



„WILL THEY BECOME SUBJECTS OR CITIZENS?“

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES IN HUNGARY
AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON**

SECONDARY ANALYSIS BASED ON INTERNATIONAL DATABASES AND LITERATURE

**FOREWORD
AND
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

JUNE 2010



FOREWORD

The Active Citizenship Foundation, Hungary carried out a secondary research analysis in partnership with the TÁRKI-TUDOK Centre for Knowledge Management and Educational Research Inc. which looked into research databases and literature regarding the active citizenship attitudes of Hungarian youth.¹

The subject is more topical now, than ever. The European Union of today – which is experiencing significant social and economic changes – needs citizens who are able to cope with the uncertain characteristic of our time, but are however susceptible to the issues of their closer and wider communities. European integration and participation in global competition requires flexible knowledge and skill training for workers. In addition, however, another key objective is to make Europe a democratic, socially inclusive and non-discriminatory, cohesive society.

The Council of Europe and the European Union have taken a number of initiatives over the past decade to elaborate the objectives of education for active citizenship and the theoretical framework and measurements, and to make suggestions on their political implementation.² The European Union has set social and civic competence among the key competences for education, closely followed by the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.³ In 2006, the European Commission launched a program, where a uniform system describes the content of the key competences required in education.⁴ Within this context, the skills of active citizenship are being elaborated as well. In 2008-2009, a major international survey took place, where the civic and citizenship skills of 14-year-old students were assessed across Europe.⁵

The Active Citizenship Foundation and the Tárki-Tudok would like to contribute with this research report to the development of Hungarian education policy in relation to active citizenship. We hope that the essay will stimulate a professional discussion and that it will also contribute to help future and present generations in Hungary to play an active and responsible role as European citizens.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concept of citizenship has undergone a significant transformation over the past twenty years. The original meaning of the word 'citizen' in the legal sense has taken a dynamic course, emphasizing the direction of action, and on the other hand, has broaden with new content (environmental awareness, entrepreneurship etc.). Our study aims to examine how young people define the concept of citizenship, and whether this awareness goes hand in hand with such values and skills that promote democratic action.

Research has shown that attitudes related to active citizenship stand in conjunction with other civil society macroindicators.⁶ The cleaner and the more corruption-free the inhabitants of a given country feel their environment, the more they are willing to behave as active and responsible citizens. The higher the socio-economic development indicators of a state, the more prevalent is the people's willingness to act as active citizens. Moreover, in countries where the social differences between men and women (the gender gap) are smaller, the active citizenship index is higher.

Over the last decade, a number of domestic investigations were conducted which specifically or tangentially addressed the issue of citizenship. The results suggest that young people have a constant feeling of disenchantment with politics, which manifests in a lack of confidence and interest, and which leads to an absence of action. Our study of internationally recorded data, however, is even more alarming than our domestic results.

An interest in politics and political awareness are just as important elements of active and responsible citizenship as are democratic protesting activities. However, they do not cover the full spectrum: being an active member of civil society is also becoming an increasingly important element of the concept. It seems, however, that the latter is becoming under-represented in the minds and activities of young people. International data show that – especially in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe – only a small proportion of young people take part in the traditional forms of political participation, and the more recent civil organizational activities. But it is also clear that young people have a need to express their views, and to participate in decision making. Eurobarometer data show, that the Hungarian and European young people believe that access to this form of participation would help them most in becoming more active citizens. It is a significant result that many Hungarian young people consider the role of the school important in becoming an active citizen. More than three quarters of the young people consider it important that the school carries out citizenship education, and 60 percent think that the activating role of civil society organizations is important as well. It appears that young people stay away from civil society organizations not because they are indifferent, but because there is no opportunity to try and learn what it is like to work for a good cause in a positive working environment. All this means, that by making the civil sector more attractive, and with more efficient management, the participation of young people could triplicate.

The results of the World Values Survey found that within the European student community there is a relatively high level of willingness to enterprise, which is an important element of active and responsible citizenship behaviour. However, the Youth 2004 national research results register a low interest in entrepreneurship by young people, even though those who work as entrepreneurs are generally more satisfied with their working conditions than the average young employee.

We know relatively little about what kind of knowledge Hungarian youth have about the notion of citizenship. The in-depth international examination of the age group of 14-year-olds took place in 1999 within the framework of the CIVED research. Unfortunately Hungary did not take part in the follow-up study (ICCS) concerning these issues in 2008-2009. The 1999 results indicate that Hungarian young people are aware of the knowledge elements and the conventional nature of citizenship, which coincides with the international average. Their confidence towards institutions and their positive attitude towards the nation were also around the international average. Compared

to international results, however, Hungarian children performed exceptionally poorly in capturing the essence of questions related to democratic operations, in disassociation of facts and opinions and in such interpretative tasks as requesting further elaboration of subjects. Furthermore, there was an essential difference in weighing the government's economic responsibility, which was more important to young people in Hungary, than within the other participating countries in general, while social responsibility was considered to be a less important responsibility of governments. The attitudes also highlighted some of the dimensions where Hungarian young people stayed below the international average. These attitudes concern participation in school and adulthood activity, as well as attitudes towards women and immigrants.

Other studies also confirmed that Hungarian students are not able to capture the essence of democracy. The School and Democracy research has found that in the head of high school students democratic values are rather in a turmoil: the importance of democracy gets on well with a leader-based system as well as with the idea of tyranny. A concurrence with a leader-based system and with tyranny has continued to increase among young people since 2005. The vast majority of young people can identify with the statement, that Hungary needs a political party which, if necessary not afraid to use violence.

THE SCHOOL AS AN IDEAL ARENA FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Although schools could be used to implement citizenship education, a number of signs indicate, that they cannot or do not want to take on this role. According to the CIVED research data, Hungarian children do not feel that the atmosphere within their classes is open for discussion, or that they are encouraged to form an individual opinion. They do not trust that their participating efforts could lead to results in school. Both their school participation and their potential adulthood participation attitudes stay behind the international average. In the Western and Northern countries, and even in some Mediterranean countries, the results regarding classroom climate were more positive. Children in these regions were much more confident regarding their chances of participation, and generally proved to be more open and tolerant than children in Hungary. Among the post-socialist countries, the Polish are among the best in this field: students are more open and tolerant than in other Eastern European countries. Not only is the knowledge of the children above the average, but they also consider their classroom climate to be more open, and are much more confident regarding their participation opportunities in school and later adulthood participation in society.

According to our experience, the Hungarian school system is organized along the lines of mere transmission of information, a normative, pre-determined question and answer minded approach. Thus, Hungarian public education possesses neither the knowledge base, nor the necessary methodology to give space for encounters of opinion or to discuss important social issues. Public education lacks the culture of discussion, which is a basis for the conduct of conscious and active citizenship. Civic education is not a separate subject in school schedules, but at best a module subject. That in itself would not be a problem, since the active and responsible citizenship education in schools, is a whole-school mission, which can not be achieved by just one hour a week. Instead, one should strive to make schools democratic habitats, where students can practice such rights and responsibilities, which they will need in their wider communities. The student council and the students (school-citizens) involvement in school planning and decision-making tasks, could effectively help to further the idea.

In schools there is an overarching need for teachers who could serve as role models for democratic, active citizens. In contrast, we have observed, that the teacher training high school students themselves do not possess the necessary competences for citizenship education. In most cases, due to the selective school system, they have not themselves met with other various social groups, they have not developed strategies for problem solving and are often prejudiced themselves. According to a research by Márta Fülöp and her colleagues, practicing teachers consider a good citizen as someone who possesses the ability to follow rules, rather than participating in community life, being tolerant and cooperative. Despite this, teacher training and postgraduate education neglects almost totally the emphasis on democracy and active citizenship education. Meanwhile, reference books from the EU are flooding the market, but their distribution is still not solved. The latest relevant educational resources that are made in Hungary are gathering dust in warehouses because of copyright disputes. It would be very important to make them available to improve the quality of citizenship education.

Our research came to the conclusion that the social and political activity of young people in Hungary is low by international standards. At the same time it is obvious that children have a desire to share their views, if they get the opportunity. Both the school system, and the non-governmental sphere should reflect over this need. Active citizenship education is a process, which can be realized within a strongly motivated community. The WVS tests of Hungary, however, have shown for many years now, that the Hungarian society is closed and it seems that traditional values are dominant, regardless of age.

Community building is a social value independent from ideology. An open community aids coexistence and responsibility. Respect for tradition strengthens the confidence, and at the same time it can open the mind for the diversity of reality. This is the very purpose of citizenship education.

FOOTNOTES

¹ WILL THEY BECOME SUBJECTS OR CITIZENS? YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES IN HUNGARY – AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON. RESEARCH REPORT. Available in Hungarian at <http://www.aktivpolgar.hu/> and at <http://www.tarki-tudok.hu/> websites.

² The Council of Europe began in 1997, to develop a program for education for democratic citizenship, and to implement a framework for policy and practice, and has been continually monitoring the actions of member states' public policy. (See: All European Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship Policies. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2005.) In addition, the Committee of Ministers adopted in 2002 a recommendation on education for democratic citizenship. (Council of Europe Recommendation Rec (2002) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on education for democratic citizenship) Within the frames of the EURYDICE program, a comprehensive study was prepared about citizenship education in 30 countries in Europe (Citizenship Education at School in Europe. Eurydice, Brussels, 2005)

³ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC), 2006

⁴ Communication from the Commission – A coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in education and training, 2007

⁵ See: International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). The research is coordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. The research is the follow-up of the 1999 study named CIVED.

⁶ Bryony Hoskins, Jochen Jesinghaus, Massimiliano Mascherini, Giuseppe Munda, Michela Nardo, Michaela Saisana, Daniel Van Nijlen, Daniele Vidoni, Ernesto Villalba: MEASURING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN EUROPE. CRELL 2006, Research Paper No. 4. European Commission, CRELL. <http://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ActiveCitizenship/AC-Final%20Report-December%202006/measuring%20AC.pdf>



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