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# Teaching citizenship and democracy: a new system of concepts for Estonia and the EU

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This paper focuses on the conceptual problems of democracy education and outlines an original framework. It relies on sociological dilemmas (individual and society, social actors and structures) and institutional theories on organisations. This framework covers all the main dimensions of the European Education for Democratic Citizenship project (Audigier, 1999) and offers a way of overcoming the shortcomings of the traditional civic education curricula (formal description of social, economic and political institutions, gaps between theories, policies and practices). I have implemented the framework in comparative studies of public and educational administration in Estonia and other European countries since 1997. I have also proposed the framework to the Centre for Curriculum Development at the University of Tartu for a reform in civic education in Estonia.

**The problem**

There is not much discussion about the main objectives of civic education: one of them is the preparation of young people and adults for active participation in democratic society. This goal has been adopted by the Council of Europe (CE, 1998 and 1999), the European Commission (EC, 1998) and the Government of Estonia (National Curricula, ROK, 1996 and 2002). However, the conceptual system is not clear. The Council of Europe initiated the project 'Education for Democratic Citizenship' (EDC) in 1997. The Thematic Network Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe (CiCe) arranges annual conferences and has published their proceedings since 1999. Ross addressed the main models of curricula in 2000 (Ross, 2000, p91). The CiCe Budapest Conference in 2002 dealt with political literacy and controversial issues in more details (Holden, Koopmann; Ross, etc.). Although there are some books and handbooks on teaching social studies (Holden and Clough, 1998; Osler, 2000; QCA, 1998), work on conceptual frameworks is still in progress.

The EDC progress was reviewed in 2002 by Naval, Print and Veldhuis, and in 2004 by Birzea, Kerr and others. Among others, Naval *et al*. argued that existing civics curricula were inadequate and that there was a need for the formulation of a theoretical framework (Naval et al. 2002, p124). This argument is supported by other scholars. Traditional social studies avoid controversies and hard issues and focus on 'appropriate' citizenship (Ross, 2001). Civics, as history and geography, is often used 'to teach blind patriotism or to 'train and discipline the mind' through rote memorisation and other scholastic authoritarian processes' (Sünker, Farner, Szell, 2003, p290). Typically, civics curricula and textbook focus on political and governmental actors, and avoid the social actors and controversies (Ahonen, 1999; Ross, 2000).

In my opinion, one of the problems is that democratic practices rely mainly on rational actor theories. According to them, all citizens are considered as equal and rational individuals, they are perfectly informed, able to understand social and political processes and willing to intervene in them if necessary. Both practice and empirical studies have demonstrated the invalidity of these assumptions. Ton Olgers expressed a critical stance

towards the rationality theory at the EDC seminar in Strasbourg in 2001 (Olgers, 2002). The practice is better depicted by empirical theories. Thus, the rational theories should be complemented by social critical and empirical ones. Social practice is controversial and education should address these controversies. This is also a political problem as it is related to interests of the main power groups (Ball, 1990; Crawford, 2003).

**The focus on social actors and structures**

In a representative democracy, citizens elect their representatives and the latter promise to do their best for the public interest. It is relatively easy to determine the representatives. It is very hard to evaluate how they keep their promises and serve the people. Without any relevant conceptual framework, it is impossible. I have elaborated my alternative framework in the following way.

First, I replaced the individual actors in the rationality theory by the social actors. In any democratic society, people have different rights, resources and responsibilities. There are crucial differences between politicians, civil servants, their administrators and the rest of the citizens. In this paper, there is no space to define them in detail.

Second, I implemented the institutional approach to the relations between the social actors. The institutional organisation theory enables one to approach the whole public sector as a system of institutional and organisational structures between the actors. There is only one central problem: are the relations between the main actors (politicians, administrators, civil servants and people) relevant for democracy, justice and effectiveness? The problem has differences on national and organisational levels.

Third, I analysed the main laws on civil service and governance, and the opinions of the main institutions in a democracy (coalitional and oppositional parties, the President, the state audit, employers' and employees' unions, mass media, social scientists, public opinion polls, etc.). This enabled me to give a definite answer to the relevancy problem on the national level (Haav, 2002).

Fourth, I studied the relations between employees and administration in a national agency and some higher educational institutions. Did the employees have opportunities for participation in organisational improvement? If a civil agency or school was willing to improve its activities, then it would have enabled the active participation of both its own employees (teachers) and its capable clients (students and parents). In case of rejection its reliability should be challenged. I have found the opportunity for civic participation as the main criterion of democratic governance (Haav, 2002).

Fifth, were the opportunities formalised and institutionalised, or not? Often, people had many informal opportunities to speak with and make proposals to civil servants, administrators and politicians. It was much more effective, if all this was regulated by statutes and laws and if there were some special substructures for that. Attitudes towards civic participation were justified by theoretical concepts of individual and society, individual and organisation.

Sixth, what were the relevant relations, the relevant models of governance and decision-making? Traditionally, there are two main models of decision-making in democratic states, those of democracy and autocracy. I considered the two models insufficient and designed the third basic model, that of partnership. All organisational models could be considered as combinations and variations of the three main models. In organisational

theory and practice, the concepts of participative democracy and partnership are well known, but they are ambiguous and need some clarification.

The participative democracy supplements the organisational hierarchy and means the right of employees and/or clients and/or other interested actors to receive information and make proposals to the administration for organisational development. The right is differently regulated in 'old' and 'new' democracies. In many European countries, it is backed by law. In Estonia, employees of neither public nor private organisations enjoy the right.

Partnership is a broad concept. Social partnership means relations between employers and employees. I use a narrow concept of partnership that is similar to the multiple stakeholders' theory. Partnership is an organisation that is governed by a body (council) representing its all main stakeholders as partners. I have synthesised the partnership model from models of a democratic market and hierarchical firm (after Williamson, 1975 etc.). Williamson considers the two models as the main effective institutions of a capitalist economy. Williamson argues that the hierarchy failed in knowledge-intensive organisations, but he did not find a new model for these cases. The partnership model is a theoretical solution for knowledge-intensive organisations. In business organisations, it has a minor role. It has wide perspectives in education (school and university councils). The principle of partnership is widely used in public policy and democratic law-drafting. It means that all interested parties should have opportunities for participation in these processes. In Estonia, the idea of public-civil partnership is very popular. NGOs are fighting for their right to receive information and make proposals to the relevant state agencies and public organisations. In some cases, they have succeeded, and their success is a sign of democratic development.

**Main social actors and structures in schools**

There are similar concepts in the educational system. In schools, there are students, teachers and administrators. There are also parents, local and national authorities. The relations between the actors are regulated by laws and other normative documents. The relations may be described by three main organisational models: democratic, hierarchical and that of partnership (Table 1).

**Table 1: Main actors and structures at schools**

| Structures | Owners | School head | Teachers | Students | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Democratic | (Local inhabitants) Local council | – | Study council, teacher unions | Student organisations, self-governance | Parents' organisations and meetings |
| Hierarchical | Local government | Authorities – school head – teachers | School head – teachers – students | Teachers – students | – |
| Partnership | In school council | School council | School council | School council | School council |

The European educational systems can also be characterised by these main models. In the last decades, the role of hierarchies has diminished, and that of participative democracy

and partnerships increased (EC 1999; EURYDICE, 1996). In some countries, the school council is the main governing body (the neo-liberal model).

In Estonia, the school system was complex and dynamic in the years 1918-1940. There were educational councils representing the main partners on school, local, regional and national levels. In the Soviet period, the system was centralised and hierarchical. After 1991, the system was de-centralised and the school councils (*hoolekogu*) were re-established. Still, the role of hierarchy did not diminish and there has been only limited progress in dissemination of participative democracy and partnerships (Haav, 2004).

School governance and students' organisations are very important for the acquisition of democratic knowledge, skills and values. Unfortunately, these issues are not part of civic syllabi and textbooks in Estonia so far.

**Main social actors and structures in economy**

In the market economy, the main actors are producers (or sellers) and consumers (or buyers). In the market place, they are equal. All economically active individuals are either employers, employees or self-employed. The main producers are business companies. In business organisations, there are employers and employees, or owners, managers and workers. These actors are unequal and their inequality is legalised by labour laws and contracts. This inequality enables social injustice and even discrimination. According to Marx's theory of surplus value, all business profit results from the capitalist exploitation of workers. This was an overstatement, but the opportunities for social injustice and exploitation still exist. In the former Soviet Union, free enterprise and private ownership of production tools were strictly forbidden. Now this is allowed, but nobody speaks about the opportunities for social injustice and exploitation. The Estonian civic syllabus and textbooks avoid the main controversies of market economy and capitalist organisations too.

According to Oliver Williamson (1975 etc.), the democratic market and the hierarchical firm are the main social institutions of capitalism.

**The system of concepts: social actors, values and structures**

In sum, there are a limited number of social actors (Table 2) and structures in society. There are only four or five main actors and three main models of decision-making in organisations:

democracy, autocracy and the partnership.

**Table 2: Main actors in economy, politics and education**

| Social subsystems | Owners | Administrators | Service providers | Clients |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economy | Shareholders | Managers | Employees | Consumers |
| Politics | (Citizens) and politicians | Administrators | Civil servants | People |
| Public education | National and local authorities | School heads | Teachers | Students |

The concepts are linked with some social values: social equality, effectiveness and justice. The democratic model relies on equality. Not always is it effective. The hierarchical model relies on inequality, it is argued to be effective, but often it is unfair.

The partnership model combines the inequality of individual members with the equality of the main stakeholders in governance. Theoretically, it enables the combination of social effectiveness and justice (Haav, 1998, 2004). These models also relate actors' values (individual success and well-being, or social effectiveness, solidarity and justice). This set of concepts is necessary and sufficient for the understanding of the main problems in democracy.

In the Estonian civic syllabus (2002) and textbooks, there is a focus on human and political rights. The democratic and social values are not related to social actors and structures.

**The social theoretical foundations**

Our framework of social actors and structures relies on the main social dichotomies (individual and society, agency and structure, micro and macro – Layder, 1994). It considers individuals and society as socially constructed and integrated concepts (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Giddens, 1984). There are mutual processes of social construction of both individuals and society (Weigert, 1986). Society is not a collection of isolated equal individuals. Unfortunately, this idea dominates Estonian education.

**Conclusions**

The paper outlines a system of concepts for democracy in civic education. It relies on some basic social dichotomies and develops a theory of effective organisational models. It defines the main social actors (eg citizens, politicians, civil servants, and administrators), organisational concepts (democracy, autocracy, participative democracy and partnership) and organisational and social values (social equality, justice and effectiveness). This system is a result of my theoretical and empirical studies, and organisational and political experiences in Estonia in the last decade. This system has been implemented in comparative analyses of Estonian public administration and education (Haav, 1998, 2002, 2004).

This conceptual system is hierarchical. It focuses on the main social actors and the main issue in democracy: are the relations between the main actors relevant for democracy or not? Traditionally, civic syllabi and textbooks focus on political and democratic institutions and avoid social actors and controversies. This is typical in Estonia and also in most other EU countries.

The concepts of social actors, values and structures should be introduced into civic syllabi and civic teacher education. They should also be outlined in relevant textbooks. Students may use the concepts to analyse their own organisational experiences in student organisations. The level of students' civic knowledge can be assessed from their ability to implement the concepts on organisational and national levels. This system of concepts enables a better achievement of the main objectives in civic education as defined by the European Commission, Council of Europe and Estonia's Government.

I have proposed these concepts to the relevant educational institutions and the academic community in Estonia. So far, there has been not much willingness to discuss them. The

reasons seem to be inside the education system itself. There are gaps between theories and practices in education, including teacher education and the education of civic teachers, especially. Teachers are used to delivering texts: conceptual thinking is more difficult to acquire and implement.

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