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Social Representations of Citizen of Europe and of the World with Romanian students

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Examining the tendencies in education in Romania one easily notices that teaching active citizenship (TAC) has become a priority in the instructional policy of the country, getting both a governmental and social support, because it is seen as having been deeply influenced and distorted by communist ideologies. Some traces of the former indoctrination are still to be identified when practicing value oriented behaviour or demonstrating civic skills and competences. Consequently, when teaching citizenship in Romanian schools, the focus is on acquiring, assimilating and internalizing concepts, on developing the necessary skills to be turned into guided behaviour and value awareness. The theoretical support and the practical exercise are provided by elaborating on the following topics:

- The responsible, informed active citizen;
- The human rights bill (rights and responsibilities);
- Social justice;
- Diversity and interdependence;
- Conflict resolution;
- Maintaining and improving the quality of life and preserving the resources for the next generation (<http://www.edu.ro/index.php/programme/c1/12apr.2006>)

In our cross-sectional study (Filimon & Danciu, 2005) about the way active citizenship is taught at different levels in our country, we realised that the following knowledge about the responsible active citizen is to be gained throughout the national curricula and non-formal/informal education, that is,

- S/he is informed regarding national and local institutions, declarations, conventions, agreements;
- S/he gets to understand the roles of both governmental and non-governmental organizations in the resolution of individuals, group or community issues;
- S/he develops the ability to identify, select and evaluate media data and other resources, as well as a certain awareness about the European and global context within which national and local events occur. Active citizens value language and different forms of national culture (arts, religion) as essential elements in preserving individual identity.

The theoretical input regarding human rights when teaching citizenship in Romanian schools contains the following aspects:

- Identification of attributes common to all people;
- The significance of the universal rights of humans;
- Discernment of human rights and responsibilities in the context of local, national, regional, European, respectively global interrelationship;

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- Comprehension of human rights when challenged by prejudices, discriminations, aggressions, denials of different sorts;
- Acquiring and accepting competition and confrontation in terms of rights and responsibilities in specific situations.

Within the framework of Active Citizenship Teaching (TAC) in Romania, teaching social justice means understanding its importance in sustaining the development of the country and the improvement of people's welfare, both in the present and in the future. It also means valuing social justice and comprehending its role in ensuring justice and equality within and between societies. It provides the knowledge to identify the impact of unequal power and difficulties to access resources; it helps in growing aware of the consequences of one's actions – intentional or non-intentional – and of the necessity of informed choices; it enhances motivation and commitment when taking actions meant to shape a more just world and to challenge and reject racism, discrimination, inequality and injustice; it leads to understanding and valuing equal opportunities as well as to gauging the effect of past injustice on present and future generations.

The activities gravitating around the theoretical background in TAC also reveal the concept of difference, of diversity and are oriented towards students' understanding of:

- How to cope with and respect differences among ethnic and religious categories living in Romania,
- How to value similarities and differences in the context of a universality of human rights,
- How to perceive the importance of acknowledging diversity within cultures, customs, traditions, social organization, forms of governance in Europe and the world when you are a Romanian,
- How to appreciate biodiversity challenging the domestic stage lately,
- How to consider the impact of the environment on cultures and economies from the perspective of a transition period.

One might assert that the present stage in the changing process of education in Romania is marked by awareness and acceptance of the challenges of an interdependent world, of the perspectives of juxtaposing local and global values, of the confrontation with the megatendencies prevailing over the world, connecting countries, such as

- Increasing intercultural and multicultural social systems,
- Transcultural communication by modern technology,
- Uncertainty of future because of the complexity of social systems,
- Knowledge-based society,
- Weakening of ethical and moral traditions,
- Increasing individualism and pluralism,
- Increasing gap between the poor and the rich,
- Unrestricted exploitation of natural resources,
- Growing mistrust of people in science and politics,
- From institutional help to more self-reliance.

Under the circumstances, TAC in Romania becomes a priority as it might grant lifelong learning, a changing of attitudes, a shaping of behaviour, a better understanding of Jasper's citizen of the world, a development of critical thinking about global versus local

issues, an acquisition of specific responsibility for one's action. In spite of the drawbacks of past history and experience, Romanians should get engaged in the process of unifying the world in their concern for the future of the planet, for foregrounding a full potential of communication among peoples.

Social representation (SR) of citizenship are mainly cognitive forms socially elaborated and shared, meant to practically contribute to the development of a reality common to a social identity. These forms of cognition though opposed to the scientific cognisance, equally represent a subject-matter legitimized by its importance in social life. SR of citizenship are those systems of interpretation that govern our relations with both social world and environment, orienting and organizing our social behaviour; they occur in social transformations, in the dissemination and assimilation of knowledge, in the individual and group development, in the definition of social and personal identities, in the representation of the groups (Neculau, 1997).

SR engages individuals' social affiliation with its norms and affectivities, with internalization of the role models in behaviour and thinking and of socially induced practices and experienced. As means of practical cognition that links subject to object, SR make the object present in absentia or when at a distance, thus standing for the mental representation and interpretation of the concept of citizenship, for the foregrounding of the subject's experience and activities, both expressing and defining it. Forming and disseminating SR of citizen rely on social communication in its inter-individual, institutional and media forms. Its effects in the emergence of SR consist in the decalogue and the dissemination of information, unequal access to information to various groups, focalization on some aspects determined by the individuals' interests and level of involvement (Curelaru, 2006)

The study

Our research aims at foregrounding SR of citizenship in Europe and in the World, an objective that is justified by the fundamental impact that SR have on social relations, behaviour and practices (Moscovici, 1961).

The Objectives

- establishing the organization of the nucleus and the foregrounding of the peripheral elements in SR;
- identifying common aspects within the SR of European Citizen and the World Citizen;
- discovering common issues in the SR of the investigated categories of students;
- finding the differences in the content of SR due to gender, class, ethnicity/education
- foregrounding differences in the content of SR of European and World Citizen at the entire sample of students, as well as at the level of each category;

The identification of the content of SR of Citizen, of the similarities and differences, their comparing to the results of the studies completed by CiCe members (Roland-Levi, Ross, 2003, Fulop and Ross, 2005) and to the objectives of other educational systems might lead to improving the teaching process in terms of its covering content gaps

regarding either aspects of knowledge, information, comprehension or the process of developing skills and of value transmission perception.

Hypotheses

- SR of the Citizen of Europe (CEU) and SR of the Citizen of the World (CW) are organized around the nucleus made up of rights, liberties, obligations and duties.
- The peripheral elements are represented by some concrete individual rights, civil liberties, obligations, duties and responsibilities emerging from the peculiarities of different groups.
- Within the content of SR of European and World Citizen there are similarities:
 - There are common aspects at all categories of age, ethnicity, gender
 - There are common aspects in SR of European Citizen and SR of World Citizen
- Within the content of SR of European and World Citizen there are differences:
 - There are differences between respondents due to gender, ethnicity, level of education
 - There are differences between SR of European Citizen and SR of World Citizen at the entire sample of students, as well as at the level of each category.

Sample

The survey was carried out on a sample of 207 students according to table 1

Table 1: The content of the sample

Samples	Gender		Percentage
N=41 Primary school (no.4)	23F	18M	F=56.09%, M=43.91%
N=43 Middle school (no.3)	22F	21M	F=51.16%, M=48.84%
N=66 High school (no.2)	36F	30M	F=52.08%, M=47.92%
N=57 College (no.1)	34F	23M	F=59.64%, M=40.36%
N= 207	115F	92M	F=55.55% M=44.45%

We also asked 12 teachers teaching civic education, out of which 4 in primary schools, 3 in middle schools, 3 in high schools and 2 at the college.

The research tools

- interview
- free association
- analysis of the results of their activities.

Procedure

Pupils and students were asked to carry out two tasks, the first of free association stimulated by the words *Citizen of Europe* and *Citizen of the World*; and next to make a hierarchy of the terms resulted from the free association. Furthermore they were asked to elaborate statements being given the following beginnings deriving from the inductive terms of Citizen of Europe and Citizen of the World:

I could

I might

I would have the right
I would have to

Teachers were asked to participate at a debate focused on the way in which their students can structure their representation of the European and the World citizen starting from the content of the national curricula and the appropriate teaching methodologies.

Results

The data are processed via computer programmer SPSS 11.5 Calculations are made to identify the frequency and rank of terms within free association and within statements. Chi-Square Tests allowed identification of significant differences among frequencies. T test allowed identification of significant differences between paired samples (SR of European Citizenship and SR of World Citizen).

The answers point to the fact that the inductive terms CEU and CW are associated with liberties, rights, duties and responsibilities – concepts they have acquired during their school years through the national curriculum for Civic Education and Civic Culture on the hand, and on the other hand via studying (in the syllabuses of history, geography, foreign languages or entrepreneurial education, for instance, that contain lessons/topics of civic education.

The examination of the statements provided by the entire sample reveals similarities and differences at all three levels. They are presented in table no. 2 (decreasing frequency) and in figures no. 1-6.

SR of CEU and CW foreground common elements such as

- travelling (highest in the top), job opportunities, freedom of speech, meeting other people, education, better life, higher income in the area of liberties
- education, individual rights, equality, travelling, job opportunities, higher standard of living, better life, in the field of rights
- obeying rules/Constitution(s), environmental attitude and concern, foreign languages acquisition, equality acknowledgment as duties.

Each category includes undecided, hesitant, uncertain answers which we grouped as 'don't know'

The differences identified in SR of CEU and CW can be listed as follows:

- the position they have among the common elements (e.g. travelling, job opportunities, equality have a higher rank in SR of CE than SR of CW; environmental concern is more important in CW than in CEU; I don't know is higher in CW than in CE)
- different contents (e.g. decision, paying taxes for CEU; information, helping other people, cooperation, peace for CW)

Table 2. SR of Citizen of Europe and of the World

Similarities and differences

CEU - Liberties	CEU- Rights	CEU-Duties/Resp
Travelling	Equality	Law abiding
Job opportunities	Travelling	Responsibility
Meeting other people	Education	Environmental concern
I don't know	Job opportunities	I don't know
Education	Patriotism	Foreign language acquisition
Decision	Freedom of speech	Freedom & equality
Better life	Security	Education
Freedom of speech	Individual rights	Promoting values
Better life	I don't know	
	Decision	
	Better life	
CW - Liberties	CW- Rights	CW-Duties/Responsibilities
Travelling	I don't know	Law abiding
Information	Rights	I don't know
I don't know	Freedom	Environmental concern
Freedom & equality	Patriotism	Foreign language acquisition
Freedom of speech	Education	Altruism
Inhabiting any place	Travelling	Equality
Helping other people	Equality	Knowing other people
Better life	Job opportunities	
Education & job opportunities	Better life	
Environmental concern	Cooperation	
	Peace	

The finding of the significant differences between SR of CEU and SR of CW is based on the t test values for paired samples. They demonstrate significant differences for rights and for duties/responsibilities.

Figure 1

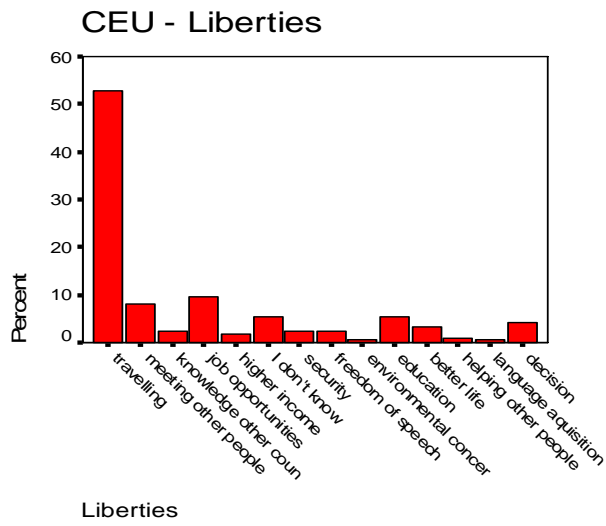


Figure 2

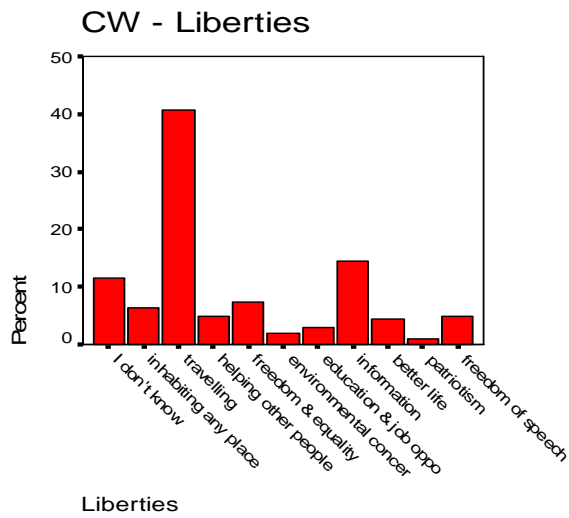


Figure 3

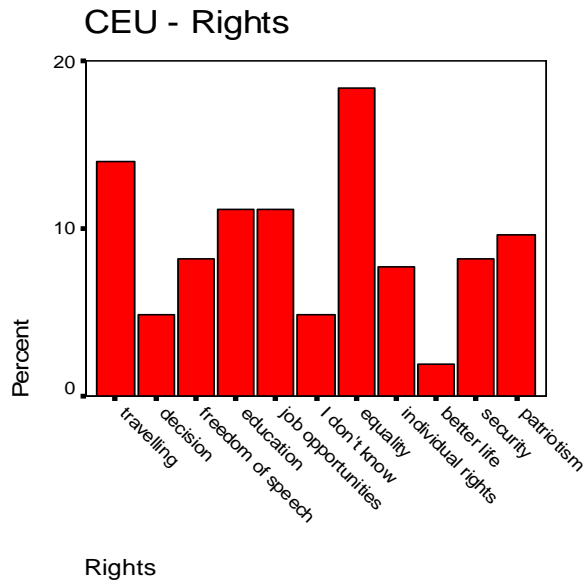


Figure 4

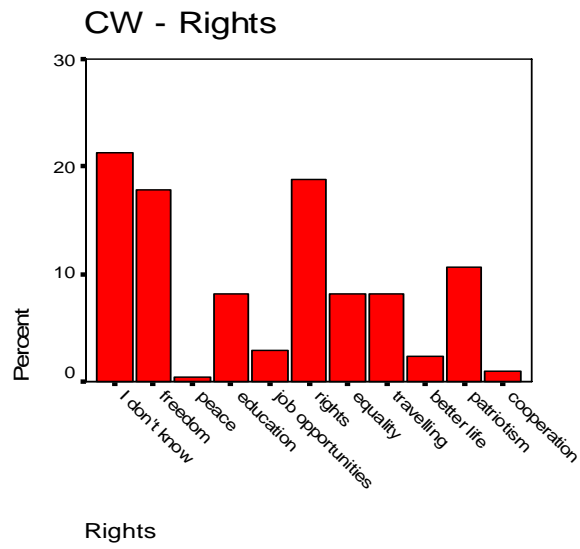


Figure no. 5

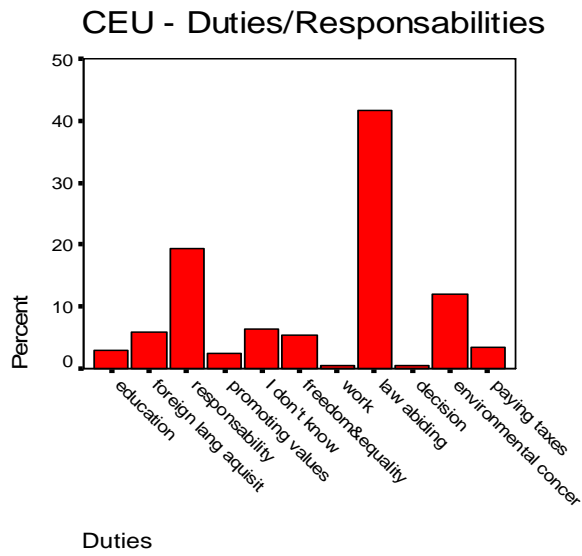
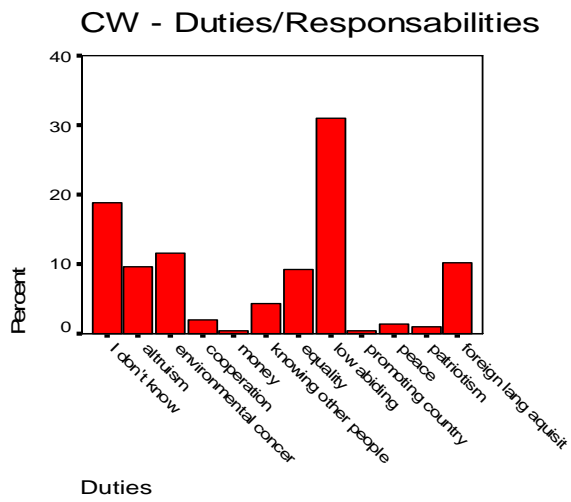


Figure no. 6



There are significant differences in the content of SR of CEU and CW connected to the level of education. The differences according to Chi-square test are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). There were no significant differences associated to gender, ethnicity or class. The differences connected to level of education are presented in table no.3 (decreasing frequency) and figures no. 7 – 12.

Table 3 Differences in the SR of Citizen of Europe and of the World connected to the level of education

CEU – Liberties	CEU- Rights	CEU-Duties/Resp
<u>College &University</u> Travelling I don't know Education Job opportunities Higher income Meeting other people I don't know Better life	<u>College &University</u> Equality Job opportunities Travelling Education I don't know Freedom of speech Decision Individual rights	<u>College &University</u> Responsibility I don't know Decision Work Foreign language acquisition
<u>High school</u> Travelling Job opportunities Better life Freedom of speech Religion I don't know	<u>High school</u> Education Freedom of speech Equality Travelling Job opportunities Decision Better life Security	<u>High school</u> Law abiding Responsibility Paying taxes I don't know Promoting values Environmental concern
<u>Secondary school</u> Travelling Job opportunities Better life Education Altruism Religion	<u>Secondary school</u> Travelling Equality Freedom of speech Individual rights Job opportunities Decision Better life	<u>Secondary school</u> Law abiding Responsibility Promoting values Environmental concern I don't know
<u>Primary school</u> Travelling Environmental concern Education Better life	<u>Primary school</u> Patriotism Security Equality Individual rights	<u>Primary school</u> Law abiding Environmental concern Responsibility

<u>CW - Liberties</u>	<u>CW – Rights</u>	<u>CW – Duties/Resp.</u>
<u>College &University</u> Travelling I don't know Inhabiting any places Freedom & equality Environmental concern Information Education & job opportunities	<u>College &University</u> Freedom I don't know Individual rights Travelling Equality Education Information	<u>College &University</u> I don't know Law abiding Altruism Equality Knowing other people Environmental concern Cooperation foreign language acquisition Peace
<u>High school</u> Travelling I don't know Freedom of speech Inhabiting any space Freedom & equality Information Education & job opportunities Better life Helping other people	<u>High school</u> I don't know Equality Job opportunities Better life Cooperation peace Freedom Patriotism	<u>High school</u> Law abiding I don't know Altruism Equality Cooperation Foreign language acquisition Peace
<u>Secondary school</u> Travelling Better life I don't know Freedom & equality Inhabiting any space Helping other people Education & job in opportunities Patriotism	<u>Secondary school</u> Education I don't know Travelling Better life Individual rights Job opportunities Freedom	<u>Secondary school</u> Law abiding Environmental concern I don't know Altruism Patriotism Cooperation Peace
<u>Primary school</u> Travelling Information Freedom Environmental concern Inhabiting any space	<u>Primary school</u> Individual rights Patriotism Freedom Education	<u>Primary school</u> Foreign language acquisition Environmental concern Law abiding

Figure 7. SR of Citizen of Europe. Frequency of liberties in terms of educational levels

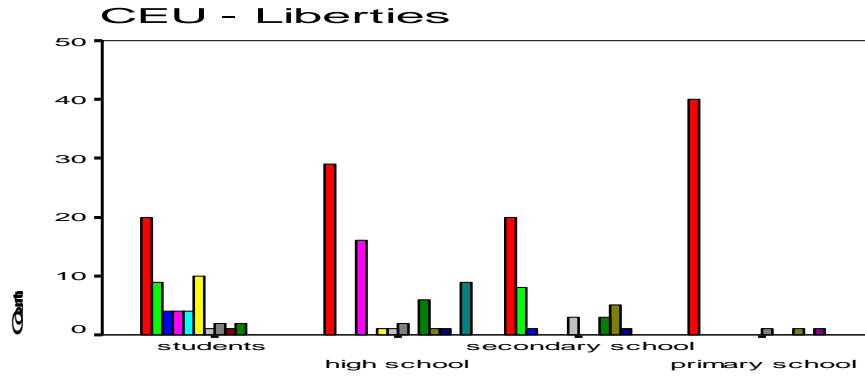


Figure 8. SR of citizen of the World. Frequency of liberties in terms of educational levels

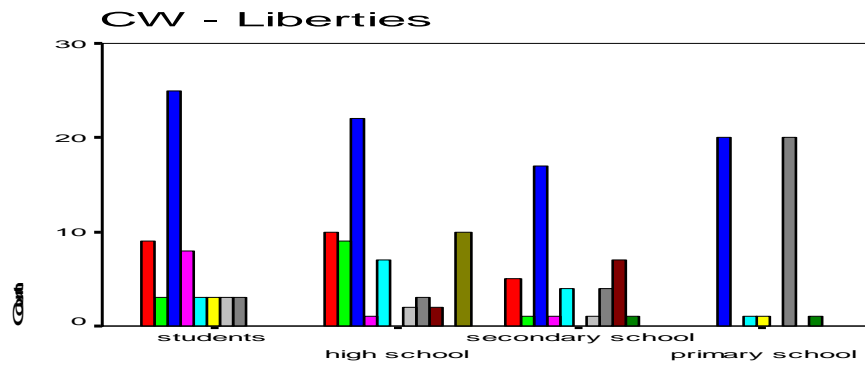


Figure 9 SR of Citizen of Europe. Frequency of rights in terms of educational levels

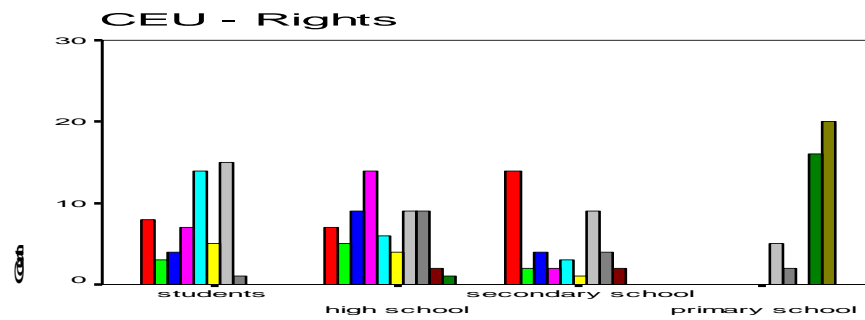


Figure 10. SR of Citizen of the World. Frequency of rights in terms of educational levels

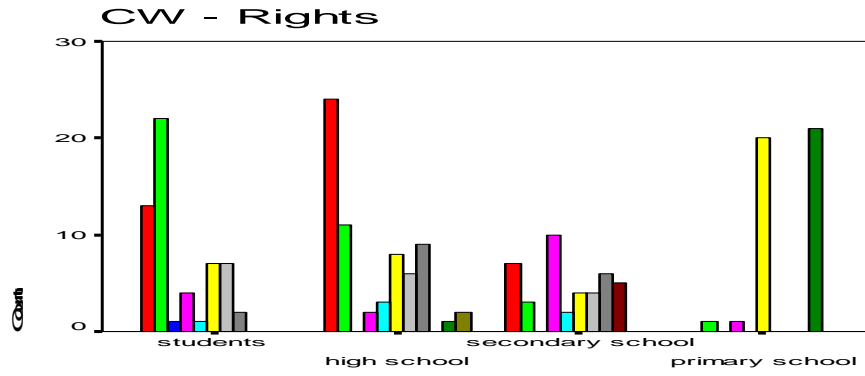


Figure 11 SR of Citizen of Europe. Frequency of duties in terms of educational levels

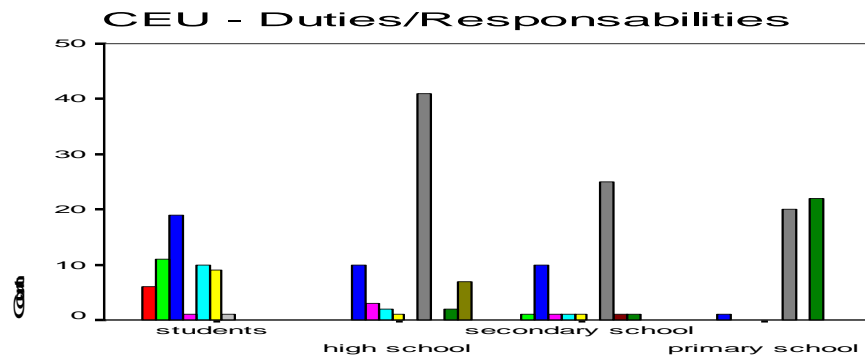
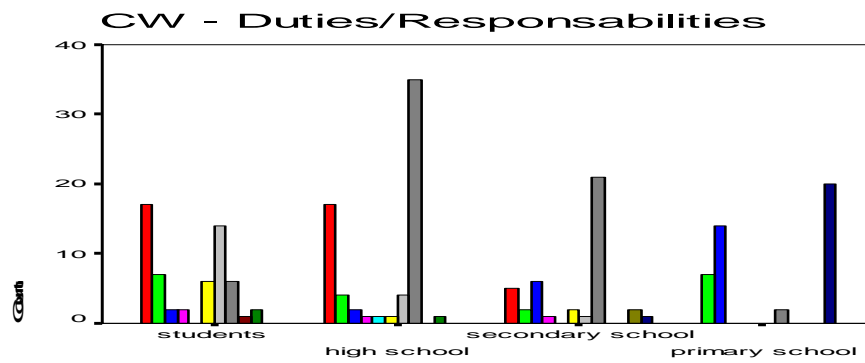


Figure 12 SR of Citizen of the World. Frequency of duties in terms of educational levels



Discussions

The quantitative and qualitative examination of the data reveals the fact that SR of CEU and CW have a nucleus made up of liberties, rights and duties, each of these components being gravitated by elements common to the concept of national identity or universal citizenship, such as travelling, meeting other people, inhabiting any space for liberties, individual rights, equality for rights law abiding, responsibility, environmental concern, foreign language acquisition for duties, with a different ranking according to the level of education (e.g. environmental concern, patriotism, security for primary school; freedom of speech for high school)

The content of liberties, rights, duties contains the same elements (e.g. travelling, better life, education, job opportunities) that might be explained as a result of the naturalization of the concept of citizenship.

The evasive, uncertain answers (I don't know) prevails in the SR of CW versus the SR of CEU as a possible consequence of:

- the high mediatization of the process of Romania's integration in the EU versus the scarce use of the concept of CW both in the media and in the educational system
- the diminished amount of information or personal experience outside Europe versus the massively publicized European experience.

The ample occurrence of environmental concern, helping other people, cooperation in SR of CW versus SR of CEU expresses the process of objectivation and anchoring specific to SR emerging against a background of Romanian altercentrism: in case of CEU, the essential elements are a better life, higher income, individual rights, whereas for the CW they are ecological disasters, conflicts, poverty,

As we advance on the ladder of education we observe a diversification of answers, a relativization and diminution of the subjects' enthusiasm for CEU.

Primary school teachers think that pupils acquire information about our impact on the environment, relationship between people and environment, of finite resources, fairness between individuals and between groups and reveals interest in/and concern others, and empathy toward others

Middle school teachers consider that students understand basic rights and responsibilities, diversity issues, our and other countries' political system and reveal sensitivity to the needs and rights of other people, concerning about the effects of our lifestyle on people and the environment.

High school teachers assert that students understand inequalities within and between societies, world and European economical and political system; they express commitment to social justice and equity.

Conclusion

The knowledge, skills and values regarding citizenship provided by the Romanian educational system, by the media or the informal ways are modelled by the SR of the individuals and groups who eventually shape the outer reality of citizenship.

Children of different ages have personal representations about citizens' liberties, rights and responsibilities:

- they explicitly report to social rules and roles considered unalterable (in primary schools);
- they rely on flexible social conventions that include rules and roles that emerge from a biological or social reality and that can change according to context (in middle school);
- they have specific personal motivation, acknowledging competences that justify opportunities, rights, liberties and imply responsibilities (high school and college).

Social Representations of Citizen of Europe and of the World with Romanian students:

- Represent an interface to understanding and interpreting reality, that is, the immanent process of Romania's integration in EU and of globalization;
- the acquisition potential of appropriate knowledge about both European and World citizenship as a necessary means to the country's integration in an intelligible, assimilable framework, coherent for both individuals and groups, cognitively and valuationally;
- Are facilitators of social communication, representing its necessary premises defining the common reference level that enables social exchanges, transmission and dissemination of these forms of practical cognition;
- Identity definers that are able to preserve the groups' specificity as SR of Citizenship in EU and the world range individuals and groups in a universe that gets to integrate the national social space in the process of social comparisons. They help with elaborating a social and personal identity, gratified by an over evaluation of some attributes or personal production or a damage of the identity by relating it to the higher standards of civilization in EU and the world.
- Represent a guideline for behaviour, practices and activities that generate anticipation and expectations regarding the EU and the world.
- By selecting and sieving data, by interpreting and generating significances, SR of European and World Citizen hope to transform the reality of integration in accordance to its content.
- Do not follow the process of economic and political integration; they do not depend on the development of real interactions, but proceed and determine them. Reflecting the nature of the rules and relationships among people, between people and power, SR of Citizen ordain compulsory behaviour or practices, define permissiveness, tolerance, acceptance and compulsion within a European and global context.
- They permit *a posteriori* the justification of attitudes and behaviour in specific situations or within inter- and intra- group relationships. Expressing their pro and con regarding the country's integration, people will refer to the function of maintaining or

strengthening the position of the group, of diminishing or emphasizing the differences between what is represented and valued as a peculiar local or national element and what is represented as a feature of either the European or the World citizenship.

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