



This paper is taken from

Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation
Proceedings of the tenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Academic Network

London: CiCe 2008

edited by Alistair Ross and Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9560454-7-8

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder):

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Jurgena, I. & Mikainis, Z. (2008) Opportunities for the Development of Students' Citizenship Identity in Higher Education in Latvia, in Ross, A. & Cunningham, P. (eds.) Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation. London: CiCe, pp. 423 - 430

© CiCe 2008

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Socrates Programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Opportunities for the Development of Students' Citizenship Identity in Higher Education in Latvia

Inese Jurgena¹ and Zigurds Mikainis²

¹Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy, ² University of Rezekne (Latvia)

Abstract

This article is about the experience of citizenship education in Latvia in forming various students' identities in higher education within the context of European identity. The article analyses the specific characteristics of the content of citizenship identity in Latvia and students' understanding of its key elements. There are also evaluated principal socially meaningful students' activities and their participation in social processes at various levels, which promotes the development of citizenship identity within the context of social integration. The article summarises the results of several studies concerning the development of youth citizenship identity and various forms of their participation in social activities as an opportunity for interaction between identity and citizenship.

Introduction

Active and responsible involvement of citizens in the social, political, and cultural life of the society in the European countries is becoming a key issue for governments and the EU institutions. Globalization and integration are important preconditions for further development of contemporary society, and the issues of the development of citizenship identity in higher education become increasingly important.

Promoting citizenship education is an important function of higher education, with considerable moral, political, and legal capacity as it ensures the development of the citizenship competency of future specialists and the advancement of their citizenship identity. This article is devoted to the experience of citizenship education in Latvia in forming various students' identities in higher education within the context of the European identity. The purpose is to summarise the results of several studies of the development of youth citizenship identity and various forms of their participation in social activities as an opportunity for interaction between identity and citizenship.

Regulatory documents and main studies of students' citizenship identity

Various state policy documents and their key principles have played an important part in improving the quality of citizenship education and citizenship identity in higher education.

The Education Law of 1998 gave an opportunity for institutions of higher education to exercise real autonomy, while the Law on the Institutions of Higher Education of 1995 had increased autonomy and required a system to ensure the quality of education. Within the context of social integration and citizenship identity, the Law on Official Language

This paper is part of *Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice & Innovation, Proceedings of the tenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*, ed Ross A and Cunningham P, published by CiCe (London) 2008. ISBN: 978-0-9560454-7-8; ISSN: 1470-6695

Funded with support from the European Commission SOCRATES Project of the Department of Education and Culture. This publication reflects the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained in this publication.

and the National Programme on the Official Language Policy were also of considerable importance.

Article 2 of the Education Law is of particular importance in citizenship education and the consolidation of citizenship identity. It identifies the purpose of the Latvian system of education is to "...provide for each inhabitant of Latvia an opportunity to develop his/her mental and physical potential in order to become an independent and developed personality and member of a democratic Latvian state and society having an opportunity to:

- obtain knowledge and skills in the areas of humanitarian, social, natural, and technical sciences;
- obtain knowledge, skills, and the experience of attitudes to participate in the life of the society and the state; and
- develop ethically, aesthetically, intellectually, and physically, thus promoting the development of knowledgeable, skilful and well educated personality.
(Education Law, 1998)

Although the Law on Institutions of Higher Education does not specifically focus on citizenship identity, it is reflected in the policy documents of several institutions of higher education. For instance, the strategic goals of Daugavpils University contain the significant statement: "To preserve and develop the national identity and the cultural heritage of the Latvian people becoming part of international integration at the same time." (Daugavpils University. The Development Strategy (2001-2010))

The development strategy of the University of Latvia, on the other hand, stresses that it was

established as a national university. It has been and still is one of the symbols of the Independent Latvian state and culture. The University of Latvia is the only classical university in Latvia which provides studies and research in humanitarian, natural, social, educational sciences and medicine, also ensuring interaction between these areas. A successful functioning of UL is a precondition for the development of the Latvian system of higher education and science, the sustainable development of all society, the development of knowledge-based economy, and the development of Latvia as a full-fledged member in the European community. (University of Latvia. The Development Strategy 2004:3)

Analysing and evaluating citizenship education and current difficulties and problems of democratisation in Latvia, it should be noted that several recent studies have aimed to analyse and evaluate students' knowledge, skills, and behavioural value orientations within the framework of citizenship education and identity. These provide valuable material characterising the social life of Latvian students, their key values, and value orientation.

The authors have identified the following studies as significant:

The Development of Youth Identity and Participation (2005),

Citizenship Values in the Curricula of Latvian and Ethnic Minority Schools: A Comparative Study (2005),

Ethnic Tolerance and the Integration of the Latvian Society (2004),

The Study of the Social and Political Activity of Youth in Latvia" (2007),

as well as research of students of Daugavpils University and the University of Latvia involved in teacher training programmes.

These studies emphasise key factors affecting citizenship identity. We can summarise the following as promoting the formation of citizenship identity:

- a competent teacher with their own personality, qualification, erudition, competence, and loyalty to academic knowledge.
- methodologies and approaches used in the process of studies. Discussions, as well as the comparison and analysis of the achieved results play a significant role among them.
- appropriate courses in the study programmes.
- situations where educators feel personally responsible for the development of students' feelings of national identity, and where they do not perceive it as planting their own political opinions in students' minds.

The factors hindering the development of citizenship values were:

- different views regarding the content of course syllabi in various departments, courses, and groups.
- particular attitudes on the use of the official language.
- Students with alienated attitudes to state power and the state in general.
- drawbacks in citizenship education and citizenship identity at the level of primary and secondary education. This "heritage" has a significant impact on the development of students' citizenship identity at the level of higher education.
- myths and stereotypes about democracy, citizenship, and the state. The inability of the state to provide opportunities for students' self-actualization, career development, and ensuring their happy future is seen critically by students. Russian students shared the view that the state did not take their interests into account, so they had set up a "Russian community" to struggle against the "Latvian community" and defend their rights and culture. These ideas were brought with them from secondary school and their experiences of the education reform and the Law on Official Language.

An analysis of issues of students' citizenship identity in Daugavpils University within the context of sustainable development concluded that teacher education should to be focused on:

- the acquisition of human values: the world will be better if each person becomes a bit better;
- the harmonization of human values in education and ensuring their transmission;

- developing an awareness that human relationships should be based on understanding and honesty (Grabovska 2006: 84).

To achieve the goals of higher education, this study concluded that several obstacles related to relationships and communication might hinder the development of citizenship identity, such as selfishness, rejection of difference, anthropocentrism, consciously defined borders, distancing, and aloofness (Grabovska 2006: 88). To counter the development of 'othering', a combination of anthropocentrism and egocentrism promotes the development of an integrated critically reflective learning environment, implementing sustainability as individual's absolute value. This clearly indicates the significance of this study for the development of citizenship identity in future teachers.

Mara Dirba focuses on the pedagogic aspect of the development of citizenship. She points out that students from Latvian families tend to construct a rather excluding identity, concentrating on Latvian cultural traditions and not including the values of minority cultures living in Latvia. On the other hand, students from minority families tend to construct a more inclusive Latvian identity, giving reasons why they should be included into the Latvian nation, such as they were born and raised in Latvia (Dirba 2003: 90).

On the other hand, a study at the University of Latvia on language acquisition by minority groups indicates that "very often the students representing ethnic minorities lack realistic value orientations ... due to the fact that the Russian television, press, and Russian schools still focus on Soviet values" (Udris 1991: 111).

Similarly, the study by Shalme on students' attitudes to languages and process of learning suggests a certain opposition by students towards bilingual education (Shalme 2006). But respondents with higher education do consider the knowledge of languages as a significant value.

Table 1. Languages that the inhabitants of Latvia ought to know (%)

Respondent's education	Latvian	Russian	English	German	French	Other	Hard to say
Primary education	95.5	52.6	30.7	5.7		4.0	2.4
Secondary education	95.1	52.4	37.8	5.8		3.0	7.0
Secondary vocational education	95.8	60.2	36.3	6.1	3.0	8.0	5.0
Higher education	96.4	56.0	49.8	8.2	7.0	8.0	5.0

(*The Latvian Language in the 15 Years of Independence* 2007: 304)

Students in higher education believe that languages are of value and the basis of national and European identity. Almost all respondents, irrespective of their ethnic origin, perceive the knowledge of languages as of value, and consider English as an important means of communication. "Among educated inhabitants of Latvia the knowledge of languages is considered to be more important, e.g. 95.8% of the Russian speaking

respondents with higher education, 93.2% with secondary education, and 91.8% with secondary vocational education (Baltaiskalns 2001: 140).

Students' Participation in Social Activities.

Youth participation and social activity are very important factors in the development of citizenship education and participation skills. Taking part in social activities, young people acquire experience and skills that are useful for any citizen of a democratic society. Studies of the participation of young people in social and political life have clarified the principal obstacles and the motivating factors for participation and the development of the citizenship identity (*The Study of the Social and Political Activity of Youth in Latvia* 2007).

In this study a survey of 651 respondents concluded that young people are insufficiently informed about Latvian youth policy. Only 7% of respondents believe that they are very well informed about the youth policy; 35% say that they have heard something about it, 32% admit that they do not know anything definite about it, while 26% state that they have heard nothing at all about it.

Thus it appears that a large number of young people have been insufficiently involved in the activities of political parties and student councils, and they lack information about the youth policy. A current issue of students' participation is the quality of the participation. Key factors hindering students' participation in public, social, and political activities include a lack of interest (36%), a lack of information (27%), a lack of time (20%) and laziness (17%). Among the factors motivating engagement in public, social, or political activities respondents mention a willingness to change the existing situation, dissatisfaction with the present situation (20%), gaining experience (18%) and spending time in an interesting way (17%).

The study concludes that, depending on the level of participation in social processes, young people could be divided into groups:

- many-sided activists – 17.4%,
- those involved in political activities – 18.7%,
- those involved in some interest groups – 15.5%,
- those involved in social activities -14.9%,
- those not involved in any activities – 33.5%.

Youth activity in Latvia can be evaluated positively, as more than half of young people are regularly involved in social, cultural, recreational, or political activities. But about one third of the young people are passive.

The most popular activities are those connected with recreation and entertainment (including culture), while social and political activities seem less attractive. But interest in social and political activities is not considered as negative. Among young people aged 15 – 16 participation is predominantly perceived as entertainment, while among 17 year-olds and especially among 18 -25 year-olds there is greater awareness of the social value of participation (*The Development of Youth Identity and Participation* 2005: 87).

In international comparisons (such as between EU states) it appears that Latvian youth participation and activity is lower than that in the so-called old EU member states: young people in Latvia are less involved in social, political, and cultural activities. It must be noted that the situation is similar in other new EU member states: it cannot be stated that youth participation is negative.

It can be concluded that the participation of young people in social activities is connected with the formation of their citizenship identity. Participation implies being involved in the decision making procedures of central government, local authorities, and the private sector. Studies concerning youth participation show Latvian young people participating in social activities, and this promotes their citizenship awareness and the development of social work skills.

Conclusions

1. Key goals for the development of citizenship identity are set out in policy documents of the Latvian institutions of higher education. Changes have taken place in their role, functions, and goals, encouraging the active involvement of students in decision making processes.
2. Student's identity and aspects such as citizenship identity and ethnic identity are essential values, connected to self-concept, self-image, and functioning in various social contexts and roles (people, nation, state).
3. It is necessary to preserve and protect the richness of the Latvian language and culture, and the diversity of expression as a means to develop students' national identity and integration, as many achievements of European culture are directly connected to certain languages and intellectual traditions. Students will support the idea of a united Europe only if their language and cultural heritage are integral parts of this Europe.
4. The participation of young people in social activities is linked to the development of their citizenship identity and this should be considered as a positive feature.

References

- Baltaiskalns D. (2001) *The Linguistic Attitudes of the Latvian Youth and Language Norms. Language – 2001*. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Changing Identities: The Mobilization of Ethnic Groups and the Impact of Changes in the Ethnic Structure on Social Integration* (2004). www.biss.soc.lv
- Citizenship Values in the Curricula of Latvian and Ethnic Minority Schools: Comparative Study*. (2005) Riga: Riga Stradins University.
- Daugavpils University. The Development Strategy (2001-2010). <http://www.dau.lv/post/modules>
- Dirba M. (2003) *Latvian Identity: The Pedagogic Aspect*. Riga: Raka.

- Education Law*. Zinotajs, 1998 No 24.
- Grabovska R. (2006) *The Implementation of the Principle of Sustainable Development in Teacher Training*. Doctoral Thesis. Daugavpils.
- Law on Institutions of Higher Education*. Zinotajs, 1996 No1.
- Shalme A. (2006) *Innovations in Teaching Latvian as a Second Language and Changes in the Process of Education*. Doctoral Thesis. Riga: University of Latvia.
- The Development of Youth Identity and Participation* (a survey of the study) (2004). Riga: University of Latvia, The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology.
- The Latvian Language in the 15 Years of Independence* (2007). Riga: Zinatne.
- The Study of the Social and Political Activity of the Youth* (2007). Riga, The Department of Youth Affairs. www.bm.gov.lv/jaunatnes politika
- Udris P. (1991) *Psychological Aspects of Teaching the Latvian Language: Language Issues*. Riga: Zvaigzne.
- University of Latvia (2004). *The Development Strategy*.