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## **The contribution of CiCe's databases and publications to the development of national curricula: the Estonian case**

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### **Introduction**

This paper analyses issues of citizenship education from the point of view of post-socialist countries, with a particular focus on Estonia. It begins with a comparative survey of the problems related to the re-conceptualisation of the meaning and organisation of civic education in the post-socialist countries. It then presents a theoretical analysis of the notion, content, and ideology of civics as of a school subject, referring to publications on the practice of citizenship education in different European countries and CiCe's<sup>1</sup> databases. The paper ends with a survey of the CiCe databases' appropriateness, reliability, and applicability for the development of national curricula.

### **Restoring civic education in Estonian schools**

With collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries belonging to its zone of influence and those incorporated into this former totalitarian superpower regained a chance to restore democratic societies. This transference from ideological totalitarianism to democracy called for radical changes in all spheres of public life, and particularly in the field of education. First attempts of democratisation often failed, as people was not ready for such fundamental changes (Mestenhauser, 1993). A period of transfer was needed to accept and internalise the values practised in democratic societies.

As evidence of the need for this kind of transfer period in the field of education, one might consider the multiplicity of curriculum reforms which occurred in the former socialist countries during a very short period of time. For example, Estonia is already starting its third curriculum renewal since the restoration of its independence in 1991. A transfer period from one ideology to another was needed, even in those post-socialist countries that had not been directly incorporated in the former Soviet Union. For instance, Hungary needed many years from the beginning of liberalisation to fully replace its educational ideology with a new one, and the new Hungarian National Curriculum was only introduced in 1995 (Goscál, 1999, p 103). The process of curriculum renewal in the countries that were once part of the former Soviet Union was even more painful. During the fifty years of the Soviet regime, the Baltic countries had had to apply a centralised curriculum originating from Moscow, and had lost their own traditions of curriculum design.

The reorganisation of social studies in the new curriculum called for many major decisions in Estonia. The first difficulty for the group responsible for the design of Social Subjects syllabi was to reach agreement about which subjects belonged to the block of Social Subjects. There was debate as to whether Civics should be treated as a separate subject, or be integrated with other Social Subjects. It was eventually decided to consider

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<sup>1</sup> CiCe – Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe – is an ERASMUS thematic network joining educators from 27 European countries and coordinated by North London University

Civics as a component of the social subjects block, integrated with other subjects in the majority of elementary and middle school classes, and taught separately in the fourth, eighth and ninth, and twelfth grades. (Valdmaa, 1996, p 53).

Because there was no tradition or experience of civic education, Estonian educators started curriculum innovation with an analysis of the experience of western democratic countries. In this the publications of the USA National Council for Social Sciences and of the International Educational Association (Walker, 1976) were extensively used.

### **Theoretical background of civic and citizenship education in democratic countries**

The papers presented at CiCe's Conference in London (1999) and CiCe's survey of civics curricula in different countries allow us to make some generalisations about the traditions, content and theoretical background of this subject.

#### *Big variations in terming of the subject*

It is clear that there are quite significant differences between countries, and even between educators from the same country, in the terminology used to describe civic and social studies syllabi. For example, in the collection of papers presented at the London conference terms like education for citizenship, education for democracy, social and political education, the transmission of human values, civics, citizenship education, civic education, ideological education, social, personal and health education, were used (*Young Citizens in Europe*, 1999). For the sake of successful communication it is always necessary to agree what is meant by a specific term or, when talking about an entire syllabus, to identify or describe its content.

#### *Differences and common areas in civics curricula between countries*

The content and organisation of civics curricula vary a great deal from country to country. In some the subject is taught within the framework of other disciplines, while others teach it as a separate discipline. Sometimes different approaches are used in the same state: in Sweden the general guidelines for the subject allow for the use of different approaches (Valdmaa, 1996, p 40–41). The content and organisation of civics also depend on its goals in each country. For instance, the aims of civics for Grade 6 are quite different in Estonia, Greece and Hungary. Therefore it makes little sense to compare objectives, level, and content of the subject at a specific grade level; a comparison of entire syllabi or programmes at specific school levels would be more appropriate. Making comparisons in this way shows some common aims for civic education can be found in different countries. For instance, Ross suggests that three broad sets of statements about citizen education usually emerge; these presume that pupils

- (1) know about and understand society and its institutions;
- (2) develop the capacity to act as 'good' citizens and members of society; and
- (3) become reflective and critical participants in the social life (Ross, 2000, p 95–96).

#### *Civics as a school subject, which depends on the political condition*

Focussing on the experiences of the former socialist countries in civic education, with their inevitable and radical changes, may give the misleading impression that those countries which have long democratic traditions do not experience any problems in this area. In fact, civics - more than any other school subject - has always been influenced by

the policy of the specific country. In federal countries like Germany and the United States the status of this subject depends on the legislation of a specific *länder* or state. Civics was removed from the English curriculum for some time, but is being reinstated in the 2000/01 school year (Holden, 1999, p 133). In some countries like Sweden the content of civics in school curricula has been modified following the leftist or rightist orientations of the government of the day (Valdmaa, 1996, p 29). Fumat points out that citizenship education in France appears to be of greater import in troubled times, when a society becomes unsure of its foundations, or when it feels an increasing threat of dissent or has other difficulties in maintaining its identity (Fumat, 1999, p 107). Freitas's report on the history of citizenship education in Portugal notes that civics as a school subject was introduced along with the establishment of republican regimes in 1911 and 1974, i.e. in the periods of radical social changes (1999).

### **Ideologies underlying the content of civics**

The content of civics is related to societal expectations of its future members' social competence. In countries with long democratic traditions it might be reasonable to expect that the educational objectives for civics were well established, but this is not the case: people's expectations of the democratic order and their understanding of democracy itself are constantly developing and become more articulated. Furthermore, the aims and content of civics - as well as those of the entire school curriculum - depend on society's understanding of the role of education. According to Johnson et al (1996, p 443) there are three philosophical concepts that prescribe the general orientation of the school and curriculum. The school can take the role of

1. reproduction, focusing on the simple transmission of nation's unquestioned cultural heritage to youth;
2. readjustment, gearing its curriculum to social usefulness and efficiency, and being concerned with preparing students for modern adult life by stressing civic training and social responsibility; or
3. reconstruction, favouring a curriculum that reflects the forefront of current thought and practice in society and strives to change the status quo.

As well as these epistemological orientations, the content of the civics curriculum depends on the concept of democracy. As Børghaug maintains, the classic distinction between representative and participatory democracy has quite different implications for civic education: '... representative democracy leads to the key identity as the informed voter. The informed voter knows what the various political parties stand for, he makes his choice, and he is between elections, informed about what power holders do and whether they keep their promises. ... Participatory democracy points to the key identity being the local-level activist. But this is an activist who also has an international perspective. He engages in actions, mass media, organisations, political parties, he is active at his work place and takes part in the democratic processes that he is entitled to be a part of' (Børghaug, 1999, p 39). Quite close to the described differences in the forms of democracy is the discrimination of two traditions in understanding of citizenship characterised as the liberal individualist and the civic republican (Holden, 1999).

## **The European dimension in civics**

The issue of European-ness in the national civics curricula should not be ignored in an analysis of the theoretical foundations of the content of the civics curricula in European countries belonging to or associated with the European Union. However the notion of European citizenship is a sensitive issue. Firstly, it was not established formally until the Maastricht Treaty on European Union was signed in 1992. Secondly, European citizenship is not something that should replace national citizenship. The *Green Paper on European Citizenship* (1993) states: 'Education systems should educate for citizenship; and here Europe is not a dimension which replaces others, but one that enhances them'. Analysing the present status of the theme of European citizenship in school curricula Ross concluded 'It is not about young citizens *for* Europe, or even about young citizens *of* Europe ... No state appears yet to be *of* Europe: at best, it is a citizenship that acknowledges – amongst much else – a European dimension' (Ross, 1999, p 1). At the present level of development of the European Union it is more reasonable to talk about a European dimension in the member states' national curricula than about education for European citizenship.

## **The contribution of CiCe databases for developing national curricula of civic education**

In addition to the papers presented at the CiCe Conference in London (1999) the CiCe databases at <http://livelink.unl.ac.uk/> provide valuable information on the social awareness of young people, on civics as a school subject, and on the higher education contribution to teaching of civics at schools in different countries.

### *Information available on national curricula*

The national syllabi of civics available on Livelink provide many opportunities for the comparison of aims of political socialisation in different European countries. Six countries in all (Estonia, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and the United Kingdom) have Livelink descriptions of their national curricula or syllabi for civics. In addition, the issues of the ideology and content of civics courses are quite thoroughly introduced and analysed in the collection of articles in *Young citizens in Europe* (1999), for Estonia (Valdmaa), France (Fumat), Greece (Chelmis), Hungary (Goscál), Ireland (Killeavy), Norway (Børghaug), Portugal (Freitas), and the UK (Holden). However the information on the national curricula is submitted at very different levels of generalisation. For example, the descriptions of Estonian, Greek, Hungarian, and Spanish curricula specify the main themes or outcomes of civics for all school levels or phases while the German national curriculum stipulates only general guidelines for designing *länder* curricula. The conceptual basis of these data and their collection needs to be reconsidered and standardised if a reliable comparative analysis of differences between countries is to be made.

### *Children's and teenagers' understanding of social and civic issues*

Many ideas on children's and teenagers' social awareness and competence can be drawn from the analysis of interviews carried out with children and youngsters. As with the national curricula, the contribution of different countries in submitting pupils' accounts is uneven: only seven countries supplied them in the age range from 7 to 18 years. A semi-structured interview as a method of study was used in the majority of cases. The interviews were carried out by different people with different background and did not

always follow a similar pattern of questioning; they do not all focus on the same issues and are reported in different forms. A preliminary analysis of these accounts revealed that the questions asked covered typically six focal areas:

1. attitudes towards childhood (and/or personal identity)
2. friendship relations and criteria
3. control and power
4. work and its meaning
5. political competence
6. national attitudes and respect for traditions and symbols.

These focal areas were unevenly covered in particular accounts. Some interviews dealt only with one or two focal areas, and more than one-third of interviews ignored problems of control and power and work and its meaning in the life of interviewees. The most neglected area was pupils' political competence. None of the interviews attempted to discover what pupils know or think about European integration or a common future. Also, very few focused on pupils' national awareness or political competence at a national level. The lack of this information hampers coming to any conclusions on pupils' competence in this field of social life and makes it difficult to compare the ideals and endeavours of national curricula and higher education courses with the achieved aims of social education.

#### *Information on higher education contribution*

Analysis of higher education training provision on the basis of data available on Livelink offers a rather episodic picture of the present situation: eleven countries and seventeen institutions are represented. Among EU countries, Austria and Ireland provide special higher education courses for civic, political and social education. The institutions of higher education in Greece, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom typically have topics of political and economical socialisation embedded in other courses for teacher and youth worker education. The situation is similar in the associated countries. In Estonia and Hungary special courses for dealing with issues of civic education are used in the preparation of future teachers, while the institutions of higher education in Cyprus, Czech Republic, and Ireland introduce topics of civic education and their teaching methodology in the framework of other education courses.

#### **Summary**

With the liberation from Soviet ideological pressure, educational reforms were initiated in many post-socialist countries at the beginning of the 1990s. The experience of democratic countries in this process has been helpful especially for re-establishing civic education in schools, and the materials from the CiCe Annual Conferences and databases make information about these experience more accessible. The analysis of these and other sources on civic education revealed that

1. there is great terminological variety in the labelling of this subject;
2. there are major cross-country variations in the content and organisation of the civic studies, although objectives are similar;.

3. civics is somehow an exceptional subject - the political background always influences its status and content and as its themes provide numerous opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching;
4. even in countries with long democratic traditions a renewal of civics syllabi is frequently needed as the aims of social education and concepts like the notion of democracy are permanently developing;
5. the European dimension in civic education is a controversial issue for all European countries as the notion of European identity is only now emerging and it is unclear how it relates to national identity.

CiCe's databases provide many opportunities for comparison of national civics syllabi and higher education contribution to civic education as well as for comparison of pupils accounts on their identity and citizenship awareness. In this sense these materials are invaluable for the curriculum renewal of countries in the process of social transfer like Estonia.

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