CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN CROATIA

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Background information
The development of policy, theory and practice of citizenship education in Croatia should be seen in conjunction with the building-up of a democratic state after decades of communist regime in the context of war in which the country’s territorial integration was threatened. Both led to the lack of appreciation that the protection of national interests and the strengthening of democracy were two interrelated and interdependent processes in the centre of which is emancipated citizenry. In the populist discourses of the centre-right ruling party of that time, the former was primarily associated with the idea of a nation-state based on the principle of ethnicity to which the renewal of tradition and religion was essential and the latter with the establishment of the democratic political and public institutions that were turned into instruments for the reproduction of power positions in all sectors of society. The term citizen was introduced as a part of the new legal setup. It had no roots in the political culture of people and its relation to the constitutional rights and freedoms was vague in the minds of individuals as the government and, in particular, the Ministry of Education referred to the citizen more in terms of duties towards the new state than in terms of liberties, autonomy and active participation.

This is, to a great extent, the reason why several attempts to introduce systemic learning for citizenship in Croatian schools have failed. First such attempt was the National Human Rights Education Programme (NHREP) developed by the National Human Rights Committee in 1998 as the government’s response to the 1995-2004 UN Decade of Human Rights Education [1]. Of the four sub-programmes then prepared - from preschool to secondary school, only elementary school sub-programme was, in 1999, included in the Framework Plan and Programme for Elementary School as “an optional integrative content”; the preschool sub-programme was widely spread semi-officially, while the impact of the sub-programme for secondary schools on the Politics and Economy, which was a mandatory subject, was minimal. An interdisciplinary sub-programme for universities, including teacher training faculties was developed independently in 2005 but was never made a part of NHREP [2]. In the context of the NHREP implementation, the Agency for Education and Training nominated former national religious education advisors as national human rights education advisors with a task to organize teacher training seminars in this field and to prepare 22 human rights education coordinators at the county level. By the beginning of 2000 the Council of Europe’s concept of education for democratic citizenship was added to the original title of the NHREP which continued to be implemented optionally as well as? the preparation of teachers for its implementation. In the following years, the human rights and democratic citizenship education would be nominally included in all major laws and strategic papers on education, as well as in
national policies, plans and action programmes in other related sectors, such as youth development and human rights protection [3]. As the implementation measurements and analytic data on NHREP in practice were missing, an independent research on the quality of its outcomes was triggered, which disclosed a wide gap between policy and practice [4] and led to drafting of the first Croatian Citizenship Education Curriculum (CEC) [5] following the values and principles defined by the National Framework Curriculum for Pre-School, General Compulsory and Secondary Education (NFC), of 2010 [6]. The new minister of the centre-left coalition that came to power in 2011 accepted draft CEC and issued the Decree on its pilot-implementation with monitoring and evaluation in 12 elementary and secondary schools in 2012-13 and 2013-14 [7]. The process was supervised jointly by the Ministry, the Agency for Education and Training, the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, a research institution and four civil organisations. Apart from numbers of data showing positive outcomes, the evaluation report pointed out problems, especially in reference to pupils’ knowledge and understanding of democracy, citizenship, cultural pluralism and the European integration, which were found to be related mainly to inadequate teachers’ preparation [8]. As in the meantime the format of curriculum had not, yet, been recognised by law, CEC had to be formally rewritten as the Citizenship Education Programme for Primary and Secondary Schools (CEP) [9]. In the process of “e-consultations with the interested public” opened by the Ministry in April 2014, CEP was attacked by the coalition of civil organizations who claimed to be the guardians of the family and national interests. They opposed CEP for its liberal orientation, especially for the introduction of, on the one hand, the notions of gender and gender equality and, on the other hand, the European and global citizenship, and claimed that it violated the rights of parents to educate their children in accordance to their own values and worldviews. The minister who in April 2014 already prepared a draft Decree on the progressive mandatory implementation of CEP from school year 2014/15 to 2016-17 as a cross-curricular theme for all levels and forms of education, and as a mandatory separate subject for the 6th to the 8th grade of elementary school and in the 1st and the 2nd grade of secondary school, suddenly left the office without signing the Decree. [10]. The new minister disregarded CEP and, in July 2014, released a new draft document for public discussion that was prepared by the Agency for Education and Training – the Programme of Cross-curricular and Interdisciplinary Content of Citizenship Education for Elementary and Secondary Schools for public discussion (PCICCE) [11]. A month later the minister signed the Decree on the pilot-implementation of PCICCE in all schools in 2014/15 [12]. Two months later the Experimental Optional Citizenship Education Programme for the 8th Grade of Elementary School was also launched for a one-year trial [13]. In 2015, the national Comprehensive Curricular Reform that relied on NFC of 2010 was also launched [14]. The working groups published their documents in February 2016, including the draft Citizenship Education Curriculum developed as a cross-curricular topic [15]. With the change of the government these documents were said to need improvement and a new expert team was nominated to accomplish the task [16]. Consequently, since 2014-15, when PCICCE was launched for a one-year trial, no new decision on citizenship education has been made. In the most recent empirical study it was found that, despite its mandatory status, PCICCE was not implemented in all schools and, moreover, that pupils and teachers were not satisfied with the approach [17].
Definition of citizenship education
There is no literal definition of citizenship education in Croatian legal and policy documents. The NFC [6] defines the purpose and objectives of this educational area. It states that “the purpose of teaching a cross-curricular citizenship education theme is to contribute to the preparation of students for their active and effective citizen’s role” (p. 46). The PCICCE [11], which has been in pilot-implementation since 2014-15, states that it “defines the expected outcomes of pupils and proposes ways in which they can be achieved in school irrespective of whether citizenship education is implemented as a separate subject or as a cross-curricular theme. The Programme is, thus, a conceptual, didactic and methodological framework for the development of civic competence in the elementary and secondary school” [9, p. 1]. In addition, PCICCE defines the following objectives (p. 47):

- acquire knowledge and develop awareness of the importance of democratic principles, institutions and processes in one’s own society, Europe and at the global level;
- develop a positive attitude towards, and interest for a creative and effective participation in the life, at school and the local community;
- develop positive attitude towards, and interest in social life as adult citizen;
- develop awareness about the rights, duties and responsibilities of the individual, equality in society, respect for law, tolerance towards other peoples, cultures and religions, and towards the diversity of opinion;
- be competent for critical reasoning about social phenomena;
- be capable for applying and assessing different sources of information while making decisions and accepting responsibilities.

Ecosystem of the formal and non-formal citizenship education
In the Czech education system, citizenship education takes place in two distinct groups: (a) children and youth (initial learning) and (b) adults (Kalina & Matějka, 2013).

a) Children and youth

- Official curriculum includes citizenship education particularly from the secondary level (age 11-15), although some aspects are already included on the primary level. The issue is mostly covered in a specific subject (civics), which includes a multitude of related topics, compulsory for the teachers to cover. Moreover, parts of skills and knowledge related to citizenship education are covered in the cross-curricular theme titled Civic Education for Democracy (Jeřábek, Tupý et al., 2007), which should somehow permeate through all subjects. In practice, teachers mostly focus on passing information, without sufficient attention to developing skills and forming opinion. For example, current issues are seldom discussed, if at all. The official curriculum unfortunately allocates minimum time for citizenship education, without suggesting appropriate teaching methods. It satisfies itself with target formulation, lacking real content and impact. To summarize, citizenship education is not adequately covered in schools. The Association of Civics Teachers shares this view.2

1 Formal education is realized in educational institutions, with legally defined functions, objectives, subjects, methods and assessment systems (Palián 2003). In the Czech Republic therefore typically schools, which follow official curricula. Non-formal learning is realized outside of the official education system, mostly voluntarily – and does not result in officially recognized academic degree. In the Czech context this would mostly take place in youth clubs, organized by NGOs or affiliated to schools, but happening outside of the official teaching hours.

• Education in schools includes a number of projects employing methods of non-formal education. These projects are implemented by NGOs (often in cooperation with the teacher), filling the gaps in official curriculum. Examples include pupil parliaments, project-based learning, community activities, actions against racism, etc.

• No uniform policy exists for citizenship education and individual actors are not bound by formal rules. Non-formal citizenship education takes place independently in youth organizations under different definitions and rules. Major organizations often adopt definitions and methods from abroad.

b) Adults
Even though citizenship education takes multiple forms (MŠMT, 2007, p. 9), Palán (2003) suggested that in the context of lifelong learning, the main categories respect the following model:

- Learning in institutions of higher education leading to a diploma (formal education).
- Other education (non-formal education)
  - Further professional education (e.g. courses for bureaucrats in their respective fields, with aspects relevant to citizenship education)
  - Leisure education (extending into citizenship education, e.g. in libraries)
  - Direct citizenship education (community activities, awareness campaigns, courses, experiential learning; sometimes focused on political engagement)

Organizations primarily focusing on citizenship education for adults are virtually non-existent. The situation is comparably better in initial learning, however even here citizenship education remains to be one of several aspects rather than the primary focus of the organizations.\(^3\)

One of the main obstacles to citizenship education is funding. There is no long-term, systematic financial support from the government. Most activities are funded as individual projects from public funds (e.g. European Social Fund, European Commission, Youth in Action), or by private foundations (e.g. the Open Society Fund Prague, the Via Foundation, the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation) or political foundations (e.g. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung).

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\(^3\)For example: NGOs: Center for Democracy in Education, People in Need, Agora Central Europe; private sector: Frank Bold, DOX – Centre for Contemporary Art; other initiatives: Association of Civics Teachers, Czech High School Union.
Legal environment
Citizenship education in the Czech Republic is not governed by a specific law. After persistent and systematic lobbying, the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic adopted a declaratory Resolution in support of citizenship education on 30 October 2014. Neither this Resolution, nor any other official document, constitutes a systematic and strategic support of the state for citizenship education.

Existing partial strategies and policies have little impact, as they seldom carry concrete measures or budget. Examples include the Strategy of the MŠMT for Lifelong Learning or the Strategy of Library Development 2011-2015. The Czech Republic adopted the Declaration of the Council of Europe and the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Vocational Training (ET 2020). The Czech education system addresses active citizenship in its Education Strategy 2020 (MŠMT, 2014). While official curricula include various references to citizenship education, the Education Act does not mention it at all. Declaratory mentions of citizenship education thus primarily serve NGOs as a footing for advocacy.

Stakeholders
There is an abundance of stakeholders for citizenship education. This article only mentions those that were actively engaged:

- Teachers of all grades
- Pupils and students
- School headmasters and responsible authorities
- Government authorities, particularly from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT)
- Local and national politicians
- NGO workers and independent experts
- Public libraries
- Media

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5 Lifelong learning can significantly contribute to educating reasonable, critical and independently thinking citizens aware of their own dignity and respecting the rights and freedoms of others; able to contribute to developing democracy and civil society. (MŠMT, 2007, p. 46)
6 Committee of Ministers’ Declaration and programme on education for democratic citizenship, based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens (1999) and Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Education for Democratic Citizenship. CM/Rec (2002)
Challenges
Citizenship education faces a multitude of challenges – describing them all would merit a separate article, the most pertinent ones being:

- Ensuring a long-term strategy for citizenship education, including a stable and sustainable framework on the state level, with transparent financial support for individual actors.
- Introducing citizenship education as a distinct field of enquiry and practice, where politicians and population would not suspect it as an instrument of indoctrination, but rather appreciate it as effective defence against propaganda, and value its principles of impartiality and non-partisanship.
- Gradual and sustained transformation of the education system (review of key documents, system of teacher training, empowerment of civics teachers, etc.).
- Improving the work of media.
- Providing a legal framework for citizenship education.
- Careful analysis and evaluation of existing projects to ensure long-term coherence and improve impact.
- Ability to quickly react to burning social challenges, such as socially excluded communities or immigration.

This article is based on literature research. Unfortunately, only few well-researched resources are available in the Czech Republic. To fill in the gaps, the author drew on outputs from expert conferences, roundtables, and his own experiences from five years of working at the Civic Education Centre. On specific issues, he interviewed selected experts: Ondřej Matějka (co-founder of the Civic Education Centre and the First Deputy Director at The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes – questions on history), Alena Hesová (Research Institute of Education – questions on curricula and legal basis), Tereza Vávrová (Antikomplex – ecosystem of formal and non-formal education), Michal Řezáč (the Association of Civics Teachers – situation in schools).
References

Act on the Right of Association, 15 November 1867

Act no. 67/1919 on creating public courses of citizenship education, 7 February 1919


Committee of Ministers’ Declaration and programme on education for democratic citizenship, based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens (1999) and Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Education for Democratic Citizenship. CM/Rec (2002)


