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# **Human rights & social sciences: education for values & understanding. Experiences and problems from Estonia**

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## **Abstract**

*The paper elaborates a social critical approach to democracy education (Haav 2005a, b, 2008a, b, 2009). The traditional civic education is isolated from social sciences and practice. It ignores the social inequalities and injustice and reduces the problems of human rights and values to legal and moral issues. In practice, social inequality is commonplace. The powerful groups have more social resource at their disposal than the less favorable groups do. The former appreciate individual freedom and well-being more than social solidarity and justice. The critical alternative attempts at linking social science and practice, human rights and values. It recognizes social inequalities and opportunities for injustice. This enables to use social science and policy for reduction of inequalities and injustice. It teaches the less favorable groups to appreciate social well-being, solidarity and justice. In Estonia, some social science and civic teachers provide students with adequate social theoretical concepts, values and experiences. The national civic education system does not support them. In the contrary, it ignores them. The system pays lip-service to human rights, and disseminates irrelevant texts, inadequate to social practices.*

## **The social theoretical and critical framework.**

The alternative framework attempts at linking social science and practices, human rights and values together. It relies on sociological theories and defines a system of sociological concepts (Haav 2005a, 2008b, 2009):

- Social actors (e. g., citizens, politicians, civil servants and administrators in democratic states).
- Social structures or main models of decision making (democracy, autocracy and partnership).
- Quality of social processes (effectiveness, equality and justice).
- Dominant value orientations, including human rights as values (individual freedom and well-being, social development, social well-being, social equality and justice).
- Social theories about relations between the social actors (functionalist, pluralist, constructivist, critical).

These concepts enable us to consider democratic society as a controversial phenomenon that combines people's legal equality and social inequality. The European programme Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) does not neglect controversies and complexities, but because they remain shallow they can be easily avoided. The comparative international studies on civic education by IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) are descriptive and avoid complex issues and critical theories. This simplification goes on (see Schulz et al. 2008).

I have developed the critical approach to society and democracy in both my studies on Estonian society (Haav 2004 etc.) and in my lessons to both foreign (Finnish, Latvian, Russian etc.) and Estonian students of the Tallinn University of Technology (formerly, International University Audentes). I focus on dichotomies of individual-society and agency-structure. The individual-society dichotomy is not sufficient, even more, it may be misleading. One could think that society is collection of equal, but isolated individuals. The dichotomy of social actors and structures overcomes this shortcoming. In the dichotomy, the concepts of actors and structures are integrated. All people enjoy equal human rights. Citizens enjoy also political rights. All of them have different personal and social resources at their disposal. Differences in social resource are crucial, since they establish social inequality. Most people earn their income in private or public organizations. Most organizations are hierarchical and people have different opportunities to take advantage of them. Some people may establish norms (including organizational statutes and structures). Some (superiors) have opportunities to control other people. Most people are subordinated to superiors and must follow their instructions. Such social division of work introduces social inequality and enables injustice. Social critical theories recognize these opportunities. Functionalist theories neglect them. The latter theories dominate in business, legal and teacher education. With such ignorance cases of injustice in practice may be hidden or neglected, or consider as personal and not as social problems. It should be noted that the EDC recognizes problems of social inequality and

injustice, while the IEA studies don't do so. Moreover, the Estonian civic textbooks, other study materials and examinations ignore the social critical problems.

The isolated concepts of individual and society enable contrast between individual and social goals and values. Individual success and well-being may become more important than social equality, solidarity and justice. This is typical for post-communist countries, including Estonia (Haav 2005b, Lauristin et al. 2004). The hierarchical organizations make up the social structure of society. Society may be defined as a collection of social actors and structures. It is misleading to treat society as collection of simple relations between people or as collection of individuals. It is crucial to focus on integrated concepts of social actors and social structures, instead of isolated concepts of individuals and society. Social actors have different opportunities to take advantage of social structures and resources. This is the main basis of their classification. It is easier to grasp, if one looks at main actors in public organizations and political system, or business organizations and economic system, or schools and education system.

Table 1 outlines main social differences between social actors in democratic states. All people have rights and opportunities for participation in democracy. Still, the differences between the opportunities are huge. Citizens can participate at their own cost and other resources. They can make proposals that are beneficial for society. Still, these proposals may be ignored or rejected without adequate justification. Politicians control the whole state budget and, all the public sector that engages almost one third of the whole working population. Politicians receive their salaries for preparation and adoption of laws; they can employ a number of experts. They may also call different interest groups to take part in these political processes. At the same time, they are not obliged to take the public and expert opinions into an account. They may follow their own corporatist interests and neglect those of the wider public. In short, they may hinder the social development, even despite some public criticism.

**Table 1. Social differences between main actors in democratic states**

	<b>Citizens</b>	<b>Civil servants</b>	<b>Administrators</b>	<b>Politicians</b>
Participation in elections	+	+	+	+
Obligation to pay taxes	+	+	+	+
Incomes from public sector	-	+	+	+
Right to check the civil servants	-	-	+	+
Distribution of state resources, adoption of laws etc.	-	-	-	+

Source: Haav 2009.

This raises some important questions, such as: How to evaluate the politicians? How to distinguish between them, do they promote or hinder the social development? It also raises the issue of the role of education. Traditional democracy education does not help in this. It considers such evaluations impossible. However, by using theory of political decision making, it becomes possible. I have elaborated the theory and tested it in my studies on public and educational administration in Estonia (Haav 2004 etc.).

The theory complements the traditional system of hierarchy, democracy and participative democracy with the model of partnership. The new system may enable everybody willing to contribute social development to do so. If the politicians are really willing to develop society, then they should welcome everybody willing to assist them. They would design a system of decision making that enables employee and public contributions. Effective system of decision making is the essence of management. Such politicians do not contrast their personal and social interests and values. They do not need the isolated concepts of individuals and society. They may use the integrated concepts of social actors and structures.

If the politicians put their group and elitist interests first, then they avoid such a solution in principle. They may ask everybody to make proposals, but handle them in arbitrary way. The former Communist oligarchy practiced this widely. Now, I have similar experiences within the education system in Estonia (Haav 2004, 2008a). Such politicians subordinate the social and national values to their selfish ones. They hide their preferences by using isolated concepts of individuals and society. They prefer individualist and functionalist theories of society and democracy.

The *traditional civic education* and respective textbooks promote authoritarian values, obedience to laws and authorities. The participative civic education supports the idea of total participation. It means that all citizens should use all their private resources and participate in as many political processes as possible. In practice, this is a utopian and misleading idea. Individuals do not have enough knowledge, time and other resources. If some of them propose something, then politicians can contrast the proposals to each other and manipulate them. As a result, the people become passive and they do not use even their limited small opportunities to make some difference. Also, the EDC promotes the idea of local participation and leaves the national level unattended. If people have authoritarian values, then they approve their leaders almost automatically, even if the latter demonstrate a lack of political will and fail to support the national development. This orientation is linked to individualist and functionalist theories of society and democracy.

The *critical civic education* helps people to realize their status and opportunities in social structure of their society. If they are simple citizens and employees, then their individual opportunities are next to nothing. They should become organized and their representatives should participate in these democratic processes concerning their direct interests. This is obligatory, participation in sphere of indirect interests is mandatory. Such participation is realistic and may be effective. The number of draft laws and policy projects concerning a particular interest group is not big. The group's representatives have usually enough time and other resources to analyze these projects and outline their proposals and recommendations. Also, the rules of good lawmaking ask politicians to consult with all relevant interest groups (CBSS 2001). This happens in European Union, including Estonia (Illing & Lepa 2005).

Such participation enables also to evaluate the leading political actors. If politicians are willing to contribute to the national development, then they welcome public participation. If they avoid some interest groups and active citizens, then this is a sign of elitist interests and orientations. The elitist politicians hide their orientations by using individualist and functionalist social theories. Thus, avoidance of social theoretical and critical theories is also a sign of elitist value orientations. Critical civic education teaches students to use social theories in analyses and evaluations of main political actors. What are their main models of reasoning? What are their declared and hidden interests and values?

The main differences between the traditional unscientific and the social theoretical democracy education are summarized in the Table 2.

**Table 2. Differences between concepts in traditional and critical civic education**

	<b>Traditional, unscientific</b>	<b>Social theoretical</b>
Individual-society	Isolated concepts	Integrated
Social actors – structures	Missing	Integrated
Theory of society	Functionalist	Constructivist, critical
Theory of organization	Missing or functionalist	Constructivist, critical
Social theory & practice	Isolated	Interrelated
Evaluation of politicians	Impossible or arbitrary	Using theories & evidences, possible
Dominant values	Authoritarian, individualist	Democratic, collectivist
Attitudes to authorities	Uncritical, obedience	Critical, supportive
Human rights & values	Isolated concepts	Integrated
Basis of inequalities	Individual differences	Social structures
Interpretation of injustice	Individual & moral issues	Social, organizational & political problems
Human dignity	Individual & moral issues	Social, organizational & political problems

I develop the alternative framework also in my lessons. I analyze the dominant (implicit) social values behind the existing social inequalities, power structures and ideologies. When students contrast their own values and preferences with those in social practice, then they may correct their value orientations. Further, I link these real values to main social theories (individualist and functionalist or social theoretical and critical). At last, I link them also with main political ideologies (individualist and neo-liberal or collectivist and social democratic). These ideologies lead to different social inequalities in society. In social democratic Nordic countries and Germany, the difference between the highest and lowest income deciles is 6-8 times. In neo-liberal United Kingdom and USA, this is 14-16 times. Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia are situated between these groups with differences about 10-11 times (HDR 2006: 335, Plotnik 2008). My approach is close to the ethical and political models in ecological education, outlined by Klas

Sandell and his colleagues in Sweden (Sandell 2005). Such teaching of controversial concepts is quite hard, because students have formerly learned one-dimensional concepts and unscientific texts.

### **Teaching human rights in civic studies in Estonia.**

The concepts of legal norms and social values are not sufficiently elaborated in textbooks for secondary schools. In secondary schools, there are compulsory courses on civics for both levels of secondary education. The Estonian civil society movement has also been concerned with the quality of democracy education. They expressed it in the Civil Society Development Concept (adopted in 2002). Its implementation program outlines eleven main goals, including the education for human rights and values. Citizens should be responsible, caring and participative (EKAK 2004 and 2006). The program criticizes the existing civic syllabi and civic education system.

Since 2003, I myself have analyzed and criticized the study materials (Haav 2005 & 2008b). The syllabi mention human rights and democratic values. The textbooks do not link the rights, values and practices to each other. The formal civic education reduces the problems of human rights to legal issues, and the social values - to moral ones. It isolates them from social sciences and practices, social inequalities and injustice. It does not enable political literacy and critical evaluation of main political actors. Also the main author of the civic textbooks, Mrs. Anu Toots (2006), recognizes limited effects of the formal civic education.

Some institutions have published special study materials about law and human rights (Adamson 2001, Teplov 2006).

### **The study materials on human rights for secondary schools.**

In 1999-2001, the Civic Education Centre at the Jaan Tõnisson Institute (JTI) participated in the joint project for Europe by the Street Law incorporated (USA). They prepared study materials for schools. A distinguished teacher of history and civics, Mrs. Mai Kahru prepared the materials about the human rights. She argues that the human rights rely on human values and norms, but the idea is not elaborated in the following seven pages. The text considers human rights as relations between isolated individuals and the State. The history teacher neglects the existence of social inequalities. As mentioned before, in Estonia and other Baltic states the difference between the highest and lowest income deciles is about 10-11 times. In the Nordic countries and Germany, the figures are 6-8. The national social policies assist the vulnerable social groups and try to decrease the inequality. Mai Kahru totally ignores these social problems and follows psychological reductionism (in Adamson 2001: 28).

Sergei Teplov (2006: 76-92) has prepared special study materials for civic teachers. The materials consist mainly of the full UNO Declaration and eight exercises for drilling the rights. The exercises concern strictly legal aspects (classification of rights, universal rights, personal rights and obligations, restriction of rights, recognition of violation of rights on pictures, national states, European social charter). He relates them neither to students' attitudes and values nor to social structures and inequalities.

### **Studies on students' values and cognition of human rights.**

Anneli Kurg and Voldemar Kolga (1999) have asked 458 students to express their ideas of human rights. The respondents represent almost equally two age groups (the younger - 13-15 years and the older - 16-18 years). The study was not representative. The basic method was informal questionnaire with an open question about human rights. The students mentioned mostly negative issues, violation of rights. Only 36 students noticed that the human rights have been discussed in their school lessons. 127 students argued that their rights have not been violated at their schools. Students mentioned mostly violence of their privacy both inside and outside of schools. Many respondents claimed also about school violence both by teachers and students. One student argued that students have been treated as prisoners.

Margit Sutrop, (Centre for Ethics, University of Tartu) analyzed students' values in 2004. There was an essay contest and 350 students out of 92 schools took part in it. Sutrop (Koppel 2004: 55) refers to the famous essay by Linnar Priimägi about changes in students' values in the last decades. According to Priimägi, the generation was revolutionary in 1960s, silent in 1970s and consumerist in 1980s. Since 1980s, the youth lost their mental aspirations and started to worship material values and individual success (Lauristin et al. 2004, Haav 2005b). The same worship was typical, even dominant, also in the essays in 2004. Sutrop reviews the main values: higher education, prestigious profession, glory, material well-being, family, love and friends. Still, education has mainly instrumental value, as a condition for high positions and incomes.

### **National program for value development.**

Margit Sutrop and the Centre for Ethics arranged many discussions about value development in Estonia in 2008. They elaborated a program and achieved the State support for that for years 2009-2013 (RP 2009). They also published a number of papers on the theme (Sutrop, Pisuke 2008). The collection is perhaps the most comprehensive review of the respective ideas and studies in Estonia. Sutrop refers to some international studies and concludes that Estonians appreciate individualist and consumerist values more; and collective and social values - less than the other EU countries in average (Sutrop, Pisuke 2008: 24). Sutrop also reviews the results of media monitoring in 2006 and 2007, the essay contest initiated by the President of Estonia and opinions of 70 NGOs, active in the value development. These studies express their concern for human values and rights in most impressive way. Unfortunately, there is no reference to social reasons. In sum, the collection of essays largely ignores the social foundations of values. The papers do not reveal the role of hierarchical social structures and social injustice in reproduction of individualist and hedonist values.

The national program for value education (RP 2009) refers to human rights and European values, but focuses only on moral and social values. The program ignores numerous studies about dominance of individualist and materialist values in post-socialist countries. This enables the authors to focus on moral issues and avoid the material ones. The document mentions that for value formation, the school's social relations are more important than the teaching and reading materials are. It does not say anything about the social foundations of values, about the role of social inequalities and injustice in value formation.

### **Some conclusions.**

I have formerly demonstrated that all Estonian civic education system (curriculum development, compilation of textbooks, national examinations, and teacher education) avoids complex and controversial social problems, social inequalities and injustice (Haav 2005a, 2008b). Overtly, the education system might pay lip service to human rights, but it remains superficial and ambiguous, as it ignores social foundations of human values. In social practice, social inequalities are commonplace. These inequalities openly promote individualist and consumerist values. The cognitive dissonance between social practice and educational ideology is solved by following individualist psychological and functionalist sociological theories. Social theoretical and critical theories could reveal the contradiction between high moral values in ideology and selfish ones in practice. As the formal education system ignores and rejects social theories and criticism, it enables an increase in social inequalities and injustice. Now, the same is correct also about facultative studies on law (Adamson 2001), special materials about human rights for secondary schools (Teplov 2006) and value education program (RP 2009). They do not open the social foundations of human values and rights. There are but some plain references to links between values and rights (Kahru in Adamson 2001), and between values and social structures at schools (RP 2009). They do not criticise the existing social inequalities and injustice, they tolerate all this. They let people unprotected in front of social injustice. The situation is better in Estonian textbooks for higher education. Advig Kiris and others (2007) discuss the problems of social and legal norms and link them to values, too. The same does Eduard Raska (2004) in a monograph and Silvia Kaugia in an article (2006). Still, they do not focus on relations between the rights and values.

I have developed an alternative framework that links human rights, respective values, social theories and practices together. I also develop this in my lessons to students of Tallinn Technical University. This framework enables to reveal the social origins of inequality and injustice. People with strong individualist and materialist values take advantage of existing social structures. This is enabled by hierarchical organizations, authoritarian relations and values. People in their vast majority are employees with very limited opportunities to influence decision making in their work organizations. Although most people are not well off, many of them still share the same value orientations as the rich and powerful people do. Individual freedom, well-being and success are preferred to social equality, solidarity, honesty and justice. In the Estonian politics, the neo-liberal and right ideology dominates over the social democratic one. Partly, this has been enabled by the dominant implicit social theories in the education system. In compulsory basic and secondary education, there is no place for social theoretical and critical thinking. Individualist and functionalist models of reasoning retain their monopoly on truth. The former communist authoritarianism has been replaced by the capitalist one. In the Estonian civic textbooks, there is no criticism of the former Soviet authoritarianism. The same is true for the mainstream higher managerial, teacher and legal education.

I try to reveal the students' values and develop their social theoretical and critical thinking. If students appreciate individual well-being and success, then they are willing to obtain higher position in work

organizations. As a result, they will have more opportunities to use others and manipulate with them. To do so, authoritarian values and structures, and individualist and functionalist social theories are beneficial. If students realize their limited opportunities for managerial career, then they start to appreciate social values, solidarity and justice. They need democratic values and structures. They should use social theoretical and critical theories. As a result, they would become able to reveal social manipulation and injustice in their organizations and society at large. All this would promote social effectiveness, equality and justice.

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