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Issues and Solutions in Citizenship Education – the Education of Values in Extracurricular Activities in the Crisis Situation in Latvia

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 21st century, due to the economic crisis there has developed a new situation in Latvia. Along with the formation of the civil society, a primitive consumerist attitude and material values are gaining an increasingly dominant position. The authors of the article proceed from the idea that the environment of consumer society and its values create mainly short-term desires with the help of mass media. However, the cultural policy of the state offers more sustainable policy planning values. Young people as social addressees adopt values through the coded content of school subjects and through participation in extracurricular activities.

Our analysis of regulatory education documents for general secondary schools – learning standards for school subjects – and the data of student surveys carried out in several Latvian schools, reveals contradictions between the values adopted by students themselves and the aims of value-education in the current system of education. Whilst the institutions of general education play a significant role in the development of social consciousness as the environment for citizenship education, an important aspect of the educational environment refers to extracurricular activities, whose main objective with regard to citizenship education is to actively facilitate the readiness of young people to live in the civil society.

This paper presents analysis of students' participation in extracurricular creative competitions aimed at the development of citizenship values: "The Experience of the Third Awakening in My Region (1986-1991) – The Latvian Heritage through Generations," the project "Virtual Encyclopaedia" and the ESF project "The Development and Implementation of Support Programmes."

Keywords: *citizenship education, values education, extracurricular activities*

Introduction

In the 21st century, the economic and political structure of the Latvian society has changed. The development of consumer society has promoted the focusing of various

social groups on material values. The contradiction between the development of education and the social development processes - the influence of consumerist values on individuals, especially young people, has become more acute. Several factors dominating in the consumer society have caused long-term consequences negatively affecting people's spirituality.

The regulatory documents of the European Union express the conviction that effective and competitive economy can only be possible based on cultural, knowledgeable individuals with humanitarian education. This is the way to the knowledge society and the embodiment of universal human values.

Overall, the society perceives education as the potential for solving essential economic problems. Economy, on the other hand, is the basis for the development of culture, education and the society. According to P. Bourdieu, the traditional economic theory has made a mistake separating economics from social processes which include all human activities: the world of culture, desires, interests, enjoyments and risks - they are all present in economic processes (Bourdieu, 2004, 72-89). The report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education states: 'Unlimited economic development cannot actually be considered as the best way how to harmonize the material development with justice, respect for people and natural resources that we are obliged to hand over to the next generations' (Delors, 2001, 19). Consequently, the economy centred model of social development has to be reconsidered from the positions of culture, morals and philosophy.

According to the value theory developed by R. Inglehart, in the second half of the 20th century there was a value shift in the Western civilization from material (material and security) values to post-material values (those ensuring the quality of life), which corresponds to the value model of consumer society (Inglehart, 2000).

Contradictions existing in the society are also reflected in education. The report of UNESCO International Commission characterises tension between several different trends: between global and local phenomena, [...] between universal and individual, [...] between the vast scope of knowledge and people's ability to acquire it and, finally, between the material and spiritual dimension (Delors, 2001 20, 21). Moreover, contradictions can be observed not only in the outer world – in social, political and cultural processes, but also in human psyche (Erikson, 1998). Thus, education has to deal with contradictoriness at least in two key dimensions: in the individual dimension and in the whole contemporary society.

Even though the economy and society have common interests, their aims are still different. Despite the fact that an educational institution is the microcosm of society, education is adapted to the needs of the labour market (Report of the European Commission, 2006). Education is gradually transforming into a commodity and is

subject to the requirements of market turnover and the demands of the world market in general. Consequently, the goals related to the state, communities, organizations and civic values are getting narrower. One-sided consumerist orientation leads to the decrease of the role of traditional values in the process of education.

Young people adopt not only the values represented by the society around them; the basic principles concerning the choice of values are acquired in the process of education and in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities are one of the most important subjects of educational environment. With regard to citizenship education, their purpose is to actively promote the readiness of young people to live in the civil society. In this way, it is possible to promote individual's creative potential and public administration skills creating preconditions for the real manifestation of communication skills, personal initiative and the responsibility of young people.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the experience of the Latvian institutions of general secondary education in using extracurricular activities to develop the civic values of young people.

1. Values and the specific features of their development in the Latvian system of education

The state as the guarantor for the expression of people's free will is the bearer of moral obligation. The state makes policies in various spheres of public life – social integration, official language, education, etc. Consequently, there is worked out the strategy concerning mutual relations, future development directions and priorities in these spheres of life. Therefore, it was very important for the authors of the article to analyse issues concerning the education policy in the country and to find out which strategic policy planning documents ensure the development of values in Latvia.

In order to establish and institutionalize values in the system of education, the content of education is determined and standardized according to the requirements set by the state. The Latvian system of education also functions based on this approach. It is especially emphasized in the "Latvian National Development Plan for 2007 – 2013," the key strategic policy planning document of the Republic of Latvia (Latvian National Development Plan, 2006). On the other hand, it is pointed out in the "Basic Guidelines of Education Development for 2007 – 2013" that the acquisition of values has to be regarded as a key strategic issue in the policy of education (Basic Guidelines of Education Development, 2006).

In order to develop democratic educational space in contemporary Europe, it is necessary to have social cohesion and the readiness of the society to change and adapt while the provision of education should put a particular emphasis on the role of values

education. Nevertheless, in both policy documents mentioned above, the priority is given to natural sciences and the economic terminology of consumer culture as well as the ideas related to them.

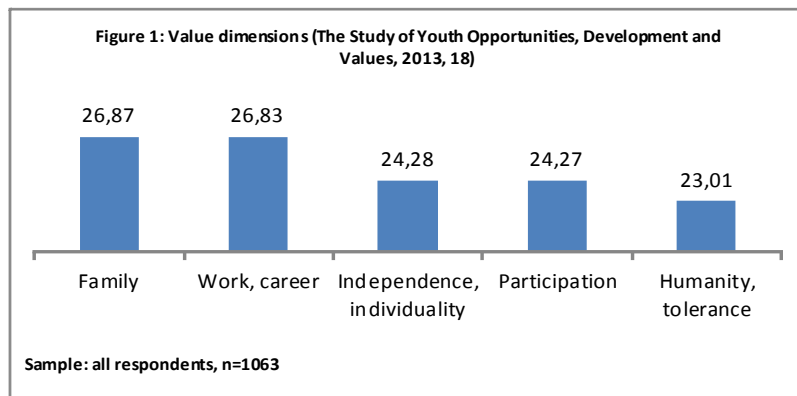
In the document “The Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030”, considerable attention is paid to the values associated with culture and the awareness of the singularity of national identity. It is pointed out there that issues concerning cultural education, high quality cultural environment and the possibilities of using cultural heritage have to be brought to the foreground. Thus, this document also emphasizes the role of educational institutions in the study and understanding of these values.

However, the analysis of the key national policy planning documents and their aims leads to the conclusion that they insufficiently promote the development and acquisition of humanitarian education. Thus, they do not encourage students to acquire personally meaningful values and underestimate these values.

The results of several studies conducted in Latvian schools show that due to the financial crisis and economic hardships there has arisen an ambivalent situation – there should be more focus on the role of humane values in individual’s quality of life without rejecting the need for material well-being, but without considering it as the absolute top priority.

The data of the studies show that Latvian teachers consider money as the most important contemporary value (66%), while work is placed in the second position (64%). This is due to teachers’ fear of losing their jobs as a result of the school reform. Other values – health, family, security (29%, 25%, 24%) follow with much lower scores. It means that the first set of values has come to the foreground in the crisis situation (Murnieks, 2011, 32).

When measuring the value orientations of young people in five dimensions – work, family, modern society, independence and individuality, humanity and tolerance – it can be observed that the orientation to family as well as to work and the career is most characteristic of young people. The indexes concerning independence and individuality as well as participation are a little lower, while the index concerning the orientation to humanity and tolerance is the lowest of all (see: Figure 1)



Having analysed the education results that have to be achieved in various subjects in general secondary education, the authors of the article came to the conclusion that the content of education referring to humane values is reflected in the standards of such subjects as ethics, philosophy, literature and culture. However, three out of them are elective subjects. This impedes the consistent and comprehensive acquisition of a broad spectrum of values important for communication and society – moral, aesthetical, religious and intellectual values – and the consolidation of the moral growth of young people. (Regulations Regarding the State Basic Education Standard and Basic Education Subject Standards, 2006).

Although the content of value education is determined already at the level of primary education, and students are encouraged to adopt humane values as a result of the educational process, the proposed requirements for the learning outcomes in the humanities and sciences as well as the unproportional number of hours allocated to these subjects do not balance out the offer of material and post-material values.

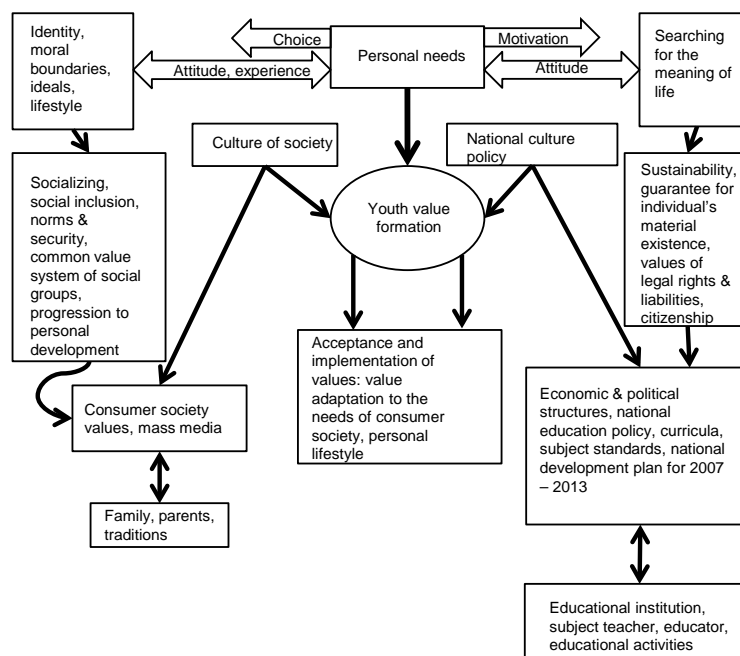
The role of extracurricular activities is particularly important in preventing the drawbacks mentioned above. They are of the same importance as learning. The state, local governments and schools provide opportunities for young people to spend their time in a meaningful way in order to perfect their humane and civic values, as well as to acquire new skills that might be necessary in the future.

The conceptual model of the formation of youth values worked out by the Latvian scholar S. Austruma (see: Figure 2) focuses on three interconnected principles for the adoption of values within the context of consumer society:

- a)** the principles personally significant for young people and adopted based on their experience, motivation, choice and attitude;
- b)** the principles significant for the society and mutual communication within the context of consumer society;
- c)** the principles significant for the state policy, including the policy of education.

It should be noted that the conceptual model of the formation of youth values in consumer society does not distinguish boundaries of opinion (outlook) between the advancement of the interests of community (the social group – the youth) or discourse community - consumer society in the shared cultural space. According to this model, the economic and political structures dealing with the cultural policy of the state, educational institutions, laws and regulations (standards) could be among the groups suggesting values.

Figure 2: The conceptual model for the formation of youth values in consumer society in Latvia (Austruma, 2012, 19)



1. The experience of extracurricular activities in the development of civic values in Latvia.

As it was already mentioned, extracurricular activities have a particular role in the development of humane and civic values among the youth. The authors of the article proceed from the idea that the environment of consumer society and its values form mainly short-term values with the help of the network of mass media. The state education policy, on the other hand, offers more sustainable values. It has to be taken into account that young people as social addressees adopt values not only through the content coded in school subjects, but also through extracurricular activities.

It is extracurricular activities where the aims of citizenship education – to promote individual responsibility for the development of the state, to teach each individual civic participation skills and knowledge, to perfect attitudes and values – manifest themselves. Extracurricular activities are an effective pedagogical means for the development of identity and understanding of the Latvian society as a whole.

One of the fundamental challenges of a national state is the consolidation of national identity and loyalty. It is a lasting and never-ending process, which also involves educational work with young people. From time to time, especially in crisis situations, there arises or is renewed the topicality of “identity politics.” It has to be born in mind that national identity is not constituted by uniform ideas and elements agreed upon by

the whole society, but rather by the diversity of elements. Each individual arrives at his/her own “understanding” of the idea of national belonging.

Latvia also needs politically and morally useful history, where neither past achievements nor mistakes and sufferings are forgotten. All communities use their past as an instrument for structuring and interpreting the present. Besides, our notions about the contemporary world are shaped both by concrete processes (technical, institutional and material) and the symbolic sphere. Individuals need shared collective meanings in order to understand the world where they live. They feel lost and isolated without them. Shared meanings make it possible to form communities and the sense of belonging. Thus, the past is the testimony of safe survival (living). Most often shared meanings are based on the conclusion that this particular thing made us richer, stronger or better in the past, so it is right to do so. Educational institutions also have to take part in the creation of identity and values.

The scholars studying the integration process point out that social memory is one of the key factors splitting the Latvian society. This is also stated in the “Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018)” adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2011).

The rebirth of civic values in Latvia is also implemented by means of the youth participation in extracurricular competitions of creative work. The competition “The Experience of the Third Awakening in My Region (1986-1991) – the Latvian Heritage through Generations” is particularly important among them. Its organizers include the National Centre for Education at the Ministry of Education and Science, the society “Virtual encyclopaedia”, secondary schools and the institutions of higher education. Thinking about citizenship education and patriotic education of young people, the consolidation of national identity and the teaching of Latvian history at schools, the National Centre for Education invites educational institutions to actively participate in the competition “The Experience of the Third Awakening in My Region (1986-1991) – the Latvian Heritage through Generations.”

This competition of students’ creative work is a particularly important extracurricular activity for the development of citizenship values in Latvia. Its aim is to get a closer insight in the rebirth of civic consciousness in Latvia during the period of national awakening. This is done by publishing the life stories of the participants of national awakening and paying respects to individuals who shaped the social position of the Latvian people during the process of regaining national independence and are continuing to do so nowadays. The participants of the competition are secondary school students and those involved in the bachelor study programmes. The participants can join the competition as a team of individually. The participating team has to have at least five members. It can be formed by any educational institution in Latvia with a teacher as the team leader. The team is to be formed by organizing a mini competition at school (class). The best works are sent for the competition to Riga. Individual participants can create their works independently or using a consultant. The winners of the creative competition take part in the conference “The Third Awakening and the Growth of the Civic Consciousness of the Inhabitants of Latvia.”

The competition is organized in two rounds. In the first round, the participants get personally acquainted with active people – participants in the third Awakening and subsequent processes - living in their region and record their life stories. They write down the memories of these people in order to publish them in the popular virtual encyclopaedia “Latvian People” (Virtual Encyclopaedia, 2012, www.gramata21.lv). The interviewees are selected both from the relatives and people living in the same district who have actively participated in the events of national awakening in Latvia or abroad.

In the second round, making use of these life stories and other sources (books, the internet, etc.), the participants write argumentative essays, reflections and reports expressing their opinion about the participation of Latvian inhabitants in the renewal of the Republic of Latvia. Within the scope of the theme, the participants can choose their own content guidelines or to select one of the directions of the theme suggested in the regulation of the competition.

For instance, the competition offered in the year 2012 attracted the attention of many educational institutions. In the first round, there were submitted 98 works from over 40 educational institutions; in the second round, there were submitted 77 works from over 20 educational institutions. The best works from those submitted in the first round were published in the virtual biographical encyclopaedia “Latvian People on the Threshold of the 21st Century.”

Competitions like this are very valuable in sharing the common historical experience of Latvian people in the renewal of statehood. Students’ works express their love for their family, region and state and demonstrate the consolidation of their patriotic feelings as well. The organization of such competitions in various educational institutions encourages young people to participate actively and creatively in the social and cultural life of their region, city and state. The competitions also provide practical opportunities for young people to get involved in the study and preservation of national traditions and cultural heritage.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the 21st century, due to the economic crisis there has developed a new situation in Latvia. Along with the formation of the civil society, a primitive consumerist attitude and material values are gaining an increasingly dominant position. This reduces the role of humanitarian values in the spiritual life of young people.

In Latvia, there has been worked out the conceptual model for the formation of youth values in consumer society.

The evaluation of regulatory education documents – education standards for the institutions of general education – leads to the conclusion that there can be observed contradictions between the values adopted by students themselves and the aim of value education set by the system of education.

The main drawback is the fact that the educational content referring to human values is only included in some school subjects – ethics, philosophy, literature, and the theory

of culture Besides, three of these are elective subjects. Thus, value education is not a continuous theme in all subjects.

Extracurricular activities are an important means how to develop civic values. They actualize respect for one's homeland, its people, culture and history, national traditions as well as the study and preservation of cultural heritage.

The diverse extracurricular activities organized in Latvian schools and the institutions of higher education promote the formation of the national identity of Latvian inhabitants and their sense of belonging.

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