

*Cesar Birzea, Bruno Losito, Ruud Veldhuis*

## Editorial

### Keywords:

Council of Europe, citizenship, democratic citizenship, citizenship education, political education, education for democracy, Europe, Year of Citizenship Education, participation, community, commitment, teacher preparation, teacher training, youth

A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of a lack of citizen involvement and, according to many politicians and scientists, a lack of citizen participation in society and in politics. Paraphrasing the famous first sentence of Marx and Engels, the Communist Manifesto, we start the introduction to this special issue about 'citizenship', because something is going on in Europe.

There are some phenomena in the behavior of citizens and politicians that raise our eyebrows and demand clarification. Politicians and scientists are concerned because of the consequences for the legitimacy and the sustainability of democracy when only a small number of citizens is participating actively in civil society and in decision-making. Citizens show a growing dissatisfaction with the "traditional" forms of participation in decision making processes, such as joining a political party and/or voting.

The Council of Europe started an ambitious project, Education for Democratic Citizenship, in 1997 which was a reaction on the political changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and later incorporated the symptoms that are sometimes labeled as the gap between politics and citizens, which were visible in western democracies.

What was the main reason for the Council of Europe to declare 2005 the European Year of Citizenship?

"Low election turnouts among young people and their decreasing participation in public and political life lend urgency to the issue of education for democratic citizenship, which should be seen as a long-term investment to promote the democratic values of human rights, tolerance and cultural pluralism" ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)).

The "Year" was designed to make the different players more aware of their

responsibilities: not only the decision-makers in the ministries, head teachers and university vice-chancellors, but also teachers, trainers, project leaders and NGOs.

The ambition of the "Year" is to offer opportunities for exchanges of innovatory practices among professionals, as well as opportunities to raise public awareness of democratic citizenship issues in various European countries.

The problems that underlie the EDC-project are still present, so that there is a reason to continue the project until 2010.

The Council of Europe joined forces with the European Union on citizenship education. Among others, a study on "Citizenship Education at School in Europe" was published by Eurydice in 2004. This comparative survey focuses on citizenship education in primary and general secondary levels in the EU countries.

For the last few years 'citizenship' has been put on the top of the political agenda by policymakers and scientists. Some reasons for that are:

- The research into the effectiveness of education for democracy or citizenship education showed that citizenship education can make a difference. In some countries like Spain and the UK a new subject will be, respectively has been, introduced in the curriculum.
- In other countries and in international bodies like the European Commission, the OECD, UNESCO a discussion is going on about the contents and direction of active citizenship. A similar discourse takes place in the USA.
- Recently we have seen uprisings from Muslim youngsters in the suburbs of some French cities. They point to social and political problems that can come to an outburst in other EU member states with similar suburbs. It gives politicians a lot to think about and they can not ignore the tensions that exist in neighborhoods with large immigrant populations. Citizenship courses and citizenship lessons are, together with social and economic measures, introduced to tackle this integration problem.

A sense of urgency to discuss citizen involvement is the declining support of citizens for political institutions, like parties and representatives. See the latest Eurobarometer results.

Although the involvement and interest in specific social and political issues like safety, terrorism, unemployment, poverty, aids, etc. is high, the turn out to vote for the Referendum about the so called European Referendum was also relatively high in France and the Netherlands, but the results were felt to be negative for the politicians.

Characteristic for the situation is how politicians and citizens are estranged from each other. The voters ignored the advice of the political leaders of the large parties.

Another reason to worry about and which is seen in almost all EU countries is the declining membership of traditional political parties. The drop in turn-out % is pretty general and voters easily change their preference for political parties.

The loss of citizen trust is not evenly distributed among the population. Higher educated, elderly and religious citizens in general show more trust. The biggest level of distrust is seen in the group of relatively low-educated,

non-religious lower middle class citizens.

The question is if this declining trust in politics can be reverted.

This issue of the JSSE deals with citizenship and citizenship education.

*Cesar Birzea* opens the issue by defining the key concepts such as citizenship (political status vs. social role), citizenship education and European citizenship. A special attention is paid to pragmatic consequences of each conceptual option.

In arguing for a cultural construction of citizenship, this opening article gives priority to non-territorial membership, such as constitutional patriotism (Habermas) and multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka). The European citizenship is one of the post national forms of membership, based on the attachment to European values and institutions where the demos prevails over the ethnos and belonging to a given territory.

*Judith Torney-Purta* and Carolyn Barber explore the issue of student participation in democratic school life. The premise is that schools can "provide students with in-class education related to politics, government, civic involvement and tolerance, but they can also provide opportunities for individuals to learn about democracy more directly and to contribute to community decisions through student councils or other groups". The results of the second IEA Civic Education study are analysed with two different aims: to present the correlations "between country averages or means for several indicators of democratic school participation and country averages on scale measuring perceptions of citizenship and expected civic participation"; and to explore the within-country correlations between democratic learning and participation at school and expectations for civic participation (as defined by two indicators from the IEA instruments: expectation of participating as an informed voter and expectations of community participation). The results of these analyses are discussed and several recommendations for enhancing student democratic participation are presented.

*Barbara Malak-Minkiewicz*, from the Secretariat of the International Association for the evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), describes in her article the historical background of the IEA civic education studies. In more detail, she describes the most recent studies: phase 1 (1994-1998) in which 24 countries participated and where the focus was on 14 years old students; in phase 2 (since 1999) 90.000 students in 28 countries were questioned. She summarizes the most important conclusions of the research, what young people know about democracy, citizenship and identity. The importance of the IEA civic education study lies among others in the contribution to the debate on education of future citizens and educational reform. In 2004 it was decided to launch a third study which will focus on civic and citizenship education. "The key research questions will concern student knowledge and conceptual understandings, interest, dispositions to engage and attitudes." In addition, there will be questions about home, school and community. The research will focus on grade 8 students. Data will be collected in 2008 and reporting is expected in 2009.

*Ted Huddleston* addresses the issue of teacher training for citizenship education. Despite the importance of this topic within policy documents, very little has been done in concrete terms. The explanation is threefold and is related to the very nature of citizenship as a new kind of subject: this

is a very new concept. It is implemented in different ways and involves the whole school staff. What is needed, according to Huddleston, is to value the existing provisions (as for instance the Council of Europe tool for teacher training) and to develop additional support structures and mechanisms. Concrete examples are given from various European countries.

Maria Helena Salema's paper presents guidelines for the development of teachers' competencies in the field of EDC. The paper is based on the Tool on Teacher Training for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, included in the so called "EDC Pack" of the Council of Europe for the European Year of Citizenship through Education. On the base of the analysis of the concept of education for democratic citizenship and of the assumption that teachers play a key role in the development of student knowledge, skills and competencies in EDC, the paper presents several proposals for an effective teacher preparation both at initial and in-service level. The development of teachers' reflexivity, as the ability to reflect on their own professional practice critically, is identified as the most important strategy for teacher professional growth.

Wojciech Starzynski's paper is his speech delivered during a Council of Europe conference (2005) about the role of non-governmental organizations in education for democracy. His topic is the role of the European Parents Association (EPA) in the development of democratic education. His starting point is "that it is the organizations, foundations and other forms of citizen association that creates the foundation of democracy ...". Parents need special attention because they have such an important role in educating their children. He describes the history and structure of the EPA and the influence that the association has exerted on the role that parents play in school. The publication "Rights of parents at school" was important in that respect. EPA also tries to assist parents in countries that wish to break away from totalitarianism.