
Dr. Sokol Pacukaj
Aleksander Moisiu University,
Faculty of Education, Durrës, Albania
sokolpacukaj@uamd.edu.al

Citizenship and Educational Policies in Europe

Abstract:

If education is an investment for the future, citizenship education is an investment for the democratic future of Europe. The concept of citizenship has always been associated with a complex set of rights and duties explainable on the basis of a common membership recognized and shared. Democracy is not something taken for granted, nor an abstract concept. It requires investment and responsible actions of citizens in daily life. In an age where young people are deserting the polling stations and the public and political life, it is urgent to address the question of education for democratic citizenship, a long-term investment for the promotion of human rights, tolerance and cultural pluralism. This article identifies in European projects, the most advanced experiences of European citizenship. It is a rich and varied projects that show how schools across Europe can learn from each other and how the United States can mutually acquire information and suggestions in order to develop effective policies for the development of citizenship education

Keywords: *citizenship education, Europe, multiculturalism, European citizenship.*

1. Introduction

The strengthening of social cohesion and solidarity in society is one of the main objectives that confront political leaders of all the countries of Europe. To get there, it is important to agree on a preliminary on the meaning of what it means to “act as a responsible citizen”. From here derives the need for each country to define its own national concept of ‘responsible citizenship’. However, it should be noted that, in general, to define the term “citizenship” is already among the most difficult task. Its meaning and its perception is different from one country to another, even when there is no equivalent term in the national language, as happens in some countries. In this context, education plays an important role and can contribute significantly to promote active and responsible citizenship. In addition to her parents, her family in an extended sense of the term, friends and the local community, the school is the main place of socialization. One of the educational goals of the school has always been to prepare young people for adult life. It is therefore essential that the school sends students the basic skills and knowledge that prepare them to participate in society by positively contributing to its evolution. Two major issues related to these issues are being addressed in this article:

- There is a national concept of ‘responsible citizenship’? If yes, what is of significance in the relevant sources of law?
- What are the main characteristics of educational policy regarding the role of the school system in the development of a “responsible citizenship” as defined in the official reference?

2. The concept of ‘responsible citizenship’

The definition of ‘responsible citizenship’ and the concept of citizenship education, which is closely related, are based to some extent on the definitions established by the Council of Europe as part of its project on Education for democratic citizenship .

As a starting point, the “citizens” can be considered as “people who coexist in a society.” Over the past decades, societies have changed and, with them, the theoretical concepts and practical applications of citizenship. The concept is transformed and expanded to such an extent that the styles and patterns in our relationships with others in various ways. Far from being limited to the national level, the concept of harmonious coexistence among citizens refers to the community in all contexts - local, regional, national, and international - in which individuals live. The notion of ‘responsible citizenship’ raises questions about consciousness and knowledge of rights and duties. It is also clearly linked to civic values such as democracy and human rights, equality, participation, cooperation, social cohesion, solidarity, tolerance of diversity and social justice. The concept of ‘responsible citizenship’ is widening more and more since they were adopted by the Member States of the Council of Europe a number of specific recommendations and resolutions designed to promote this issue. The European Commission has also published in the White books and in many studies on this topic, which has become a priority for many European countries.

Citizenship education refers to education that the school aims to equip young people's ability to contribute to the development and welfare of the society in which they live as responsible citizens and active. In the vast field covered by its objectives and its content, we can distinguish three key thematic issues of citizenship education which, essentially, is to try to develop in the students:

- (a) A political culture,
- (b) Critical thinking and certain attitudes and values,
- (c) Active participation.

The development of a political culture may include:

- the study of social institutions, political and civic organizations, as well as human rights;
- the study of the conditions in which people can live in harmony, social issues and current social problems;
- preparing young people to exercise their rights and duties as defined in national constitutions;
- promoting the recognition of the cultural and historical;
- promoting the recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity of society.

The development of critical thinking and certain attitudes and values is based, for example, on:

- The acquisition of skills necessary for active participation in public life as a responsible citizen and critic;
- The development of recognition of and respect for self and others in order to foster greater mutual understanding;
- The acquisition of social and moral responsibility, including the self-confidence and responsible behavior towards others;
- Consolidation of the spirit of solidarity;
- The construction of values that take full account of the plurality of points of view within a company;
- Learn to listen and resolve conflicts peacefully;
- Learn how to contribute to a safe environment;
- The development of more effective strategies to combat racism and xenophobia.

Finally, the active participation of students can be encouraged through the following means:

- Allowing them to be more involved in the community in the broad sense (at international, national, local and school);
- Providing them with practical experience of democracy at school;
- Developing the individual's ability to commit towards each other;
- Encouraging pupils to develop joint initiatives with institutions (such as associations, international organizations and public bodies) and projects that involve other communities.

A comparative survey carried out by the Eurydice Network, (Citizenship Education at Schools in Europe), revealed that the translation of the term “citizenship” in the national languages does not necessarily produce an equivalent term that refers to the role of citizens in a society in which coexist with others. In some countries and depending on the context, the term translated can summon or a legal or a social role while in other languages these dimensions are insignificant or do not exist. In the national language of many countries, the term “citizenship” expresses only the legal relationship between the citizen and the state.

The majority of the sources of national law does not define explicitly the notion of “responsible citizenship” despite being present in several official documents. Many countries use another expression to refer to the definition of ‘responsible citizenship’, as for example: “civic participation” (Latvia, Romania), “civic skills” or “civic consciousness” (Poland), “civic engagement” (Romania) or “civic rights and duties” (Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Scotland). Generally, it can therefore be said that the ‘responsible citizenship’ concerns matters related to the knowledge and the exercise of the rights and civic responsibilities. All countries associate the concept to certain values closely linked to being a responsible citizen. These values include democracy, human dignity, freedom, respect for human rights, tolerance, equality, the rule of law, social justice, solidarity, responsibility, loyalty, cooperation, participation, the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical. Despite the fact that some countries give more or less importance to one or other of these notions, it is generally agreed that they all contribute to the overall understanding of the concept and its implementation. Almost all countries refer to their constitution or other specific documents in the field of education (curriculum, education laws, other official documents) as sources that express in the best way their notion of ‘responsible citizenship’.

In the Czech Republic, for example, the responsibilities of citizens towards other individuals and towards the community, is emphasized by the Constitution. This also puts the emphasis on values such as human dignity, freedom, equality, respect for human rights, the respect of the natural, cultural, material and spiritual respect for the law and the authorities.

In Germany, the concept of ‘responsible citizenship’ is part of the Grundgesetz (Basic Law), Article 33 states: “All Germans have, in each state, the same civic rights and duties.”

The general curricula of Lithuanian schools of general education (1997), state that a citizen is a person conscious of his rights and obligations and able to participate constructively in public life. The curriculum specifies that the “responsible citizenship” is based, for example, on moral principles and core values. In Scotland, the notion of citizens as “people who live in a society” is debated and discussed in the consultation document Education for citizenship in Scotland published by the Learning and Teaching Scotland: “Citizenship implies the enjoyment of rights and the exercise of the duties in different types of communities. This concept of

citizenship encompasses the specific notion of political participation by members of a democratic state. It also includes the more general concept according to which citizenship covers a range of participatory activities, is not overtly political, that affect the social welfare of the community. (...) The citizenship is to take decisions and make informed choices as well as take action individually and as part of the collective processes. "Most of the countries of Eastern Europe has stressed the importance of the historical dimension that covers the term" civil society".

In the early 90s, when they were established democratic principles to their societies, these countries have experienced profound changes. The social and political changes of the last two decades have significantly influenced the meaning and role of 'responsible citizenship' and , therefore , the idea of citizenship education; This development has prompted experts and policy makers to reconsider the role of curricula and, more specifically their influence on the formation and development of a democratic political culture. In several countries, especially those that include many minority groups, the concept of 'responsible citizenship' is also closely associated with the policy of integration of non-citizens, such as people living in the country for a long time, or even that we are born, but do not have the nationality.

Estonia, for example, has launched a state program integration planned between 2000 and 2007, whose main objective is to promote the integration of non- Estonians into Estonian society. One of the three sub-programs of integration, known by the name of "social competence", has as its basic objective the formation of a "socially responsible Estonian population" and "the active participation of the inhabitants of Estonia to the development of civil society, whatever it is their nationality and their mother tongue".

3. The principal guidelines of educational policy

To the extent that the school is one of the leading institutions for socialization, it is also extremely important to analyze how the educational policy of each country promotes, through its own school system, the 'responsible citizenship'. All countries have declared that they promote this concept, some as a priority, through legislation in the area of education, white papers, action plans and decrees, etc. The majority of countries explains how pupils / students are guided in the school system through a path based on the three above-mentioned objectives of citizenship education, namely the acquisition of a political culture, the development of critical thinking and certain attitudes and values the active participation.

In the German state of North Rhine - Westphalia, for example, Article 1 of the Gesetz zur Ordnung des Erstes Schulwesens (First Act on the Education System) provides the following: "Young people need to be educated in a spirit of humanity, of democracy and freedom, a goal of tolerance and respect for the convictions of others, of responsibility for the preservation of the natural environment. (...). The young people should be able to prove that they can successfully serve the community, family, profession, individuals and the state".

In Cyprus, according to the Primary School Curriculum (2003), the education provided in public schools “has the purpose of contributing to the harmonious development of democratic and responsible people, who have the knowledge, skills and abilities to cope with a changing world. At the same time, pupils must be ready and able to contribute, through their actions, the political, economic and social development of their country and the wider European society to which they belong”.

In Finland, the legislation on basic education in 1998, said that “the aim of education described in this Act is to support the development of pupils as individuals with a sense of humanitarian and ethical and responsible members of society.” Following a decree Government issued by the Minister of Education in 2001 states that “the goal of education is to support the development of students to become harmonious and individuals with a healthy ego, members of a society capable of exercising a critical opinion on their social and natural environment. At the base is the respect for life, nature and human rights, as well as the appreciation of the study and their personal work and that of others”.

Interestingly, some Nordic countries such as Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Norway include respect for nature among the items to be promoted in the context of the development of ‘responsible citizenship’ of pupils. Few countries establish an explicit link between education on the one hand and religion and / or Christianity on the other.

In Germany, the *Erstes Gesetz zur Ordnung des Schulwesens* (First Act on the Education System) (Article 1) of the Land of North Rhine – Westphalia, includes the “respect for God” as one of the main objectives of education. According to Icelandic law school, methods and educational practices should be characterized by tolerance, Christian ethics and democratic cooperation. In the preamble to the Norwegian Education Act of 1999 reads that “the primary and lower secondary school contributes, in collaboration and agreement with the family, to dispense to the students a Christian education and morality. (...) The upper secondary education contributes to bestow knowledge and understanding of basic Christian and humanist values, the national cultural heritage, democratic ideas and a way of thinking and scientific work”.

Preparing young people to participate constructively in the national and European society is one of the main objectives of educational reform in the new Member States of the EU, particularly the former socialist countries. In the last decade there have been major reforms in the countries of Eastern Europe. The reforms of the public education system are based upon the common heritage of European political values, cultural and moral reflexes in human rights as befits any State governed by the rule of law and based on a pluralist democracy, tolerance and solidarity. All the countries of Eastern Europe underline the importance of strengthening the power of integration and social cohesion in the country.

In the Czech Republic, the National Programme for the development of education puts emphasis on strengthening the cohesion of society, support for democracy and the preparation of cooperation between the European and global society. It

also emphasizes the need for a transition between the acquisition of facts and theoretical knowledge on the part of the pupils and the development of skills and competencies needed to live in a healthy, responsible and well-informed within the company, with the other.

In Latvia, the Concepts of Education Development (2002-2005) attempt “to make changes in the education system so as to promote the formation of a democratic and socially integrated”

In Lithuania, the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012 defines the mission of education in the following terms: “to help the student to understand the contemporary world, to gain a cultural and social competence and to become an independent, active and responsible, strong-willed and able to constantly learn, who builds his own life and that of his help to build community”

The changes related to education reform in Slovakia after 1989 included in particular a greater focus on democracy , autonomy of schools, an expansion of the rights of students and their families, respect for non-native citizens and the general awareness of the location human rights in a global society .

4. The participation of the school in society

One of the most important ways to capture the behavior of a responsible citizen is to take an active part in society, exercising their rights and duties. In addition to acquiring greater familiarity with democratic principles and the related organizational measures, it is important to put into practice what has been learned in school. In almost all European countries, schools are trying to engage their students in the activities of the company and vice versa. The schools and civil society can connect in two different ways: either the representatives of the public can be involved in school activities, or, alternatively, students can cross the boundaries of their school and experience the many aspects of life in society. In society, schools can find numerous counterparties with which associate to transmit to the students the behavior of a responsible citizen. There may be students from other schools at the national and international members of the local community and representatives of institutions, enterprises or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The school participation may include a variety of activities ranging from information initiatives to their actual involvement in everyday life of the local community. Such activities may include the following:

- Partnering and exchanges between students with schools in other countries, including the correspondence of the pen;
- Days “open doors” or school parties, at which the citizens of the area are invited to visit the schools to find out how they work and to meet the students;
- Visits to nearby institutions or groups in the community, including police, firefighters, museums, local or national authorities, specialized centers for

vocational guidance, religious institutions, NGOs, shelters for children with special educational needs, the elderly and refugees;

- Simulations of elections, modeled on the national elections or the European Parliament and simulation games work councils or parliaments citizens;
- Fundraising to support projects of charity and solidarity, especially for the benefit of children living in developing countries or who are victims of natural disasters;
- Volunteers, including help in nursing homes for the elderly, or cleaning the play areas or local parks;
- Internships short term for secondary students is to introduce them to working life and give them the opportunity to meet potential future employers.

Schools have a variety of potential partners to support their participation in the activities of civil society: public authorities, businesses and industries to local, national or even international, cultural institutions, religious or social, youth associations and institutes of higher education.

Moreover, in all countries schools can cooperate with NGOs or international organizations. For example, they can take part in the campaigns of NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International, the activities of charitable institutions or other care organizations (eg, UNICEF, UNDP, Red Cross) or projects of international organizations like the United Nations.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is clear that one of the most important tasks of citizenship education is to prepare pupils for their future role as active citizens who contribute to the welfare of society. The most effective way to do that is to give them the opportunity to experience firsthand what it means to be responsible civic action, reducing the gap between the school, as a microcosm closed, on the one hand, and the real world on the other. In other words, it is important to give young people the opportunity to be involved in the daily operation of the local community, but it is no less important for them to have taken previous responsibilities within the structure and organization of their school. Only if schools bring into being what they teach can persuade students that their commitment to citizenship must be done seriously. And the most convincing way to do this is to encourage a participatory and democratic ethos involving both pupils and parents, their main models, decision-making processes of the school.

REFERENCES

AA.VV., *La cittadinanza europea : itinerari, strumenti, scenari: rivista di studi e documentazione sull'integrazione europea* .1 (2002), Roma: Philos, 2002

Balibar E., *Noi cittadini d'Europa?: le frontiere, lo stato, il popolo*, a cura di Anna Simone e Beppe Foglio, Roma, 2004

Eurydice, *Citizenship Education at Schools in Europe*, Bruxelles, , 2005

Civic Participation - 2004/100/EC, Lussemburgo, 4 febbraio 2004; (disponibile al seguente indirizzo Internet: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/educationculture/civilsociety/decisionen.pdf> .

Commissione Europea, *Learning for Active citizenship. A significant Challenge in Building a Europe of Knowledge: Education and Active Citizenship in the European Union*. Lussemburgo, Ufficio delle Pubblicazioni Ufficiali delle Comunità Europee, 1998.

Commissione Europea, *Open Learning Environment, Active Citizenship and Social Inclusion. Implementation of Education and Training 2010 Work Programme: Progress Report*. Bruxelles, Novembre 2003.

Commissione Europea, *The future of Education and Citizenship Policies: The Commission adopts Guidelines for Future Programmes after 2006*. Bruxelles, 2004

Consiglio di Europa, *Council Decision of 26 January 2004 Establishing a Community Action Programme to Promote Active European Citizenship*

Consiglio di Europa, Karen O'Shea, *Developing a Shared Understanding. A Glossary of Terms for Education for Democratic Citizenship – Comprendre pour mieux se comprendre. Glossaire des termes de l'éducation à la citoyenneté démocratique*, Strasbourg, 2003.

Cotesta L., *La cittadinanza europea : evoluzione, struttura e prospettive nuove per i diritti soggettivi*, Napoli, 2002

Parsi V. E. a cura di, *Cittadinanza e identità costituzionale europea / ricerca del Centro di ricerche in analisi economica, economia internazionale, sviluppo economico*, Bologna, Il mulino, 2001

