national and post-national model

Dimensions of citizenship education	National model	Post-national model
The focus of the curriculum is on the geography and nationality	Patriotic	The focus is on the region/world, regional, and international organisations
Citizenship	Adherent of the nation	A citizen of the region, world (though he remains the adherent of the nation)
Human rights	Rights and obligations are based on nationality	Based on global definitions of belonging; however, nationality is still present
Values	Values promoted by the nation state and the nation culture	Universal civil values
Skills	Participation in the national institutions	Cooperation, awareness about the social construction of knowledge, critical thinking

Schematic descriptions are often too simplified. The above-presented table, despite its frequent quotation (Keating, 2011), seems too general and lacking in depth in order to serve for further consideration. Surely, it cannot support the analysis of the integration of learning about the European dimension of citizenship, since due to the specificity of the integration such as the EU, the transfers of previous models and strategies of teaching on citizenship simply aren't possible. Schematic representation also does not allow a discussion about the complexity and connectedness of understanding of citizenship in the new age; namely, the relationship between the citizenship and the nation state as well as the European citizenship and related citizenship education.

Learning about the European dimension of citizenship has become particularly important in Slovenia since the 1990s – from the period when it became an independent nation state. In the following pages, the analysis will thus be devoted to the approaches, which have been developed, first in the international community and then in Slovenia, after 1990.

2. LEARNING ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF CITIZENSHIP FROM THE 1990S TILL TODAY

The understanding of the concept of citizenship in the period after the year 1990 has significantly influenced the implementation of formal citizenship of the European Union with the signing of the Treaty on European Union at Maastricht in 1992 and with the expansion of the Member States. The European identity simply was no longer limited to the Western European countries, "the former Communist countries needed to be included not only in the European integration, but also in the European image" (Keating V Pikalo, Ilc in Banjac, 2011, p. 257).

The enforcement of active democratic citizenship has therefore become an important aim of the educational policies of all the countries involved. On the level of the European Union, as well as on the level of the Council of Europe, numerous documents and concrete projects were adopted, which were intended to provide the presence of learning for active democratic citizenship in the curriculums. Consequently, the project "Education for Democratic Citizenship" and the study "Education and Active Citizenship in the European Union" were carried out (DGXXII 1998), and the Council of Ministers of education and the European Parliament adopted "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning". In the framework of the key competences to be acquired by individuals in the process of education, social and civic competences were particularly emphasized.

A conceptual shift in the understanding of citizenship is more than obvious. Civil identities were no longer inseparably linked to the nations. More emphasis today is on the citizen as a member of political and civil community, than on the citizen as a member of ethnic, cultural or historical community (Keating, 2011, p. 258). On the basis of this shift, some changes can be noticed in the integration of the citizenship education in the curriculums of the European schools. The curriculums are more focused on the learning about human rights and participation. Citizenship is separated from the socio-cultural identities and individual territories, which allows the socio-cultural diversity while at the same time commits to link diverse groups on behalf of the joint mission of building a Europe, united in the knowledge, democracy and participation (Keating, 2011, p. 263).

Quotations of the various theoretical definitions point out the complexity of the problem, which, however, does not diminish the urgency of the inclusion of citizenship education in the process of education. The aim of citizenship education in schools is to strengthen citizens' competences, which include knowledge, skills and as well the ability of active participation. Although the initiation of the courses on citizenship education has been accompanied with discomfort in many countries, which originated from the fear of ideologization, the necessity of transferring the knowledge, which is important for citizenship education can be justified by the fact that this knowledge (Galston, 2004):

- supports democratic values,
- supports political engagement,
- helps to understand our own interests as well as interests of other groups,
- educates citizens on civil matters,
- reduces mistrust and fear of engagement in public life, and
- allows active participation in public life, participation in the decision-making process related to the public issues.

Learning about the European dimension of citizenship includes gaining formal knowledge and a greater understanding of social and political issues (Eurydice, 2005, p. 66). Even a few years ago, the European dimension was in most countries mentioned only in the general curriculums that attempted to address and encourage the feeling of belonging to Europe, while it was more present on the level of secondary education (Eurydice, 2005, p. 60). The report of the European Commission, published on 31st of May 2012 shows a significant advancement in the involvement of citizenship education in the school curricula in different ways (European Commission, 2012). The report titled "Citizenship Education in Europe", which covers the data for the referential academic year 2010/2011, among other also highlights, "that schools in all European countries have introduced rules and recommendations for the promotion of democratic practices and the participation; for example, with the election of the representatives of the class, the student councils and students' representatives in the bodies of school management" (European Commission, 2012, p. 1). Furthermore, all EU member states included their pupils and students of the primary and secondary level education in the school management process. However, the report which covered all 27 EU member states including Iceland, Norway, Croatia and Turkey, exposes the problem or challenge of the lack of basic training for teachers. Namely, only England and Slovakia provide future teachers, specialised in citizenship education, with improvements of the skills and competences (European Commission, 2012). At the same time teachers often find themselves in a dilemma on how to transfer the knowledge about the EU to their students or how to give a well-structured lecture that would be effective and efficient.

Most countries in Europe enable professional trainings for teachers in connection with a European dimension; furthermore, the teachers also participate within the European programmes, such as exchanges and study visits abroad. Such opportunities represent an exceptional contribution to the improvement of the knowledge about the content of the European dimension. Additionally, various study and information materials on the topics of EU are available to the teachers, as well as the general public (Eurydice, 2005, p. 64-5).

An important contribution to the development of the European citizenship is various extra-curricular activities, such as mobility in the context of various lifelong learning programmes within the EU (Eurydice, 2005, p. 59). The possibilities of acquiring practical experiences are also available to the students by offering them a variety of the projects, among which the most widespread and popular are study visits, exchanges, and school twinning projects. In some European countries, an annual competition "Europe at school" is performed annually. The competition focuses mainly on artistic and literary fields. It has also already become a matter of habit that schools celebrate important European dates (i.e. May 9th) (Eurydice, 2005, p. 66).

However, despite all the activities, there are still some dilemmas and problems. A major challenge for educational policy is the establishment of the relationship between national and global, between the concept of citizenship and patriotism.

3. LEARNING ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF CITIZENSHIP IN SLOVENIA

The positioning of citizenship education in the educational system in Slovenia represents a major challenge for all education policy planners. Slovenia is one of those countries where compulsory

schooling was introduced among the first in Europe. At the same time, it has always been closely linked to the creation and retaining of the national identity. The close connection between education and national identity has significantly influenced the shaping of the educational system in the independent country. Programme documents, which were the basis for the formation of the school system in the nineties of the 20th century, included a clear definition of the importance of citizenship education and the nation state (Krek, 1996).

The integration of citizenship education in school curricula was, therefore, not questionable. However, the educational policy faced many dilemmas in relation to the conceptual questions, such as: how to understand citizenship education; on which content (knowledge) should citizenship education be based; how to establish a relationship toward national identity, patriotism. All these issues were particularly sensitive in the nineties of the previous century.

Citizenship education is now included in Slovenian school curricula in several ways, namely:

- as a course,
- as a content in several different subjects,
- as a 'cross-curricular' subject and
- in the context of various other curriculum activities (mandatory elective contents, expanded parts of the programme) and take place on the level of the school as a whole.

The concept of national citizenship was the characteristic of the 90s; however, this concept began to expand with the themes of so-called post-national model, especially with the processes before the integration of Slovenia in the EU. Due to this fact, the discussions about the meaning of this expansion in relation to the nation state were that much more controversial (Rustja and Barle, 2006).

The topic regarding the European integrations first appeared in the Slovenian school curriculum in the year 2011; however, two years earlier an elective part of the curriculum included a content titled 'United Europe – an ageing Europe', which did not define the functioning of the EU. This appeared in the new curriculum in the framework of the mandatory programme for pupils of 7th and 8th grade (the topics were 'The European Union: its formation and expansion', and 'The Republic of Slovenia: Member of the EU'). The results of the analysis in the framework of the ICCS research regarding the content of this new curriculum in relation to the European module show relatively good knowledge of our pupils about the EU (Šimenc, 2012, p. 103–44). Perhaps the reason is also in the fact that such content was not included in the curriculum in the year 1999, but was a part of the curriculum of 2011, which is, according to the questionnaire ICCS 2009, also displayed in the comparison of the content coverage between the two curriculums of 1999 and 2011. Namely, a new curriculum for 8th grade also assumes that the students will learn about the impact of the membership of Slovenia in the EU, as well as the functioning of the EU, based on the concrete cases (ibid, p. 133). Secondary education naturally offers the students more comprehensive knowledge and competences regarding the EU.

The year when Slovenia entered the EU, the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia published an upgrade of the gymnasium programmes to the so-called European classes. As the needs of actual events and future opportunities for Slovenia dictated, the European dimension was stressed and expressed with the introduction of new elements (which however did not directly change the structure of the previous programmes). Today, in Slovenia, the curriculum of the European classes is carried out by 14 secondary schools (National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, 2004).

The need for knowledge regarding Europe is sufficiently covered in the school curriculum with a wide variety of activities, although European countries in general agree that citizenship education should be included in the formal school curriculum (Eurydice, 2005, p. 67-9). In Slovenia, the first guide for teaching the content related to the EU - "EU in schools" ("EU v šoli") was issued by the Government Communication Office and the European Commission representation office in Slovenia with expert assistance of the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia. All teachers of primary and secondary schools in Slovenia have received it.

4. STRENGTHENING THE AWARENESS OF THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION – PROJECT EU-PIKA

In the last decade Slovenia is faced with various forms of education with the goal of raising the awareness of the European dimension of citizenship. Many of these forms also take place in the context of non-formal education.

One of such forms is the Jean Monnet programme which is a part of the Lifelong Learning Programme in the period 2007–2013. The programme was established in 1989 and is dedicated to the memory of Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU (Pesch-Konopka, b.l., p. 10). The Jean Monnet Programme aims to stimulate teaching, research and reflection in European integration studies at the level of higher education institutions both inside and outside the European Community (EACEA 2012a).

The International School for Social and Business Studies (ISSBS) has participated in the Lifelong Learning Programme Call for proposals and has been selected for the co-financing of the project in 2012 in the framework of the "Learning Europe at School" action, whose general objective is to bring the EU closer to its citizens and especially young population (EACEA, 2012b). A total of 46 projects have been selected for co-financing in 2011 and 17 projects in 2012.

The project EU-PIKA (the acronym refers to the Policies, Institutions, Cooperation, Actions) was a one-year project with the aim to introduce the functioning of the EU to the general public, students, and pupils. In the framework of the project, eight different events were carried out in the region of Celje; roundtable discussions, seminars, three-day workshop for secondary school students, teachers' seminar and thematic workshops.

One of those was also the Module for Secondary School students – EU-KAMP II. that was performed between 12th and 14th of October of 2012. This three-day workshop brought together 45 students from all over Slovenia¹. The event took place at the ISSBS and at the Centre for the school and outdoor education, Gorenje at Zreče. Participants had the opportunity to socialise with their peers and to learn about the history of the European integration, the EU institutions and policies. The lectures were performed in an innovative way by various Slovenian and foreign lecturers.

A small research was conducted among the participants with the focus on the following objectives:

- a) to gain participants' opinion about their own knowledge in selected areas related to the history, policies and institutions of the EU,
- b) to assess the actual knowledge of the most general facts of the EU and
- c) to gain the participants' opinion about the importance of knowledge regarding the EU and how much of this knowledge is acquired in school.

The questionnaire (anonymous) was fulfilled by 33 participants (73% of all participants) -students of 3rd and 4th grade from 12 Slovenian secondary schools. The questionnaire was composed of three different parts:

- a) In the first part "How do I estimate my knowledge?" 12 different fields of the EU were stated (history, policies and institutions) - all included fields were discussed in the three-day workshops. Respondents were asked to evaluate their knowledge on a five degree-scale (5 signified 'Excellent', 1 meant 'I do not know anything').
- b) The second part, "Test your knowledge", consisted of 10 arguments of general facts about the EU. Respondents assessed the arguments by selecting 'Correct/Not correct'.
- c) The third part of the questionnaire "What do we think?" consisted of the 3 open type questions, where the participants could give their own opinion about the importance of the knowledge of the EU and about introducing the EU topics in schools. The last question was related to participants' view in relation to his/her own contribution to the strengthening of the knowledge of EU content.

The results of the first part of the questionnaire indicate that participants evaluated their knowledge to be the best in the field of the history of the EU and its enlargement, followed by the knowledge in the field of treaties establishing the EU and finally the knowledge regarding the relevant persons from the history of the EU. The students' knowledge is better in the field of the policies of EU than in the field of history of the EU. The topics rated highest were connected to the common European currency and employment; interestingly, the estimated knowledge regarding the institutions of the EU was quite low.

¹ The participants were students of vocational and technical secondary education, as well as students of gymnasium programmes (among them also the students of the European sections): School Centre Rogaška Slatina, High School of Economics Celje, School Centre Velenje, Celje, Jurij Vega Gymnasium, Bežigrad Gymnasium, Bussiness-Comercial High School Celje, High School for catering and tourism, School Centre Maribor, School Centre Celje, School Centre Ptuj, Novo mesto Gymnasium and Piran Gymnasium.

In the second part, the respondents were required to test their knowledge and to define the correctness of up to 10 arguments about general facts about the EU. All respondents thought that the following statements were correct, namely: that the EU is a unique political project and at the same time a legal organization; that it was established by the Maastricht Treaty; that we as the citizens of the Republic of Slovenia became also the European citizens on 1st of January 2004 and that we are celebrating Europe Day on May 9th and that in the EU we do not have 27 official languages. Least of all respondents, however, thought that the correct argument was: "Common market is one of the cornerstones of the EU, which is based on the four freedoms - free movement of goods, services, capital and travel".

The answers of the respondents to the 3 open questions and their opinion about the importance of the knowledge related to the content of the EU and the involvement of these topics in their schools are more important than a quick overview of testing their knowledge (self-assessment and arguments). The last question was aiming to gain their opinion regarding their own contribution to the strengthening of the knowledge of EU content. To the question "Why do you consider the knowledge about the EU important for you personally or for students in general?" some respondents replied that it is important to be aware of their options in the EU. They pointed out that this kind of knowledge is important, because we live in the EU and it is good that we know what is happening, because in the end it affects their future. For them it is important to be familiar with the institutions, which, directly or indirectly, have an impact on their lives. One has stressed that "as is appropriate to be familiar with Slovenia, of which we are citizens, we should also know the EU since we now are its citizens" (survey questionnaire, October 2012). Respondents also pointed out that the knowledge about the EU is necessary so that young people could know in what kind of political and social system they are living in and that they would be familiar with the possibilities of employment. Also it's important due to the identity and the sense of belonging to the community as a whole. One statement is particularly interesting: "It is very important, because the world stands on the young and we need to learn about the pros and cons of certain organizations". The answers to the question "How much about the EU issues do you learn in school and which topics do you discuss? Do you have any suggestions how learning in schools could be supplemented?" were quite similar. Most of the respondents replied that they learn very little, just general things, or even nothing at all. If they do discuss the functioning of the EU, it's in the context of other subjects such as geography and history. We assume those were the respondents of European classes. The respondents' suggestions were that they could have an optional subject covering the topics of the EU; they also suggested that the knowledge could be complemented with project assignments about the EU. Other suggestions were: different types of education, additional lectures, involvement in the workshops, European studies as a school course.

The opinion of the respondents about how they would themselves contribute to more effective knowledge of the content of the EU, most answered that it depends on each individual. They believe that you cannot force anyone to be curious about the EU; however, they believe that opportunities should be present to those who wish to participate. Their proposals were similar as in the previous question; with the participation; the organisation of lectures and workshops; debate clubs on the topic of the EU; additional school course; workshops; lectures in schools; (work) experience; visits of the various institutions; simulations of the processes.

5. CONCLUSION

The complexity and connectedness of the modern world brings about the refocusing of certain categories of our being, which were until now considered unquestionable, such as the concept of citizenship. For Slovenia, the concept of citizenship was closely linked to the development of the nation state and the maintenance of the national identity. The membership of Slovenia in the international integration, in particular the EU, has encouraged the discussions about the relationship between national, global; regarding the relationship between citizenship and patriotism. It is undisputable that education plays an important role in the creation of such relationships, as well as in the strengthening of social and citizenship competences. Consequently, the educational policies applied play a crucial role. Therefore, it is particularly important that the delicate relationship forming in this field is strengthened with the exchange of experiences of good practices, in particular with the measures in the area of formal education, supported by various forms of non-formal education. It seems that searching for synergies between the various forms of formal and informal education is the only way to contribute to the effective placement of citizenship education in the educational system.

The scopes of teaching the EU content (in schools) provide wide opportunities for further activities. As the results and analysis have shown, and as we also found out, it is important to become aware of the options and opportunities offered by the EU. Any interest in any subject depends on the individual's evaluation. Due to the fact that it is harder to influence the change of human values, but much easier to influence the change in the needs of the people, we find and increase in the need for awareness regarding the importance and impact of the European dimension. Therefore, further considerations should include the attempts to find additional ways toward reaching an individual's knowledge regarding the benefits and advantages brought about by the EU, and how this relates to our everyday life.

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