

Country Report: Civic and Citizenship Education in Polish School

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- Assumed shape of school civic education, resulting from analysis of school core curricula is based primarily on the transfer of knowledge, adaptive and reconstructive function of education.
- The model of civic education is based on thin conception of democracy. It is functionalistic and socialisation model.
- The reform of education implemented since 2017/2018 school years doesn't change civic education significantly. However, there has been a change in the political context in which civic education has taken place.

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the shape of current civic education in Polish schools.

Methodology: The results of the analysis presented in this article are based on the following research question: What shape of civic education can be reconstructed on the basis of the researched sources? The method of collecting data is finding secondary sources and documents. The method of analysing data is content analysis. The research sample includes legal act regarding education law, new school core curricula that have been implemented since 2017/2018 school year and publications showing results of research on civic education in Poland.

Findings: Within the framework of civic education in Polish schools, emphasis was placed on knowledge and on adaptive and reconstructive function of schools. Deficiencies in terms of skills and attitudes assumed in the core curricula indicate that neither has there been an establishment of active citizenship, nor has any emphasis been placed on developing attitudes. Results of the research indicates that legal regulation regarding social bodies such student self-government fail to give these authorities significant powers and opportunities for the experience of democracy by students are very limited. Civic education in Polish schools is not learning in democracy, it is learning about democracy.

Key words: citizenship and civic education, Polish schools, core curriculum, social and civic competences, democratization of school life

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1 Contemporary political culture and civic education in Poland

Until 1989, civic education in Polish schools and the school subject *wychowanie obywatelskie* (citizenship upbringing) were strongly ideologized (Szczegółą 1965, 1969; Siwek & Zajączkowski, 1971, 1979; Erasmus 1976, 1977, 1978; Erasmus et al., 1980; *Wychowanie Obywatelskie 1969-1989*)¹.

Things began to change in the 1990s, after the overthrow of communism. The earliest programs of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) were approved by the Ministry of National Education in 1995 and 1996.² Currently, civic education is conducted as part of civics, but it is also emphasized that civic competences are of an intersectional nature, and schools should develop them throughout the entirety of education, as an element of all school subjects.

Civic education in the former Eastern-bloc countries has a specific nature. The concept of citizenship, and consequently of civic education, become hybrids. On the one hand, there are designs, models, as well as good practices developed in other democratic countries. On the other hand, the context of introducing and adapting these changes encounters obstacles that are difficult to overcome, such as the persistent suspicion toward the state, which results in the formation of citizenship in opposition to the state and a negative assessment of civic activity (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005, p. 114). Civic education under such conditions is regarded as “highly suspect,” and therefore pushed to the side. This particular situation is also influenced by general social trends and changes therein. Contemporary civic education in school is therefore a mixture of all these: elements often accidentally taken from various educational models, “cleansed” of civic activity, trapped in what is still a rather traditional educational system that focuses on the transfer of knowledge.

The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the shape of contemporary civic education in Polish schools. However, I do not intend to carry out this reconstruction within a historical perspective. Rather, this article is an attempt to capture the characteristics of current school civic education. I call this an attempt with the full awareness of the limitations resulting from the adopted methodology. Yet, it is my hope that the characteristics and analyses presented below will offer insight into civic education in schools and complement—or perhaps slightly change—the perspective of widely available research in this field, such as ICCS (Schulz et al., 2010) or Eurydice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). However, before getting to this point, I will briefly outline the political context surrounding Polish civic education, which remains relevant to the interpretation of the results of the analyses presented below.

In 2015, Poland underwent a shift in the allocation of political powers, which means a significant shift in political culture (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016). The parliamentary elections were won by the conservative, Eurosceptic party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice - PiS), which received 37.58% of the votes and secured the majority of seats in the Sejm (the lower chamber of the two-



chamber Parliament of the Republic of Poland). One of the important points of the party's electoral program was the education reform consisting of the dissolution of middle schools.³ Middle schools existed in Poland since 1999, and were introduced in the atmosphere of numerous protests. After several years of functioning, the situation stabilised, and these schools became part of the "landscape" of formal education. Although experts pointed to both the pros and the cons of the functioning of middle schools, in the 2015 election campaign the focus was on populist arguments that justified the above mentioned dissolution primarily on the basis of intensified didactic and educational problems within these institutions. The return to the older system of education (8-year primary school and post-primary education with a duration of 3, 4, or 5 years) was primarily justified with arguments regarding increased child safety, greater educational impact (a single school over eight years), and a return to the past⁴. The change in the structure of education was widely discussed, there were numerous protests, and scientific communities addressed open letters on the matter to the Minister Edukacji Narodowej (Minister of National Education - MEN), Anna Zalewska. On the Ministry's part, numerous meetings—so-called social consultations—were organized in many places, the aim of which was less to consult and more to present the assumptions underlying this reform. There was no place to ask questions or formulate opinions. The purpose of the change in the structure of education quickly became confirmed in the enacted legal acts, and, beginning in the 2017/18 school year, the reform began to be implemented in schools. As the structure of education changed, it became necessary to introduce new core curricula. These were prepared at an express rate within a single year. Of course, such a pace was unfavourable to the deliberated changes. The core curricula have changed in detail; some subjects to a larger, others to a lesser extent. The most visible change concerns the number of specific requirements. For example, the number of requirements in social and civic competences has more than doubled, indicating that the new core curricula are even more detailed than the previous ones.

Currently the most widely debated change concerns the way in which the increased requirements are spread over the different stages of education. One result of the dissolution of middle schools was that part of the core curriculum was transferred to the newly created seventh (in the school year 2017/18) and eighth (in the school year 2018/19) grades of primary school, and some to post-primary schools. As a result, organizations of parents (e.g. Rodzice mają głos [Parents have voice], Rodzice przeciwko reformie edukacji movement [Parents against the reform of education movement])⁵, as well as teachers, began to inform the media about the educational overload of the new seventh-year pupils due to the vast amount of tasks required for the completion of the final grades of primary school. The Rzecznik Praw Dziecka (Polish Commissioner for Children's Rights - RPD), Marek Michalak, revealed the letters he received from students and their parents (RPD, 2017a) regarding this situation, and on November 30, 2017 he requested of Minister Zalewska to consider changes in this regard. He also appealed to the education superintendents⁶. In a subsequent official statement to the Ministry of Education (August 14, 2018), the Commissioner for Children's Rights also referred to the report titled "The situation of students in



the seventh grade of the reformed primary school,”⁷ which showed that 48% of teachers believe that the subjects they teach are too extensive, especially in the case of Polish (75%), history (75%), geography (64%), mathematics (62%), and English (59%). As these teachers claim, they are unable to realise all of the curricular content during classes: on average, they realise 60% of the material in class, while the rest the pupils must learn at home⁸. Minister Zalewska, responding to the report, undermined its reliability and called it “an image of subjective assessments”⁹. Subsequent statements by the Commissioner for Children’s Rights, dated October 1, 2018 (RPD 2018a), and November 28, 2018 (RPD 2018b), drew attention to the necessity of analysing the core curricula, particular with regard to the scope of requirements and the number of hours allocated to meet them. In response, the Ministry pointed out that the responsibility for the proper organization of the educational process lies with the teachers and school principals.

The above is just one thread in the discussion of the educational reform, but it is important because it is related to the changes in the structure of education, and therefore also to the core curricula. However, it should be emphasised that despite the change in the number of requirements, the shape of social and civic competences reconstructed on the basis of the core curriculum of general education has not changed significantly (Kopińska 2017b). The new core curricula repeat the same errors that were seen in the old ones (Kopińska & Solarczyk-Szwec, 2016, pp. 153-155, Kopińska & Solarczyk-Szwec 2017, p. 277-281). They exhibit and neglect similar areas of civic education (compare chapter 4 below). However, there has been a change in the political context in which civic education has taken place. This concerns both government policy understood more broadly, as well as educational policy, especially the area that directly affects the shape of civic education. The following statement was included in the introductory part of the core curricula:

“School activity directed at wychowanie (upbringing) is one of the basic goals of the state’s educational policy. The task of wychowanie (bringing up) the next generation belongs to the family and the school, which in its activities must take into account the will of the parents, but also to the state, whose duties include creating proper conditions for wychowanie (upbringing). The task of the school is to focus the educational process on values that set wychowawczy (upbringing) goals and criteria for its assessment. Wychowanie (upbringing) oriented toward values assumes, first and foremost, the subjective treatment of the student, and values encourage people to make the right choices and decisions. In the didactic and educational process, the school undertakes activities related to places important to national memory, forms of commemoration of figures and historical events, the most important national holidays and state symbols” (MEN 2017a, MEN 2018).

The new core curricula to a greater extent articulate issues related to the formation of patriotic attitudes, primarily patriotism understood in terms that are national and megalomaniacal, rather than civic and critical. Nevertheless, patriotism reconstructed on the basis of the previously existing program had the same character: Poland-centric, idealizing its own national group, with



little criticism of its own history, steeped in the cult of a hero spilling his own blood for his homeland (Kopińska, Majchrzak, Szwech, 2017). The present change concerns the way in which the current core curricula emphasize this even more strongly, appealing to patriotism directly. This is especially important in the context of government policy.

2 Example: The Rainbow Friday

Another example illustrating the context in which civic education is implemented in Polish schools is the recent action by the Ministry regarding the initiative of the NGO “Kampania Przeciw Homofobii” (Campaign Against Homophobia - KPH) to organize in October the so-called Rainbow Friday in schools. On the KPH website one can read about the purpose of this action:

“Rainbow Friday is an action initiated by the social organization Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (Campaign Against Homophobia), held for three years on the last Friday in October. The aims of the action are to show LGBTQI youth that there is also a place for them in school—that they can feel safe there and fully realise their potential. Although the initiator of Rainbow Friday is the Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (Campaign Against Homophobia), it is the teachers, together with the students, who themselves conduct classes, decide on the content and activities that will take place as part of the action. Educational materials provided to schools by KPH serve as inspiration for how to conduct these classes” (Tęczowy piątek. Pytania i odpowiedzi, 2018 [Rainbow Friday, Questions and Answers, 2018]).

It is worth emphasizing that the obligation to conduct anti-discrimination education in Poland results from many international conventions in which Poland partakes. In addition, the preamble to the Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. - Prawo Oświatowe (the Act of 14 December 2016 - Educational Law – UPO)—the most important legal act in the field of education law—poses that:

“Schools should provide each student with the conditions necessary for his or her development, and prepare young people for the fulfilment of civic duties based on the principles of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice, and freedom” (UPO, 2016).

Furthermore, the core curricula themselves contain requirements (though not many) regarding tolerance, respect of others, and a respect of diversity. Despite this, the Ministry of National Education indicated that the KPH initiative does not fall within the scope of the curriculum, and therefore parents’ permission to conduct this type of activity is required. Subsequently, it was reported that schools in which “Rainbow Friday” was organized would undergo inspection, and if any irregularities were detected, disciplinary proceedings against the school principals would be carried out¹⁰.

In response, KPH organized an action called “Write to Minister Zalewska regarding Rainbow Friday”¹¹. The following message is displayed on the KPH website:



“Write to the Minister of Education why you think Rainbow Friday is needed in Polish schools. Show that young LGBT people are important, and that every pupil has the right to feel safe in their school” (Napisz do Pani Minister Zalewskiej w sprawie Tęczowego Piątku, 2018 [Write to Minister Zalewska regarding Rainbow Friday, 2018]).

Within two weeks, 806 letters written by students, parents, and teachers were received and delivered to the Ministry of National Education (Niech Zalewska nas usłyszy, 2018 [Let Zalewska hear us, 2018]). On December 3, 2018, the Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich (Commissioner for Citizens’ Rights – RPO), Adam Bodnar (RPO, 2018a) also defended anti-discriminatory education, sending a letter in this matter to the Minister of National Education (RPO, 2018b). In this letter, Bodnar pointed out the lawfulness of all classes concerning issues of tolerance and non-discrimination, and stressed their importance in education. He also wrote that he received information about incidents involving “summoning students for individual conversations with the headmasters, collecting statements from them about participation in the action [Rainbow Friday – auth.], controlling their dress, confiscating items related to the action (e.g., pins), or using threats of lowering conduct grades.” Bodnar assessed such occurrences as grossly violating students’ rights and affecting their sense of security at school. He requested from the Minister of National Education information regarding activities undertaken in connection with the introduction of anti-discrimination content to schools and other educational institutions as part of projects carried out by non-governmental organizations, and to indicate the legal basis of inspections carried out on schools participating in Rainbow Friday, as well as to provide a detailed list of planned and already-implemented activities, and copies of internal documentation regarding those inspections that had already been carried out (RPO, 2018b).

These are just some of the events that shed light on the context of modern civic education in Poland. I selected them because of their importance to the present discussion. On the one hand, they show the general climate of the contemporary reformed (or, as many think, “deformed”) Polish schools, which does not bode well for civic education because it means that an even greater focus will be placed on what can be evaluated through external examination.

The results of the analysis presented in this article¹² are based on the following research question: What shape of civic education can be reconstructed on the basis of the researched sources? Civic education in school is here understood broadly. Therefore, the issue does not only concern teaching and learning within individual school subjects, but also the development of civic competences through the experiences and activities that, although taking place at school, exceed the scope of those subjects.

3 Civic education in school: Organization and scope

Civic education in Poland (Artych & Witkowska, 2014; Kopińska & Solarczyk-Szwec, 2016) is implemented as a cross-curricular theme, integrated with other subjects, and as a stand-alone subject, *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (“knowledge about society”, which resembles/be similar to civics). The organization and the scope of the subject of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) - as in the case of other school subjects - is regulated by generally applicable legal acts of which the most important are the decrees of the Minister of National Education: concerning the framework teaching plans (MEN 2017, MEN 2012) and the core curriculum of general education (MEN 2017a, MEN 2018).

In the first three years of school education (children aged 7–9 years)¹³, there is no division into subjects. Instead, specific areas of education—e.g., mathematics education, or artistic education—are distinguished on the basis of the planned educational goals. Civic education is included here primarily in the area called *edukacja społeczna* (social education). Over the following six years of primary school, civic education is included as part of various subjects, the most important of which are history, Polish, and geography. In the last (8th) grade of primary school, pupils (14-years-old) have one hour of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (“knowledge about society”) per week (MEN 2017a). At the next stage of education—post-primary school (4-year high school, 5-year technical school, 2-year first-degree vocational school), the subject *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (“knowledge about society”) is continued for two years at one hour per week: for the first two years in high school (Fig.1), and the last two years of technical school. The frequency of 1 hour per week concerns the so-called basic scope of the subject, which is implemented for everyone.



Fig. 1: Frame of working hours in Polish 4-year high schools – division into compulsory subjects.

	Compulsory subject	Weekly working hours (45 min.)				Total in the four-year education period
		First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year	
		Basic scope				
1.	Polish language	4	4	4	4	16
2.	Foreign language	3	3	3	3	12
3.	Second foreign language	2	2	2	2	8
4.	Philosophy or arts or music*	1	-	-	-	1
5.	History	2	2	2	2	8
6.	Knowledge about society (civics)	1	1	-	-	2
7.	Base of entrepreneurship		1	1	-	2
8.	Geography	1	2	1		4
9.	Biology	1	2	1		4
10.	Chemistry	1	2	1		4
11.	Physics	1	1	2		4
12.	Mathematics	3	4	3	4	14
13.	Informatics	1	1	1	-	3
14.	Physical education	3	3	3	3	12
15.	Civil defense and security education	1	-	-	-	1
16.	Classes with form master	1	1	1	1	4

*The principal of school decides which subject is realised during the first year.
 The legal regulation give possibility to introduce optional subjects in school education.
 In extended scope the number of hours taken per week is increased:
 - In the case of Polish language, knowledge about society, philosophy, or optional subject like: history of music, history of arts, Latin language and ancient culture – it is additional 8 working hours per week ;
 - In the case of foreign languages, history, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and informatics – it is additional 6 working hours per week.
 The subjects realised in extended scope are established by the school. Every student can choose 2 or 3 subject executed in this way.

Source: MEN (2017). Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 28 marca 2017 r. w sprawie ramowych planów nauczania dla publicznych szkół (Dz.U. 2017, poz. 703) [Decree by the Minister of National Education of March 28, 2017, concerning the framework plans for teaching public schools], <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20170000703> , access: 2018-12-12.



In addition, it is possible to implement an extended scope based on the profile of the class¹⁴ or a decision by students who want to take the matriculation examination in the subject¹⁵. Implementation of the extended scope of the subject indicates an additional 8 hours per week (MEN 2018). Secondary schools of the new type (4-year high school and 5-year technical school) will start functioning from the 2019/20 school year. Currently, old type 3-year high schools and 4-year technical schools are still in existence; there, *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) is offered in the basic scope of 1 hour per week (throughout one year), and in the extended scope of 6 additional hours per week (MEN, 2012; Kopińska & Solarczyk-Szwec, 2016, p. 29). In these schools, graduates of the dissolved middle schools are taught, where the scope of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) included 65 hours during the three-year education cycle (MEN 2012), which translated into one hour per week for two school years. As it was reported by Eurydice, Poland is among the few countries where citizenship education is implemented as a stand-alone subject. However, the number of school years in which citizenship education is provided as a compulsory separate subject is not so high like in Estonia, France, Slovakia and Finland (7-12 grades) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 44). Currently, in Poland it is three grades.

The scope of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society), resulting from the core curriculum at the level of the last grade of primary school, includes 12 thematic blocks: the social nature of humans; family; school and education; human rights; juveniles vis-à-vis the law; local community; regional community; national/ethnic communities and the homeland; civic participation in public life—civic society; mass media; democracy in the Republic of Poland; international affairs (MEN 2017a). In contrast, the themes for secondary schools (4-year high schools, 5-year technical schools) are constituted (in the basic scope) by 7 blocks: humans and society; civic society; public authorities in the Republic of Poland; human rights and their protection; law in the Republic of Poland; selected problems of public policy in the Republic of Poland; contemporary international relations.¹⁶ The analysis of the requirements formulated in both the subject of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) and others is presented below (chapter 4). Like in most former Eastern-bloc countries (but also in Sweden, France, Spain, Austria, and Switzerland), in Poland general aims, specific objectives, and learning outcomes are formulated in national curriculum for citizenship education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 46). However, this construction of core curriculum results from the approach to it, not from the specific position of citizenship education.

In Polish schools there is no obligation to use textbooks. The decision regarding the use of textbooks and the choice of a specific one depends on the school and teachers. In practice, using a textbook in school is an unwritten rule. Every textbook that can be used in school has to be approved by the Minister of Education. This decision is made on the basis of experts' assessment. Currently, there are 12 textbooks (four for primary schools; and nine for post-primary schools,



including six within the basic scope and three within extended scope) for wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society) approved by the ministry for school usage.

Figure 2: The cover of the civic education textbook for primary school: Iwona Janicka, Arkadiusz Janicki, Aleksandra Kucia-Maćkowska, Tomasz Maćkowski, *Dziś i jutro. Podręcznik do wiedzy o społeczeństwie dla szkoły podstawowej*. [Today and tomorrow. The knowledge about society textbook for primary school] Nowa Era sp. z o. o., Warszawa 2017

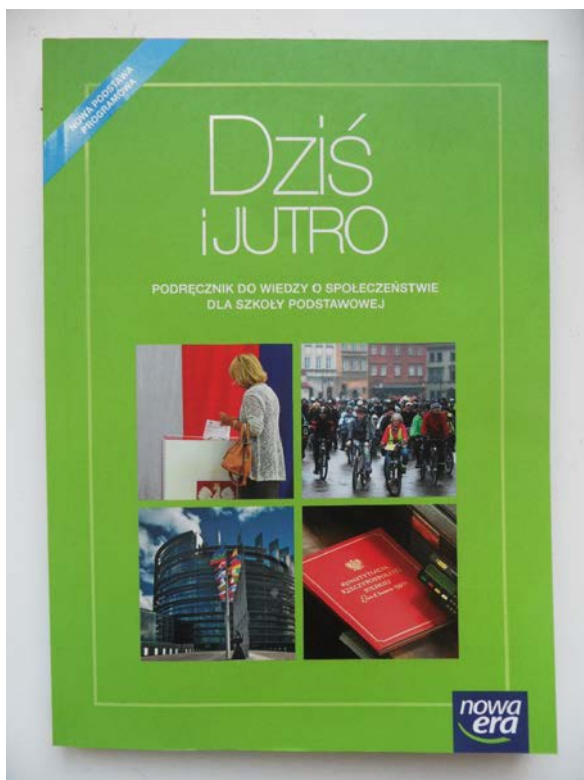


Photo: V. Kopińska

The content of wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society) is quite similar to scope of Swedish subject social studies (Arensmeier, 2018, p. 10-11) but in Poland, active participation, and critical and scientific ability is much less exposed, even on assumption level. The respect for differences which is expressed in educational law in Italy (Albanesi, 2018, p. 22) in Poland is not even declared; though tolerance is articulated in Polish educational regulation (see chapter 2). Detailed analysis of school core curricula of general education gives more specified image of citizenship education in Polish schools.

4 Social and civic competences expressed in core curricula¹⁷

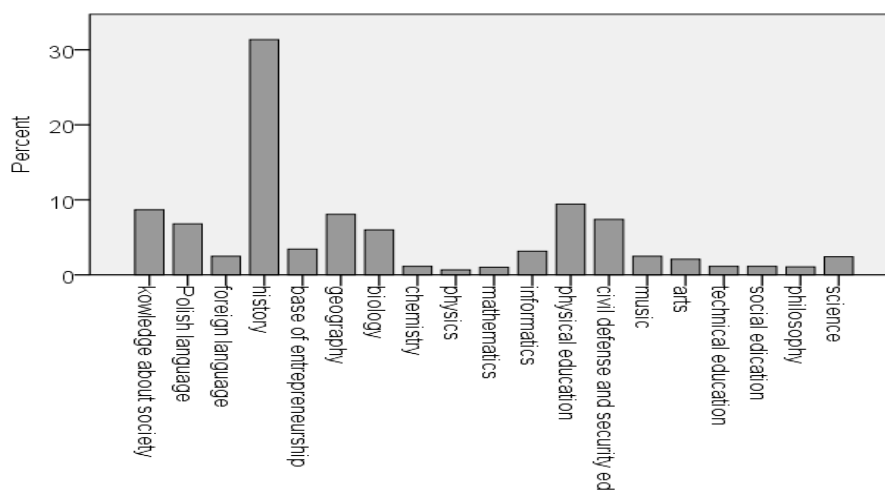
Core curricula in Polish schools consist of a couple of parts. The first one determines the general aims and tasks of a given type (primary, post-primary), and includes general characteristics of individual subjects. The second, most comprehensive part, contains the general aims of every subject (called general requirements) as well as learning outcomes (called detailed requirements).

The general and detailed requirements are regarded as units of analysis in this research. However, in this article I am presenting the results concerning detailed requirements, whereas general requirements are the context of this analysis.

The research took into account core curricula for all the compulsory subjects and two optional subjects which are 'ethics' and 'family life education'. The analysis consisted of selecting from among all the core curricula requirements those that fall within the scope of social and civic competences (1736 detailed requirements were selected from among 3515), followed by searching for analytical categories¹⁸ in selected requirements.

First of all, it is worth noting the school subjects in which social and civic competences have been placed. As shown in Fig. 3, these competences are generally concentrated in several subjects. The most, over 31%, can be found in history. A significant number of them is also found in wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society) (8.7%), physical education (9.4%), civil defence and security education (7.4%), geography (8.1%), Polish (6.8%), and biology (6.0%).

Fig. 3. Social and civic competences in the Polish school curricula, including division into subjects.

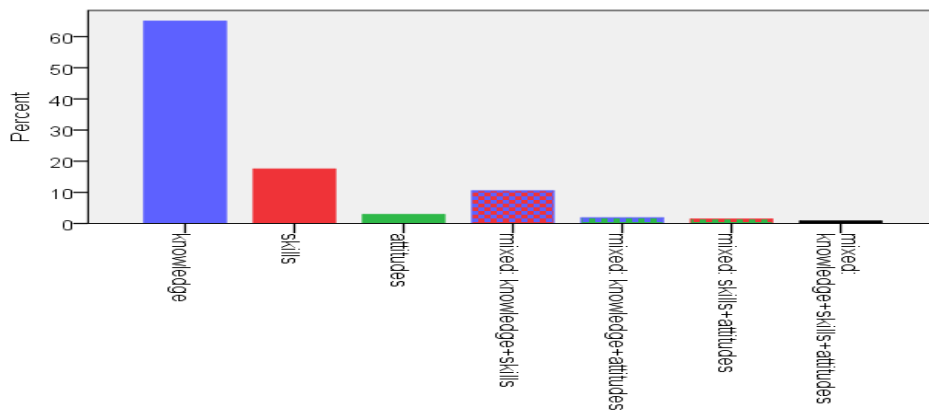


Source: own research



Important for the assessment of the shape of civic education in contemporary schools is yet another general result. The structure of the surveyed requirements based on inclusion in the area of knowledge, skills, and attitudes is presented in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4. Social and civic competences in Polish core curricula—division into the area of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.



Source: own research

The area of knowledge is interpreted in these analysis as involving learning outcomes concentrating on memorising; recreating from memory; characterising; exchanging; discussing concepts, facts, procedures, models, etc. The area of skills includes those learning outcomes that focus on performing specific activities (psychomotor sphere) or those related to higher-level intellectual skills (designing, constructing, creating, evaluating, verifying). Then, the area of attitudes includes those learning outcomes that appeal to feelings, principles, valuation, readiness to react in a specific way (affective sphere) (Kopińska 2017a, p. 104).

Fig. 4 clearly shows that the Polish core curricula are dominated by requirements related to the area of knowledge. It should be added that the requirements related to knowledge dominate the majority of school subjects in which most of the social and civic competences were included (indicated in Fig. 3). They constitute 87% of the requirements analysed in the subject of history, 75% in geography, 98.9% in biology, 76.4% in civil defence and security education, and 63.6% in wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society).¹⁹ Skills dominate only two subjects: Polish and physical education. However, in the former subject the focus is on simple communication skills (sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages), and in the latter on the skills needed to ensure physical health.

Taking into account the division into the area of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the analysis of social and civic competences in the core curricula suggests that the reconstructed form of civic education is based primarily on the transfer of knowledge, not the development of skills or attitudes. In Poland, civic education in school is more concerned with learning about citizenship and democracy, rather than learning in citizenship and democracy. In addition, of importance is the fact that only 6.5% of the surveyed requirements can be described as those that fulfil the emancipatory function of the school, which consists in preparing people for the critical assessment of reality, for overcoming imposed restriction, and for changing the surrounding reality into a better one (Kwieciński 1995, p. 21). The function of the other requirements is the reproduction of the national and universal culture, the reconstruction of the social structure, and the insertion into the existing social order (Kwieciński 1995, p. 21). This suggests that, in its assumed form, civic education in Polish school has a socializing and adaptive character, because it focuses essentially on inserting individuals into the existing socio-political order (Biesta 2009b, pp. 153–154).

However, let us look at which requirements dominate the core curricula, and which appear the least or have been omitted completely.

Table 1 presents the most numerous categories found in the area of knowledge, skills, and attitudes identified in the examined core curricula.

As can be seen from Table 1, among the categories that have the highest numbers in specific areas, those in the lead concern history and cultural heritage at both national and European levels.²⁰ Categories such as knowledge of human rights (14) and their protection (11), respect for human rights, knowledge about diversity and cultural, religious, and other identities (11) are not included in Table 1 due to their low frequency of occurrence. Although these categories are present, over 70% of them are found in one subject: civic (called ‘knowledge about society’). Whereas the category of communication skills has been identified in a high number of requirements, 66.4% of them refer to very elementary skills related to sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages. However, missing are many communication skills that are particularly important for functioning in a democratic society. I will return to this observation in the analysis of data from Table 2.



Table 1. Social and civic competences in the core curricula: most frequently occurring analytical categories in the area of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Analytical category/learning outcome	Number of detailed requirements in which the analytical category is present	Percentage of detailed requirements in which the analytical category is present
Knowledge		
knowledge about the history and cultural heritage of the country	344	19.8
knowledge of major events and trends in European and world history, knowledge of the cultural heritage of Europe and the world	248	14.3
knowledge about social problems, processes, and phenomena	69	4.0
knowledge concerning the political and legal system—national level	56	3.2
knowledge concerning behaviour in crisis situations (threatening to life and health)	54	3.1
knowledge about threats to the environment and its protection	53	3.1
understanding of the rules of conduct and behaviour generally accepted in various societies and environments	38	2.2
Skills		
communication skills	107	6.2
ability to take action to ensure physical (and mental) health	72	4.1
ability to evaluate the actions of others	65	3.7
ability to behave in accordance with the rules and regulations prevailing in different environments	43	2.5
ability to judge critically	39	2.2
Attitudes		
readiness to accept responsibility related to participation in various communities, functioning in various social roles	9	0.5
conviction about the need to protect the environment	8	0.5
respect of differences	8	0.5
a sense of belonging in one's own surroundings	8	0.5

Source: own research

Another numerically important category is knowledge of social problems, processes, and phenomena. Nearly 80% of requirements related to this category are located in two subjects: geography (56.5%) and wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society) (23.2%). These requirements were mainly set for post-primary schools, that is, for 15–18/19 year-olds (72%). Also



worthy of note is the relatively high value in the category of “critical judgment”, which is particularly important from the perspective of civic education.

Data included in Table 1 also show that only 8–9 requirements received the highest numbers in the category of attitudes. This is true in the case of “respect of differences.” During the first three years of school education there are two requirements related to this category, five requirements in the following five years, while in the last stage, designed for 15–18/19 year-olds, only one. This last one is quite narrow, referring to the respect of differences arising from musical preferences.

Table 2. Social and civic competences in the core curricula least frequently occurring categories.

Analytical category/learning outcome	Number of detailed requirements in which the analytical category is present
knowledge and application of the concept of equality	0
knowledge of the forms of civic opposition	1
knowledge about the role and meaning of conflict and contestation in the state	1
ability to create an atmosphere of trust	1
ability to speak up in a group	1
ability to identify and talk about one’s own problems	1
ability to participate in democratic decision-making processes	0
ability to participate constructively in the activities of local and neighbourhood communities	1
ability to critically evaluate media messages regarding political and legal issues	1
ability to critically evaluate specific solutions or practices related to the political and legal system	1
ability to understand different points of view	1
readiness to evaluate the actions of people under one’s command	0
readiness to change one’s opinion and to reach a compromise	1
sense of belonging to the EU, Europe, and the world	1
readiness to participate in democratic decision-making processes	1
readiness to evaluate and correct the effects of one’s own work	1
negative assessment of, and readiness to overcome prejudices, racism, and discrimination	1
supporting diversity and social cohesion	1

Source: own research

A low number was also recorded in the category of “respect of human rights” (7). During the first three years of school education there are two such requirements, over the next five years—three, two of which are found in the subject of wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society). In the final years of school education there are two such requirements: one in wiedza o



społeczeństwie (knowledge about society), and the other in music (respect for creators and recipients). Such a small representation of categories related to “respect of differences” and “respect of human rights” is not justified even in the context of building of the core curriculum itself. Both at the second (designed for 10–14-year-olds) and at the third level of education (designed for 15–18/19-year-olds), only the general requirements relating to the above-mentioned categories have been articulated, which means that they must be further specified. This result is worth considering in the context of previous comments concerning the real possibilities of implementing anti-discrimination and equality education in contemporary schools. The core curriculum assumes the development of competences in this area, although admittedly they occupy a rather marginal position. If we combine this with the conservative politics conducted by government (e.g. the attitude towards LGBT+ people, or national patriotism, combined with political actions and decisions that show that, in the government’s understanding, the concerned civic community has more of an exclusive than inclusive nature) then these requirements are not only sparse, but can become no more than a guise.

On the basis of the analyses it can be concluded that many categories, especially in the area of skills and attitudes, do not find their proper representation in the core curriculum. Table 2 lists those categories that appeared only once, or not at all. It is worth emphasizing, however, that identifying a given category two or three times (in a document meant to design an educational program lasting 12/13 years) does not mean that it is sufficiently represented.

Data presented in the table show that among the least-rated categories in the core curricula can be found such important categories as: the ability and readiness to participate in the democratic decision-making process; the ability to understand different points of view; the ability to speak up in a group, to talk about one’s problems, but also readiness to change one’s own opinions, to reach a compromise. Although the skill of critical judgment is a relatively well-represented category in the Polish core curriculum (Table 1), it turns out this does not apply to political and legal issues (Table 2).

5 Civic education in Poland: research review

In 2009, Poland took part in the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS)²¹, a project which assessed young people’s knowledge and attitudes. In Poland, 4081 students were enrolled in the study (mean age: 14 years and 9 months), 150 school principals, and 2,238 teachers (Wiłkomirska 2013). In these studies, out of all the countries Polish students came in sixth place in the field of civic knowledge. At the same time, these studies showed differences in the results achieved among the Polish youth. A large group of students achieved results in the two lowest levels (28%), which means that these students either did not know the principles of democracy (8.6%), or knew only general principles—such as equality, social cohesion, and freedom—and tied them to examples of situations illustrating the threat or defence of these principles (Wiłkomirska 2013, pp.



103–105). Their competences were limited to a simple understanding and interpretation of social phenomena without the ability to think relationally (Wiłkomirska 2013, p. 104). Deficiencies were particularly visible in areas that required critical thinking (Wiłkomirska 2013, pp. 123–128). The average results for the 150 Polish schools covered by the survey showed that only in one out of four schools students achieved an average score corresponding to the highest level of knowledge highlighted in the cited studies (Wiłkomirska 2013, p. 106). At the same time, these studies show that specific features of the school environment—such as an open atmosphere of school discussions or activities related to the elections to school councils—also have a positive impact on the results in civic knowledge (Wiłkomirska 2013, pp. 170–171). The research cited above shows that Polish teachers assessed the impact of students on school decisions at a level much higher than the students themselves. There would be nothing extraordinary in this, because disproportions in this area were observed in most countries. But firstly, the assessment of Polish teachers was among the highest, and, secondly, the discrepancy between teacher and student ratings was the greatest in Poland (Wiłkomirska 2013, p. 187). The result showing low student assessment of the influence of young people on decisions taken at school, taken in combination with a high teacher assessment is therefore very worrying, because it offers little hope for a change in the situation. It should be emphasized that the very legal structure of the bodies that can potentially democratize Polish schools does not make it any easier. It is true that in Polish schools there is an obligatory representation of both the parents—the parent council (Starzyński, 2005)—and the student self-government, but their rights are limited. The student council has no legally determined decision-making power other than the ability to decide on its own regulations (Article 85 of the Act of 15 December 2016—Educational Law). The legal competences of the student self-government have an opinion- and proposal-giving character. The scope of democracy experienced by pupils in schools is not secured by appropriate legal regulations. The mere establishment of student representatives, even if taking place under the conditions of democratic elections, offers no guarantee as to the influence of this representative body on the decisions taken at school. Therefore, a lot depends on the school's culture, understood as rules referring to the relations between all participants of the school life. This is confirmed by research from 2015 (Cierzniewska et al., 2017) conducted among 13–15-year-olds in Poland, which showed that the main variable in the assessment of student self-management is the school itself (Gackowska, 2017, p. 287–320; Cierzniewska & Gackowska, 2017, p. 321–332). Summing up this research, the authors state that young people have a very limited influence on their school life. Their fields of activity are strongly limited by constant teacher control, which creates a mere veneer of self-governance and, as a result, discourages action (Cierzniewska et al. 2017, p. 371). The above studies largely confirm the results of other research carried out seven years ago on the same age group (Kopińska 2009), in which I identified the following problems of student self-governance: a limited scope of activities undertaken within the framework of student self-government activities (focus on sports and entertainment activities), and, consequently, a lack of a sense that the students' interests are represented by the self-government bodies (Kopińska 2009, pp. 312–313). Unfortunately, this means that little has changed in this area over the years, which in turn may support the



preservation of a specific pattern of student self-government. And this makes it difficult to implement any changes in this regard.

In terms of the democratization of school life, the creation of appropriate conditions for the development of student self-government activities is not the only aspect that leaves much to be desired. Another social body that offers an opportunity to experience democracy at school is the school council (Articles 80–81 of the Act of December 14, 2018 — Educational Law). It is made up in equal numbers of representatives of teachers, pupils, and parents. This body has been equipped with significant competences (the most important of which is the introduction of changes to the school statute and the ability to petition the supervising authorities for an evaluation of the school's activities, its principal, and individual teachers—these applications are binding for this body). However, legal provisions stipulate that the presence of this body in the school is not mandatory. It can be appointed through the initiative of the school principal, at the request of the teachers' council, the parents' council, and in post-primary schools (for 15–18/19-year-olds) also at the request of the student self-government. If not appointed, its function is exercised by the teachers' council, which is made up of all the teachers and headed by the school principal. As a result, the presence of the school council is rare in Polish schools. Śliwerski's research into 561 Polish schools showed that only 4.1% of them had a functioning school council (Śliwerski 2013). When asked why a council had not been established, over 40% of schools replied that such a need was not communicated to them. On the other hand, in the vast majority of schools in which councils could be found, the initiative for their creation came from the principals or from the teachers' councils. In only five cases was the situation different (Śliwerski 2013, pp. 201–203). This suggests that many Polish schools do not see the need to democratize school life, which unfortunately impacts the evaluation of their culture. That, which is obligatory, is implemented. If schools are required to have a student self-government and a parents' council, those bodies are functioning. But since legal regulations fail to give these authorities significant powers, their role varies, often having much more in common with tokenism than actual participation.

ICCS research from 2009 shows that the majority of Polish teachers (65.3%) leave the burden of teaching civic education in the sole hands of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) teachers. At the same time, the most important goal of civic education for civics teachers is to disseminate knowledge about the rights and obligations of the citizens, and among the changes they proposed it is postulated, above all, that the number of hours in the field of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society) be increased. Of course it is worth emphasising that these results come from 2009. Unfortunately, there is no newer research regarding this problem. However, civics teachers express formal approach to teaching *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society). They connect it with different features of school system like: low position of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* among others school subject or cons for testing as a tool of evaluation of student competencies (Wywiół, 2017).



Besides, results of research regarding monitoring of implementation of school curricula (Choińska-Mika & Sitek, 2015) indicate that education in Polish schools ends up running into difficulties in terms of coherence between the assumptions defined within a specialized subject and education on the whole. Furthermore, it is considered as something that decidedly does not exceed the scope of specific school subjects.

6 A thin and functionalistic conception of democracy

The analysis presented above can be summarized as follows:

- Within the framework of civic education in Polish schools, emphasis was placed on knowledge and on its adaptive and reconstructive function. A much smaller number of requirements in the area of skills and attitudes, combined with “overloaded” national core curricula leads us to assume that skills and attitudes that fit into civic competences will be marginalized in school education as those that are not subject to testing.
- Implementation of civic education through all its possible paths, that is, as a separate subject, cross-curricular theme, and integrated with other subjects (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017, pp. 29–37) is assumed in the core curriculum, but a thorough analysis shows that social and civic competences are concentrated in only a handful of subjects. Furthermore, the implementation of civic education by means of a separate subject starts relatively late at the age of 14–15, and is implemented for a very limited amount of hours for three years. In addition, the responsibility for civic education is primarily relegated to the teachers of *wiedza o społeczeństwie* (knowledge about society), which ultimately suggests that its cross-curricular character is rather doubtful.
- Based on the analysis of social and civic competences included in the core curriculum, it can be seen that civic education in school focuses primarily on historical knowledge, which further underlies its reconstructive character. The adaptive character of civic education is indicated by the fact that the core curriculum highlights knowledge about the political and legal system at the national level, and although the skill of critical judgment is also significant here, it does not concern political and legal issues. Also marginalized is knowledge concerning various forms of civic opposition. It is also worth noting that although there are relatively many requirements in the core curriculum related to the knowledge of social problems, processes, and phenomena, they are unfortunately found in essentially two subjects and only at the level of post-primary school.
- Deficiencies in terms of skills and attitudes assumed in the core curricula indicate that neither has there been an establishment of active citizenship, nor has any emphasis been placed on shaping attitudes. Seemingly optimistic results of the 2017 Eurydice report, which indicated the presence of parents’ and students’ representation in schools, acquire a different tenor when we add to this a legal analysis of the construction of these bodies. It turns out that they do not have significant legal competences, which means that the

degree of democratization of each school depends on its individual culture. This is confirmed by the research results, on the basis of which it can be concluded that the majority of schools create very limited opportunities for the experience of democracy. There is also a relatively high discrepancy between student and teacher ratings, which in turn suggests that any need for change in this area might go unnoticed.

It is important to note that the analyses presented above are limited in that they generally refer to the assumed shape of civic education in Poland, enriched by research results that shed light on the problem of democratization of school life. For this reason, the following conclusions should be treated as incorporated in the analysed sources.

Civic education in Polish school does not fit into any of the models built on the classic concepts of citizenship. It is not a model of education based on the civic republican concept of citizenship (Hoskins et al., 2015, p. 433). Although present here are national issues and patriotism, while issues of diversity remain overlooked, marginalized, or at the very least overshadowed (this effect may be further strengthened by the current political context), civic activity and participation are not emphasized at all. All the more, the Polish model of civic education does not fit into the cosmopolitan/post-national/critical conception of citizenship (Hoskins et al., 2015, p. 434; Delanty 2000). An analysis in the context of the types of citizenship proposed by Westheimer and Kahne is also hampered by the lack of exposure to civic activism, whether from the perspective of a personally responsible citizen, a participatory citizen, or a justice-oriented citizen (Westheimer & Kahne 2004). The adaptive character of Polish civic education may, however, be conducive to the formation of law-abiding members of society, which, when combined with charitable actions taking place in schools, may eventually approach the personally responsible type of citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne 2004, p. 3, 27). Nor can it be said that civic education in Polish school is based on the liberal model of citizenship (Hoskins et al., 2015, p. 433), although it is certainly a model of education that is based on a thin conception of democracy. This kind of conception “typically envisions democracy as an accomplishment and as a neutral political system,” not as a way of life in Dewey’s understanding (De Groot, Veugelers, 2015, p. 29). A model of civic education based on such an understanding of democracy is usually referred to as the socialisation and functionalist model, in which individuals are inserted into a specific political and social order (Biesta 2009b, p. 153). This is precisely how civic education in Poland may be characterized. It is also worth emphasizing that civic education in Polish school is rather individualistic, although this effect may result from the “language” of the core curriculum (formulating learning outcomes). However, if we assume that the model of civic education based on the liberal concept of democracy should emphasize the citizen’s right to engage in civic activities, and refer to basic liberal values (Hoskins et al., 2015, p. 433), it is difficult to see Polish civic education as one of its examples. It is neither learning in a democratic environment, nor preparation for being a citizen, understood as the development of civic competences within a full structure (knowledge, skills,

attitudes), not necessarily through the proper organization of the school environment, but through the creation of training scenarios. It is learning about democracy and citizenship.

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Endnotes

¹ See more about history of civic education in Poland in: Kopińska & Solarczyk-Szwec, 2016.

² Wiedza o społeczeństwie, program nauczania dla szkoły podstawowej, nr DKO-4014-9/96 z 27.09. 1996 r., WSiP, Warszawa 1998 [knowledge about society, primary school curriculum, no. DKO-4014-9/96 from September 27, 1996, WSiP, Warsaw 1998]; Wiedza o społeczeństwie, program nauczania dla szkoły średniej (liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum i liceum zawodowego), nr DKO-4015-11/96, WSiP, Warszawa 1997 [Knowledge about society, secondary school curriculum (high school, technical school, and vocational school), no. DKO-4015-11/96, WSiP, Warsaw 1997].

³ General education schools of the second degree, three-years for youth aged 13–15.

⁴ The structure of education in Poland, taking into account changes resulting from the reform introduced in the 2017/18 school year—see European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2018/19: Schematic Diagrams*. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. p. 23; https://eurydice.org/pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/the_structure_of_the_european_education_systems_2018_19.pdf

⁵ See more about parental organization in Poland: Starzyński, 2005.

⁶ Schools are supervised by educational superintendents.

⁷ This report was created at the request of the Polish Commissioner for Children’s Rights by a research team from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. 3328 students from the 7th grade, 617 parents of 7th-grade students, 959 7th-grade teachers, and 76 primary school principals participated in the study—press release on the subject: (Anna Zalewska: Wystąpienie RPD ws. siódmoklasistów oparte na subiektywnych ocenach, 2018 [Anna Zalewska: The statement presented by the Commissioner for Children’s Rights on seventh graders based on subjective assessments, 2018]), <https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/edukacja/anna-zalewska-wystapienie-rpd-ws-siodmoklasistow-oparte-na-subiektywnych-ocenach,112564.html>.

⁸ Dzieci z 7. klasy są przeciążone nauką, pracami domowymi i doświadczają przemocy. Nowy raport, 2018 [Children in the seventh grade are overloaded with learning, domestic work, and experience violence. New



report, 2018], <https://www.o2.pl/artykul/dzieci-z--klasy-sa-przeciazone-nauczaniem-domowymi-i-doswiadczaja-przemocy-nowy-raport-6286443194808449a>.

⁹ Anna Zalewska: Wystąpienie RPD ws. siódmoklasistów oparte na subiektywnych ocenach, 2018 [Anna Zalewska: The statement presented by the Commissioner for Children’s Rights on seventh graders based on subjective assessments, 2018]], <https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/edukacja/anna-zalewska-wystapienie-rpd-ws-siodmoklasistow-oparte-na-subiektywnych-ocenach,112564.html>.

¹⁰ “Tęczowy Piątek” w szkołach. MEN przeprowadzi kontrole, 2018 [“Rainbow Friday” in schools. MEN will carry out checks, 2018], <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/teczowy-piatek-w-szkolach-men-przeprowadzi-kontrole,880215.htm>, MEN: Jeżeli Tęczowy Piątek zostanie zorganizowany w szkole z pominięciem procedur, będzie to złamanie prawa, 2018 [MEN: If Rainbow Friday will be organized at school without following procedure, such action will break the law, 2018], <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/5114454.MEN-Jezeli-Teczowy-Piatek-zostanie-zorganizowany-w-szkole-z>.

¹¹ Napisz do Pani Minister Zalewskiej w sprawie Tęczowego Piątku, 2018 [Write to Minister Zalewska regarding Rainbow Friday, 2018], <https://kph.org.pl/napisz-do-pani-minister-zalewskiej-ws-teczowego-piatku/>.

¹² The method of collecting data is finding secondary sources (Rubacha 2008, p. 157–164) and documents. The method of analysing data is content analysis. The research sample includes:

- Decree by the Minister of National Education of March 28, 2017, concerning the framework plans for teaching public schools (MEN, 2017);
- Decree by the Minister of National Education of February 7, 2012, concerning the framework plans for teaching public schools, as amended (MEN, 2012);
- Annex No. 2 to the decree of the Minister of National Education of February 14, 2017, concerning the core curriculum of preschool education and the core curriculum of general education for primary school, including pupils with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, general education for technical school of the first degree, general education for vocational school, as well as general education for post-secondary school (MEN, 2017a);
- Annex No. 1 to the decree of the Minister of National Education of January 30, 2018, concerning the core curriculum of general education for general secondary school, technical secondary school, and vocational secondary school of the second degree (MEN, 2018);
- Publications showing results of research on civic education in Poland.



¹³ The structure of education in Poland—see European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018. The Structure of the European Education Systems 2018/19: Schematic Diagrams. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. p. 23; <https://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/the-structure-of-the-european-education-systems-2018-19.pdf>

¹⁴ For example, in a class with a humanistic profile, the extended scope of the curriculum for the subject of wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society) can be implemented.

¹⁵ If they choose to do so, they declare whether they want to take the exam in the basic or extended scope.

¹⁶ The scope of the subject of wiedza o społeczeństwie (knowledge about society), implemented in existing schools of the old type (3-year high school, 4-year technical school) – see Kopińska, Solarczyk-Szwec, 2016, pp. 69-75.

¹⁷ The results presented in this part of article come from the research project which was conducted in 2018 by researchers from the Department of School Education in the Faculty of Education Sciences, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Poland: Dr hab. Violetta Kopińska, Prof. dr hab. Hanna Solarczyk-Szwec, Prof. dr hab. Beata Przyborowska, Dr Izabela Symonowicz-Jabłońska, Dr Kinga Majchrzak, Dr Iwona Murawska, mgr Sandra Lesiakowska. The aim of this project was to identify and evaluate social and civic competences included in the national core curricula of Polish schools. The first edition of this project (regarding the previously applicable core curricula) took place in 2015. Selected results were published, among others, in: Kopińska, Solarczyk-Szwec, 2017.

¹⁸ We created a catalogue of 122 analytical categories constructed on the basis of literature (Argyle, 2002; Biesta, 2009b, 2011; Hoskins et al., 2008; Martowska, 2007, 2012; Martowska & Matczak, 2013; Riggio, 1986), education and political documents (Raport referencyjny, 2013; Strategia rozwoju kapitału społecznego 2020, 2013; Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning), and also the analysed core curricula. Analytical categories which are a part of the catalogue are the learning outcomes in the areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which belong to the vast area of social and civic competences.

¹⁹ These results do not include the so-called mixed requirements that combine the area of knowledge with the area of skills and / or attitudes.

²⁰ Although the category also covers knowledge about history and cultural heritage outside Europe, the learning outcomes contained in the school curriculum basically relate to Europe.

²¹ Poland did not take part in ICCS 2016 edition. Funding of the research was refused by Polish authorities.



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