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Education for Democratic Citizenship in Poland

Abstract

The civic education is one of the biggest challenges of every nation, but in Poland – as a post-communist country – the upbringing of young generation to life in a democratic and modern world, is essential. Education, and so education for democratic citizenship, is very important, even decisive force of development of societies – it can flourish or decline the development. The purpose of this paper is to identify and explain development and evolution of civic education in Poland at different phases of the systemic transition. Additionally, the authors point out the barriers of civic culture's development and abilities of institutions, which enable civic education in Poland. Thus, the paper analyses constellations of actors concerning on the one hand factors eroding education for democratic citizenship from schools and on the other hand those which unevenly and constantly building, grass-rooting and enhancing civic education at all levels of educational process.

Keywords

Poland, education, civil society

Education for democratic citizenship is a societal project, an uncertain reality in a permanent tension. It is a project and a reality to be built and rebuilt constantly, a process everywhere in transition. Education and schooling are very important, even decisive forces for the development of societies – it can support or prevent the development. The purpose of this paper is to identify and explain the development and evolution of civic education in Poland at different phases of the systemic transition. Thus, the paper analyses the constellation of actors concerning on the one hand factors removing education for democratic citizenship from schools and on the other hand those unevenly and constantly introducing, implementing and improving civic education at all levels of the educational process in Poland.

The year 1989 in Poland was a turning point for the whole Polish society; it determined a birth of a new system and the beginning of the changes. From this moment social reality in Poland, with the rules under construction, entered the way of slowly but thoroughly breaking transformations. The transition of the system's structure obviously did not remain without impact on the lives of individuals. Some of them were feeling like 'fishes in the water', others could not (and some still cannot) free themselves from old habits and take advantage of new perspectives and options.

The ongoing change, which we have to deal with, throughout almost twenty years, is deep and all-embracing. The transition from a socialist system to democracy concerns all dimensions of the Pole's lives, thus furthermore, the adaptation to the transition needs similar 'evolutions' of individuals. To fully exercise the new possibilities and rights, which were created for the citizens in a democratic system, Polish people had to learn the rules of its functioning and also absorb a culture which we can name the civic culture. It is a difficult process since democracy turns out to release civic culture and opens the way to its development. But if society does not make use of these possibilities, then democracy will remain underdeveloped and flawed. As Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński (2005, 164-165) wrote: "Civic culture and democracy function in a

symbiotic relation. Democracy functions unfitly under the conditions of low civic culture, while civic culture without a democratic system cannot develop".

Therefore, there is a synergy of civic culture and democracy. In accordance with this assumption, we can try to characterise civic culture in society (its intensity), and in doing so we can try to answer the question of the condition of a democratic system. In that case one should take into account:

− Predominating attitudes towards other actors of the public sphere (acceptance-tolerance-discourage-distrust);
− Level of public life competence (does everyone have the same level of knowledge and 'institutional know-how');
− Two approaches: particularistic vs. public sake, public 'good'
− Obeying formal rules in public life – do individuals accept these rules and their breaking by others (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005, 161).

Results of many pieces of research concerning the condition of civic activity and civic society in Poland are not optimistic. The spread of civic attitudes and behaviour was very limited in Polish society. Surveys of the level of trust, relations to others, to the institutions or to the social processes and also studies on the feeling of control of one's own life are good examples of this phenomenon. A high level of trust is indispensable for the creation of social networks, making people able and open for co-operation, and it is also essential for the development of social capital. But as it isturned out in the European Social Survey (ESS), the percentage of people trusting others is about 19 percent in Poland. Poles are the most distrustful nation among European societies[1]. Likewise, the belief in one's own abilities and the feeling of being equal while doing something on one's own is very low. 26 percent of Poles do not believe that she/he can help people who are in need or resolve some problems of their community through the co-operation with others (BS/19/2006, CBOS). In one of the research reports of The Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS)[2] it is said: *"After fifteen years of a democratic system in force only less then every seventh Pole (...) has the feeling that this, what happened in Poland, in some way depends on her/him. By far most people think that ordinary citizens do not have influence on what is happening in the country"* (BS/101/2004 CBOS). Under these circumstances it is difficult to require people to willingly take up any political or civic actions, if they do not believe in its advisability and efficacy. The Polish survey 'Social Diagnosis 2003 Objective and Subjective Quality of Life in Poland'[3] also supplies interesting data dealing, among other things, with the issue of concerns about public goods. Thus, the fewest people care about the fact that someone does not pay taxes, is a free rider and bribes, and most people care about someone receiving a benefit for no reason or not paying rent. 40-56 per cent of the people surveyed are indifferent to what will happen with the public sake (Czapiński/ Panek 2006, 195). Taking into consideration the mentioned aspects, we can say that the level of civic culture in Polish societyis still too low. We can still rather talk about the need of learning civic culture in Poland than about finishing the process.

It is crucial, in this context, precisely to examine the barriers of learning civic culture detected in Polish society. One of such obstacles, which need to be stressed, is the experience of the socialistic past. For many decades the normative system of real socialism was carefully shaped. One of its dimensions – official norms – was created by propagandist actions, education and ideological indoctrination. Another dimension – *unofficial norms* – was created as a spontaneous reaction and protective adaptation of

[1] In comparison, in Hungary the percentage of people trusting others is 23,4 percent, the highest is in Denmark 74,5 percent (ESS 2002).
[2] CBOS is a publicly funded independent research centre established in 1982. It is one of the largest and most renowned public opinion research institutes in Poland, http://www.cbos.pl/EN/cbos_en.shtml
[3] http://www.diagnoza.com/index-en.html

society in the internal clash with imposed conditions of life. As a result of the mechanisms of the socialistic system, which characterised the lives of individuals in the People's Republic of Poland (PRL), social reality was divided between the *official* and *non-official world* governed by different norms. Together – propaganda and the conditions of life created a characteristic culture syndrome, which can be named *homo sovieticus*. In other words, the personality of individuals living in a socialistic system was shaped as an authoritarian one (not adequate for a democratic system) – willingly subjected to the power of authority, dependent on the system and working for its reinforcement (Sztompka 2003).

The collapse of the system caused an overnight diametrical change of the cultural expectations. The new democratic system based on a capitalistic market and democratic politics, and the freedom of thinking had introduced totally different rules and begun to demand choices (how to act in social reality). This was even more difficult for the *Homo sovieticus* – the most important type of personality in the era of communism has been in total opposition to the new type of personality generated by capitalism and democracy, namely the *Homo oeconomicus (vel domecratus)*. The enslaved and 'deformed' society has not been able to quickly and easily adapt to the new reality. In consequence, nowadays Poles seems to live in a more and more multifaceted and peculiar reality plunged into anomy. New values have originated (objectives), but norms to achieve them are still incoherent. The differences between these two cultures: real socialism and democratic, market culture are presented in the pair of oppositions in table 1.

Table 1: Two types of social attitudes

Homo sovieticus	*Homo democratus/economicus*
– Collective – Egalitarian – Common – Assurance and safe – Destiny – State care – System blaming – Passive privacy – Rooted in the past	– Individual – Meritocratic – Successful – Risky – Self-made man – Act on one's own – Self responsibility – Public participation – Future-orientated

Source: Sztompka 2003

Thus, we can sum up at this stage that one of the barriers of developing citizenship in Poland is the fear of the not internalized, emergent ground rules. It also relates to values such as cultural norms and objectives which are popular and dominate in social reality. It is worth to add that during the social realism period even the concept of civility has lost its traditional, original meaning. After the collapse of the communist rule, the problem was recreation of its signification and consciousness among polish society (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005). Thus, the transition process in Poland had to respond to the need of changing the whole society with civic socialization, in order to learn and adapt to the new reality. Therefore, creating self-responsibility, knowing the rules of the game and participating in society seems to be essential up to this day. An individual, a 'product' of the civic socialisation in liberal democracy, should learn to obey the rules of the democratic game and actively use this knowledge. Furthermore she/he should also feel the efficiency of this practice and be tolerant towards different points of view. It shows that in the case of post socialistic societies, as for example Poland, the civic education process is extremely complicated and difficult.

Another crucial issue is the quality and abilities of institutions (agendas) which enable civic education. It has to be mentioned that the process of learning citizenship begins in the family and this life-curriculum has a big influence on the future and the adult life of an individual. In primary socialisation an individual's characteristics are crafted. Individuals can be outspoken or, on the contrary withdrawn and distrustful towards others. This attributes have obvious effects on shaping civil society, which just needs a dose of resourcefulness, self-confidence and also trust and willingness for co-operation with others. There are a lot of analyses which prove that in many biographies of social activists a plot of 'family tradition' appears (Gliński/ Lewenstein/ Siciński 2002; Wasilewski 2006). Every element of Family – its type, relations between family members and ways of spending free time – is crucial and passed down from generation to generation. The role of the family in Polish reality is very strong, hence we should take into account the past, presence and the future of a single family member.

A school is the most significant institution, where individuals achieve both knowledge and ability to utilise it. The school and its program for education in Poland have been evolving during the process of systemic transition. Currently there is a complex educational program concerning citizenship as a part of an obligatory curriculum recommended by the Ministry of National Education. In accordance with 'The decree of Ministry of National Education and Sports from 26th February 2002' civic education is obligatory at every level of education: from primary school, gymnasium to high school. Furthermore 'Knowledge of Society' is one of the subjects which can be chosen in the secondary school leaving exam.

Narrowly, at the primary school level, from first to third class so-called 'integrated teaching' lessons are leaded (which are not typical lessons but thematic blocks). Pupils learn, *inter alia*, about positive relations with others, attachment to local community, region, country and basic citizen's duties and rights. From fourth to sixth class, the realisation of 'educational paths' begins – one of these paths, so-called 'Upbringing to live in society', connects various topics and disciplines with citizenship education. It consists of three modules: (1) upbringing in family, (2) regional education, (3) patriotic and civic upbringing. In Gymnasium the curriculum implies continuation of the 'educational paths' (e.g. regional education and European education). Additionally, the 'Knowledge of society' classes are conducted. During this subject pupils gain knowledge about activity in an economy, society, local community and family. At the level of high school there is still the continuation of the 'educational paths' as well as the 'Knowledge of society' classes. We

should point out that civic attitudes and abilities are not only learned in classes of 'Knowledge of Society'. Just as important (and sometimes even more important) is the type of social relations in school, which strongly influences teenagers. On the one hand relations between peers are essential, on the other hand contacts with teachers and tutors (do they inspire their pupils to be independent and creative?) are important. It is common knowledge that many of the Polish schools inoculate pupils with an attitude of 'not to stick one's neck out'[4]. Open relations are restricted by the traditional arrangement of school classrooms with a clear division between pupils and a distanced teacher who is looking down on them. But it is not a rule. Schools, head masters and teachers are under a strong impact of many social actors and ideas, which can also change this reality. In that case an interesting issue is the common definitions of citizenship in public discourse. They can be different, and undoubtedly there are many varied views as well as political and social attitudes. It is impossible to present all of them. The most important one is the dual portrait of 'an ideal citizenship', created by two organisations in the educational field:

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[4] That means that pupils should not protest and rebel because it may be a risk for them.

− As created by the ex-Ministry of Education led by a leader of a far-right coalition party;
− And as created by non-governmental organisations like the Citizenship Education Centre.

The differences are overwhelming in terms of the content of programs, forms of organisations, roles and missions of teachers, relations between a teacher and a student, relations with local communities. 'An ideal citizen' is a cliché which helps to present the conditioning and horizon of civic education in Poland (Table 2).

Table 2: Two kinds of citizen

Citizen constructed by ex-Minister of Education (Giertych's citizen)	*Citizen* constructed by NGO (Centre for Citizenship Education)
− *patria* orientated − based on national (nationalistic) tradition − civic duties more than civic rights − activity based on nationalistic values − *Teacher as a mentor, an unquestionable authority; order giver;*	− wider concept of citizenship − free and creative thinking − civic rights and abilities − activity based on creativity, self consciousness and democratic values − *Teacher as local animator; sustainer of basic values, rules; partner.*

Source: Own analyses

Thus, we can say that in the Polish reality we can also find two opposing conceptions of citizenship education inspired by two ideas of a citizen. Firstly, the authoritarian one sees the citizen as a conservative individual, who legitimizes and accepts current institutions and social norms. This idea is still closely connected and has some common aspects with the homo *sovieticus* public personality and finds supporters specially (but not only) among the older generation. Secondly, the democratic one considers the citizen as a liberal individual, who critically appraises societal institutions, structures and processes. This leads us to the conclusion that that kind of non-governmental organisations, which Tocqueville named 'schools of democracy' (see Tocqueville 1945) are very significant with regard to learning citizenship in Poland. Many of them are schools of democracy and community in the sense that thanks to their activities social interactions are strengthened. NGOs help to create horizontal ties of trust and reciprocity. They also contribute to the creation of a community spirit and, what is likewise important, protect democratic values (Salamon/ Hems/ Chinnock 2000, 7).

Except the influence on its members, activists or people affiliated to them, non-governmental organizations also influence its beneficiaries in a more deliberate and coordinated way. There are many organizations in Poland, of which one of the main purposes is propagating civil values and shaping abilities based on them. Many of these organizations are realizing projects or entire programs which are supposed to raise civil culture in specific social groups or in the whole society. The Center for Citizenship Education (CCE) is an excellent example of such an organization – a non-governmental educational foundation, established in 1994. The main aim of CCE is the promotion of 'civic knowledge, practical skills and attitudes necessary in the building of a democratic state founded on the rule of law and civil society. CCE also operates a non-profit teacher-training institute registered with the Ministry of Education and Sports.

In addition to developing innovative school curricula in the fields of civics, history, law and economic education and introducing them into Polish schools, the Center for Citizenship Education is in charge of a range of activities targeting teachers, students and local authorities'[5]. One of the first programs initiated by the Center is 'Civic Education at Local Government Schools' (KOSS). The objective of this project is to encourage students to active learning through discussions, simulations, case studies, individual and group projects. At the moment, KOSS is the most often used civic curriculum in the Polish gymnasium: every year more than 350,000 students use textbooks published by CCE. Another famous project implemented in cooperation with Poland's biggest daily Gazeta Wyborcza is 'A School with Class'. From 2002 to 2004 over 6 000 schools participated in its activities. The project promotes principles include the following: 'the school educates each student well, ensures fair assessment, teaches to think and understand the world, encourages involvement in social activities, helps the student develop self-confidence and prepares its students for the future'[6].

Complexity of socialization and education was of course inspiring for many sociologists but also for pedagogues and political scientists in Poland. In the field of sociology the concept of the political or civic education was raised not only in the democratic context. There was some investigation during the socialistic regime, like this one made by Barbara Rudnicka-Frątczak published in 1990 in the book titled *Political socialization in family in the circumstances of crisis* (*Socjalizacja polityczna w rodzinie w warunkach kryzysu*). Nowadays, some interesting examples are made by Barbara Fatyga [7], Krzysztof Kiciński[8], or publication edited by Krzysztof Koseła[9]. Interesting aspects regarding socialization were also presented by Hanna Świda-Ziemba in her systematic publications about the attitudes of polish teenagers[10]. Recently, the comparative investigations are conducted by sociologists and pedagogues in the framework of the 'International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievements' projects [11] in Poland. There are also some initiatives inspired by polish non-governmental organizations. For example the Institute of Public Affairs[12] leads the investigations 'Civic Education in Poland - an attempt to adapt selected elements of the German experience' about the possibilities of the implementation of German concepts of civic education. Thus, the studies about the role of the family and the school in Poland were realized by many environments, but there are also still many questions to answer about polish civic education as a part of the wider process – civic socialization. One of these questions, which is an intersting topic regarding to further investigation,concerns the stability and popularity of the concepts of civil society and civility in polish society. It is not possible, definitively to say that one of the civic education types dominates in Poland. It depends on what kind of case study is chosen, which organization, school or even which class is taken into account. There are a lot of examples of active schools,

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[5] http://www.ceo.org.pl/portal/english

[6] http://www.ceo.org.pl/portal/english

[7] E.g. Youth without wings. Teenagers in town (Młodość bez skrzydeł. Nastolatki w małym mieście) Warsaw, UW ISNS 2001, White book of polish youth – two trues about activity (Biała księga młodzieży polskiej – dwie prawdy o aktwności), Warsaw, Biuro Młodzieży MENiS, Ośrodek Badań Młodzieży UW ISNS, Zakłd Badań naukowych PTS 2005 and many others.

[8] Youht towards problems of polish democracy (Młodzież wobec problemów polskiej demokracji), Warsaw LTW, 2001.

[9] Youht about market and democracy (Młodzież szkolna o rynku i demokracji), Warsaw, Oficyna Naukowa, 1999.

[10] Youth of the end of millenium, the picture of the world and of the being in the world (Młodzież końca tysiąclecia, obraz świata i bycia w świecie) Warsaw, UW ISNS 2000, Youth in the new world, (Młodzi w nowym świecie), Cracow, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005.

[11] It is an independent, non-partisan public policy think tank., established in 1995 to support modernisation reforms and to provide a forum for informed debate on social and political issues. It conducts research as well as societal analysis and presents policy recommendations.

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teachers and pupils who are involved in many projects like the 'European Club'[13] or the mentioned 'School with the Class', but there are also examples of schools which prefer other relations and which reduce their activity to a minimum. Considering that, the analysis of different types of socialization's agendas and their knowledge's transfer interesting is another intersting research subject. Finally, the influence of the globalization process should be taken into attention. We can observe some changes of attitudes' unification, especially when we compare the youngest generation of Poles to other nations [14].

To summarise, citizenship education is affected by many factors in Poland. On the one hand there is an intense need for that kind of education at all levels of society, on the other hand the content of handed down knowledge still varies a lot and is often contradictory. It is also worth remembering the role of the family and the school in civil socialization. The family and the school simply play the first-rate role because of a low participation in non-governmental organizations in Poland (in comparison to other European countries)[15]. Last of all it is also worth realising the difficult situation in socialist Poland in which generations of Poles were brought up. They must first learn to cope with the new, democratic world, and only then they will be able to pass their knowledge and experience on the next generations. Beyond doubt, the further change will be an outcome of co-operation among many actors, as Pacewicz wrote: "Before the collapse, the communist school was treated as an arena for the state propaganda. Obviously school is not the only provider of civic education; for my generation, families, peer groups, local communities and church were the main sources of civic culture. Unfortunately the experience of a long lasting rejection of the official state, civil disobedience or even dissident movements can't be translate easily into a positive version of civic culture and education. At the beginning there were no curricula, no textbooks, no credible teachers and no recent experience to build on. This has changed quickly thanks to the efforts of both educational authorities and non-governmental organisation" (Pacewicz 2004, 1).

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[13] School European Clubs are meant to popularize knowledge of and stimulate interest in the process of European integration among secondary school pupils, more information on: http://www1.ukie.gov.pl/WWW/en.nsf/0/B110E4C38CC0D5DBC1256F12003D03BA?Open

[14] E.g. Siemienska, Renata *Intergenerational Differences in Political Values and Attitudes in Stable and New Democracies*, "International Journal of Comparative Sociology" 43, Sage Publications 2002.

[15] See for example: Salamon, Lester M., Wojciech Sokolowski and Regina List, *Global Civil Society. An Overwiev*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, 2003.

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Links to Institutions

Centrum Badania Opinii Spolcznej (http://www.cbos.pl/EN/cbos_en.shtml)
Center For Citizenship Education (http://www.ceo.org.pl/portal/english)
Ministry of National Educations (http://www.men.gov.pl/menis_en/news/news.php)
The Council for Social Monitoring (http://www.diagnoza.com/index-en.html)
The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED) (http://www.edudemo.org.pl/pl1/index.php)
The European Social Survey (http://ess.nsd.uib.no/)
Urzad Komitetu Integraziji Europejskije (http://www1.ukie.gov.pl)