Citizenship Education in Slovenia

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Background information

The formation and systematization of citizenship education in Slovenia since its independence in 1991 is a historical process of gradual changes driven by multiple causes and factors, among which are modifications of Slovenian (formal) education system, novel socio-political realities at the national, the European and the global level, and, at least in part, by the competing political (ideological) outlooks on what should be the main aim of citizenship education.

In the middle of the 1990s, Slovenia profoundly reformed its education and on the basis of conceptual design laid down in The White Book on Education in Slovenia (Krek, 1995) adopted new legislation regulating the entire education system from pre-school up to higher education (Krek & Kovač Šebart, 2008). Citizenship education has been introduced as a compulsory subject with the adoption of Basic School Act in 1996 under the name 'Citizenship Education and Ethics' at the level of basic elementary school education. On the basis of new legal framework, the period of comprehensive curricular reform followed in which citizenship education curriculum has been prepared, developed, approved, and accepted in 1999. The citizenship agenda introduced during the 1996–1999 reform of public education was based on a common European heritage of political, cultural, and moral values (Šimenc & Sardoč, 2013).

During the process of systematization of formal education in Slovenia, citizenship education has been also acknowledged and accepted as cross-curricular topic within other compulsory subjects at the level of lower and upper secondary school level, such as geography and history. Moreover the citizenship education has been introduced as an optional subject 'Civic culture' for Grade 9, as an elective subject in general upper-secondary schools, while in two-year and three-year vocational schools the citizenship education is included in the subject 'Social sciences'.

Definition of citizenship education

In Slovenia, there is no single definition of citizenship education recognized as official or referred to by all the stakeholders in the field. Nevertheless, there are some key documents and reference points that are usually used when defining the meaning of citizenship education.

Very common and well-known reference is the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Council of Europe Ministers Committee, 2010) where citizenship education (education for democratic citizenship) is defined with a focus on equipping individuals with knowledge and skills needed for effective exercising of democratic rights and their active role in society. This article therefore uses definitions of formal and non-formal education as provided by Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Thus, formal education means the structured education and training system that runs from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university. On the other hand, non-formal education

means any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting. Moreover, different actors in the field of citizenship education in Slovenia use also definitions that are given by other international organisations such as European Commission, UNESCO, and the OECD.

Finally, an important reference point for defining citizenship education and its role in the formal education system is the curriculum for the compulsory subject in the lower secondary level 'Patriotic and citizenship education and ethics'. In the description of the subjects' aims the curriculum states that citizenship education should equip pupils with political literacy, develop their critical thinking and stimulate their direct involvement in social life.

Ecosystem of the non-formal citizenship education[1]

Non-formal citizenship education in Slovenia is developed and conducted in various forms and through heterogeneous practices within the civil society. The latter experienced extensive growth after the independence when, especially after the second half of the 1990s, the number of non-governmental organisations has significantly increased (Rakar et al., 2011). While some of the non-governmental organisations explicitly address citizenship education, the other provide citizenship education in more indirect way through, for example, organising volunteering and other community work understood as active citizenship. Non-formal citizenship education is provided predominantly by the non-governmental organisations through project-based activities funded by the Slovenian government or, for example, European Union programmes. Because of the wide variety of implemented projects, there is consequently also large number of different topics which are interrelated to the citizenship education. Among others, most important are human rights, democratic participation, global education, active citizenship, etc. Along with the development of those topics, non-governmental organisations significantly contribute to the implementation of innovative, engaging and participatory educational methods in Slovenia that directly involve various target groups.

Legal environment

Key framework and legislative documents for the current systematization and definition of citizenship education within formal education are White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia adopted in 2011, Basic School Act from 2007 and Organization and Financing of Education Act from 2008.

The aims citizenship education are well defined in White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (Krek & Metljak, 2011). The paper provided new directions towards which citizenship education should turn. Among others, the paper recommended the inclusion of topics of globalization, European integration as well as entrepreneurship.

Article 2 of the Basic School Act 2007 (Government of Slovenia, 2007) sets out the aims of basic education in Slovenia, among which especially relevant for citizenship education are: (1) Raising awareness of citizenship and national identity and improving knowledge of Slovene history and culture; (2) Educating for the general cultural and civic values originating out of European traditions; and (3) Educating for mutual tolerance, respect for differences, cooperation with others, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, thus developing the competencies required for living in a democratic society. Similar educational

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Conferences Workshops

goals for basic and upper-secondary education directly relevant for the citizenship education are defined also in the Organization and Financing of Education Act 2008 (Government of Slovenia, 2008).

Stakeholders

Key stakeholders in the field of citizenship education in Slovenia can be divided into three categories. First, stakeholders in the field of research, science and expertise forming the theoretical and conceptual framework of citizenship education in Slovenia. Second, stakeholders involved in the systematization, preparation of the curricula and content for citizenship education in the formal educational system. Third, stakeholders in the field of non-formal education, focusing mainly on conducting projects and trainings that relate to the citizenship education in its broadest sense.

The most important actors in the field of research, science and expertise in citizenship education in Slovenia are: the Educational Research Institute (ERI), Faculty of Social Science (University of Ljubljana), Institute of Ethnic Studies, Council of Europe (Information Office of the Council of Europe in Republic of Slovenia) and Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Pušnik & Zavadlav, 2011). The above mentioned institutions conduct various national and international research intended for the analysis and evaluation of the content of citizenship education in formal educational system (curricula and materials) and preparation of new content and recommendations for improvements.

In the field of formal educational system the most important stakeholder is Ministry of Education, Science and Sport as a key and central institution responsible for the systematization of citizenship education. Under the Ministry, National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia is responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the curricula for citizenship education.

In the field of non-formal education there are numerous non-governmental organisations, initiatives, youth organisations and projects focused on the citizenship education in its broadest sense. Especially the National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS), Zavod Nefiks and the National broadcasting organization - Radio-Television of Slovenia are among most recognizable organizations in the field of citizenship education in non-formal education.

Challenges

One of the most pressing challenges to citizenship education within formal education is related to the teaching staff of the compulsory subject 'Patriotic and citizenship education and ethics' at the lower secondary school level. Since only one hour per week is dedicated to citizenship education, educators who teach citizenship education are primarily focused on other subjects, such as history, geography, mother language. There are no specific requirements or qualifications for teachers of this subject. Thus, the subject is too often thought by teachers who do not have enough knowledge on topics of citizenship education and are not familiar enough with the teaching approaches relevant for this subject. Therefore, this challenge needs prompt systematic solution so that only qualified and skilled teaching staff would be involved in teaching the aforementioned subject (Pikalo et al., 2011).

Another challenge connected with the compulsory subject are ongoing controversies over the educational agenda of citizenship education in Slovene public education, especially in regard to prioritizing its aims and objectives. One such issue is whether the citizenship education should (and to what extent) prioritize patriotism. As a result of this controversy, the subject's name has been changed in 2008 from 'Citizenship education and Ethics' to 'Citizenship and Patriotic Education and Ethics' and again in 2013 to 'Patriotic and Citizenship Culture and Ethics'. As stated by Kodelja (2009), renaming of the subject was a political act that has not been justified by experts and has not been based on data on the achievements of Slovenian pupils in the internationally comparable analysis (CIVED and ICCS). On the contrary,

empirical data shows that Slovenian pupils have a positive attitude towards their own country also in comparison with the attitude of pupils around the world (Šimenc, 2011). Therefore renaming of the subject was not only terminological change but also conceptual in order to emphasis content of patriotism which can be potentially dangerous if patriotism overlaps with nationalism or if patriotism is understood very similarly as nationalism (Kodelja, 2009).

Within the non-formal citizenship education there is wide variety of actors and correspondingly large number of small-scale projects. While they are of great importance in terms of addressing different topics relevant to the citizenship education, they are at the same time small-scale in regard to their duration and impact. In this regard, better coordination and cooperation between great varieties of activities by different actors active in the field of citizenship education is needed. While different organisations do implement diverse projects directly relevant to the field, they rarely (or, at least, not sufficiently) collaborate and have joint activities (Neubauer & Močnik, 2010).

The article uses case study methodology with a focus on descriptive ("What is happening or has happened") as well as explanatory questions (How or why did something happen?) concerning the matter in focus. In conducting the analysis, primary resources (such as policy documents, law, etc.) as well as already existing secondary literature and research on citizenship education in Slovenia has been collected and examined. Furthermore, latest Slovenian Mid-Term Review on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education in accordance with the provisions of the Council of Europe Charter has been used with a purpose to obtain data on latest developments in the field. The data gathered and reviewed was then analysed, interpreted and structured in the article to meet the needs and aims of this particular publication.

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