Civic Learning As A Prerequisite For Democratic Values And Civil Society – Case Study

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Abstract

Democratic and responsible behaviour is a prerequisite for the formation of civil society. Thus, the civic learning gains importance in the education process. Civic learning shapes the civic position of every individual in society and preserves democratic values. This publication describes the historical aspects of civic learning and its role in strengthening democracy. Also, elements of civic learning have been analyzed, a structure of civic position has been developed and civic attitudes of young people have been diagnosed. Civic position is the relationship between an individual and society, in which he or she fulfils his or her duties to the state and acts conscientiously and responsibly towards people and own country.

Keywords: civic learning, civic position, civil society, democracy, education.

1. Introduction

The world, including education, is undergoing a major transformation: the pandemic crisis is forcing a rethink of socialisation and learning/teaching habits, while geopolitical challenges and populist currents are posing serious challenges to democratic values. Society is experiencing technological progress and at the same time a crisis of values, which is not only linked to liberal or neoliberal currents. We live in a very information-saturated age, where people seem to be confused – Homo Confusus (Черниговская, 2019), thus, understanding and approaching democratic values and the reasons for their relevance, as well as a development of individual's civic position and civil society becomes essential. It is critical in the learning process to put focus on empowering students to be civically responsible contributors to the future life of their country. Therefore, to preserve democratic values and develop individual's civic position, the implementation of civic education in the pedagogical process gains a special importance. Civic education in general education can reinforce democratic values, leading to greater political trust (Kołczyńska, 2020). It should

also be mentioned that citizenship issues and their integration into the curriculum are also goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and its contribution to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2018, 32).

"We need to think beyond the high school Civics class to imagine a lifetime of civic learning and practice. Civic learning includes practicing civic skills and developing civic dispositions as well as acquiring knowledge about our history and public institutions" (Vinnakota, 2019, p. 4). It influences the development of an individual's civic position through the formation of individual attitudes, resulting in the promotion of the individual's civic responsibility. In his work "Personality Structure and Human Attitudes to Reality" V. Myasishchev describes the structure of human attitude, noting that "the manifestation of the civic position of a personality is characterized by a person's attitude towards society, social processes, people and oneself. It is a psychological phenomenon that combines the results of human cognition, emotions and behavior towards a particular object of reality" (Мясищев, 1956, p. 21). However, the role of the family cannot be underestimated as "democratic attitudes and values should be acquired not just in class, but also at home". And therefore "it is important to inform parents about this process (Kula & Aytac, 2022, p. 254). Civic position is the relationship between an individual and society, in which he or she fulfils his or her duties to the state and acts conscientiously and responsibly towards people and own country. To summarise, it should be noted that a certain algorithm is being developed, namely, civic learning shapes an

individual's responsible attitude, which leads to a civic position that serves as a basis for further civic engagement.

The aim of this publication is to analyse the elements of civic learning, to develop a structure of civic position and to identify the civic attitudes of young people by describing the historical development of civic learning. To achieve the objective, the authors used theoretical research methods: complex analysis and critical thinking method, as well as empirical research methods: data collection method; survey; data processing and analysis methods (Martinsone, Pipere, Kamerāde, 2016).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Historical overview of civic learning

Civic learning has its origins in ancient Greece (Athens). In the classical period, education was not compulsory – it was seen as a moral duty of parents towards their children. Although there were no formal schools, and everyone educated their children as they wished and could (it was more a collective responsibility). However, this did not bring a negative impact on the general level of knowledge. For example, in the 5th century BC in the Athenian polis there was not a single illiterate (Rubenis, 2007). It should also be noted that education was the privilege of those citizens who could afford it. In ancient Greece, learning process was very broad and practical for life, although, at the same time, unequal for the girls, who had rather limited access to education. Teaching was provided by private teachers without direct state intervention, so schools were autonomous: „schools were open from dawn to dusk. School discipline was severe and hitting (as an educational tool) was freely used both at school and at home. Later (6th century BC) two types of schools emerged: one where boys studied music and literature and the other one where physical training was provided. From the age of 16 to 18, boys (if their parents could financially

afford it) were placed in a state-supported gymnasium, where physical training was continued. Later (at the age of 18 and 20), a boy could apply for citizenship by taking an oath of allegiance to his country thus becoming a full citizen" (Cubberley, 2004, p. 26, 32). Later, after the 5th century BC, a new kind of learning came to Greece, which became more accessible, humane, and structured, thus laying the foundations for an educational system emphasising the need for civic learning, individuality, and the practical applicability of knowledge. These changes were introduced by the Sophists. The ancient Greeks understood the importance of education and the long-term effects of patriotism, so civic education became essential to prepare citizens to serve their country. Of course, reserved judgements should be made about the manifestations of civic participation and civic learning, analysing the ethnopsychological portrait of a person and education in the ancient world. The ethnopsychological portrait was based mainly on the surrender of one's destiny to the gods and a certain sense of superiority over others, education and learning were shaped by several aspects. Firstly, not all people born had the right to life; secondly, society was patriarchal, with the father having the final decision, legal and de facto absolute power over the children. On the one hand, in Ancient Greece: there was no legal control over education, but at the same time there was a certain order which later laid the foundations for the education system. Collective consciousness, a sense of responsibility, high virtues and morality were the most important factors in the development of civic learning and, later, the education system in ancient Greece.

Civic learning in the classical way was not applied in the medieval period because of the social decision in the medieval society which was determined by the existing feudal system, the authority of the Church and people's prejudices. Childhood in the Middle Ages lasted until the age of 7, then children were separated from their families (Classen, 2011).

The upbringing of children was based on child`s unconditional obedience, a theocentric outlook and the tasks assigned by parents. While the most important aspect of upbringing was the virtue of work, because in most societies, the child was a labour resource whose task was to do farm work or to help with the housework (Heywood, 2008). In the Middle Ages, most people lived and worked in the countryside, while their way of life and economic activities were determined according to their geographical environment. An individual's personality was influenced by Christianity and belonging to a particular order. It should be noted that in the Middle Ages, education was not available to all and the main function of education in the Middle Ages was to bring children closer to Christianity to prepare people for the transition from secular to eternal life (Модзалевский, 2000), thus, education was mainly theocentric.

A fundamental change in the context of civic learning was taking place in the period of Enlightenment when attention was being paid to the child as a citizen and the future of society. The Enlightenment made a distinction between individual virtues, which concern the individual action of a single person, and virtues which are relevant to a person's life in the society (Rubenis, 2001). Education focused on patriotism more and more, which led to a person's readiness to act in public life as well. At the same time, patriotism was not associated with nationalism. The Enlightenment ideas underlined the need for legislation to strengthen childhood as a special stage of human life and the necessity for a radical change in society's attitude towards children, thus contributing to the development of the science of pedagogy. Enlightenment philosophy was oriented towards cultivating human qualities such as tolerance, justice, and responsibility for the common interests of society. Enlightenment philosopher J. Locke in his work "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" (1693) emphasizes that the aim of education is to produce a "gentleman" who is virtuous and

active, physically strong, able to control himself, clear-minded and having knowledge relevant to life. While the criterion of virtue is citizen's readiness to promote the well-being of society (Локк, 1988). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a philosopher and writer of the Enlightenment period in his work "Emile, Or Treatise on Education" (1762) highlights that the child is a gift of nature, while the task of education is to develop in the child the traits given by nature, helping him to acquire the necessary knowledge for life in society and preparing him to be an active citizen of society. The Enlightenment marks the beginning of modern history: childhood in the Enlightenment was also oriented towards modern social forms and concepts of childhood, child-centred family life, and the promotion of a happy childhood (Fass, 2013).

During Enlightenment, society became more and more concerned on education, and the child, compared to people's attitudes in the Middle Ages, became a value and a potential for the future, so that the ideas of the Enlightenment continued to have a significant impact on the development and expression of civic education in both the family and the school in the following centuries. Further features of civic education were depended on the political ideologies and currents of the 19th century. While civic learning in the 20th century depended mainly on different political regimes, based on national characteristics, and needs.

2.2. Synergies between civic learning and citizenship

Slastenin & Shianov highlights that the main goal of civic learning is „the development of civic responsibility as a set of personal qualities, including the individual's inner freedom, self-confidence, respect for the state, love for homeland, tolerant attitude towards existing diversities, harmonious expression of patriotic feelings and the development of intercultural dialogue" (Сластёнин, Исаев &

Шиянов, 2002, p. 266). However, the development and implementation of a new and improved system for civic learning requires "a lot of time and patience, strategy and long-term action from countless individuals and organizations" (Vinnakota, 2019, p. 4). There are four dimensions of civic learning: "civic knowledge; civic skills; civic dispositions; civic capacities" (Vinnakota, 2019, p. 8).

Civic learning is the orientation of the younger generation towards the political, economic, and cultural life of a country. Researcher McFarland emphasises the importance of civic learning in the global age, noting that every educator has an important contribution to a citizenship education programme: „ Students need civic knowledge, they need to learn and practise civic participation skills, so educators need to use effective methodologies in their daily work to inspire and promote positive change in our students" (McFarland, 2002). Students`s civic engagement can be reached through the development of an atmosphere of shared responsibility and collaboration of school and the society. Civic learning is a process through which students become critical producers of knowledge and develope 21st century problem solving skills (Reis 2020). While Hoskins & Janmaat (2019) admit that civic competence can only be reached through ensuring active participation (Hoskins & Janmaat 2019).

The tasks to promote civic learning should be set up basing on the recognition that learning is always oriented towards human development, shaping the individual's attitude towards himself/herself and the world around him/her. The following principles of civic learning can be put forward:

- continuous human development: an internally determined process, determined by internal individual contradictions and psycho-physiological peculiarities;

- the influence of social situation on human development and individual's attitude towards existing social realities;
- human development, which is the result of person`s level of activity (activity oriented towards growth and self-improvement, participation in action and communication);
- the development of a person determined by the leading types of activity (the types of activity that determine the most significant changes in the psychological processes of personality);
- human development depends on the motives and the content of the actions

in which a person participates, shaping his/her attitude towards material and spiritual things.

The process of learning is a complex and dynamic system constantly developing in its emotional, spiritual, intellectual, psychological, physiological, and social dimensions, through the interaction of internal and external factors. It is a process of interaction between the inner world of a person and the outer world, resulting in the formation of a system of attitudes. By understanding the objectives and regularities of civic learning, it is possible to highlight the components of civic learning and their characteristics (see Table 1).

Table 1. Components of civic learning and their characteristics

Components of civic learning	Characteristic feature
Civic awareness	- Awareness of own rights and responsibilities. - Understanding of democratic values. - Knowledge of the cultural and historical traditions of city, region and country. - Sense of belong to the country.
Qualities of civic attitude	- Patriotism. - Loyalty. - Internationalisms. - Tolerance. - Sense civic duty and social responsibility. - Readiness to defend own homeland. - Express views in a reasoned manner.
Civic engagement	- Active individual involvement in social activities. - Civic participation in the different dimensions. - Civic knowledge. - Civic skills. - Resource.

It is important to note that there are several pedagogical opportunities in the process of developing the components of civic learning: upbringing in family, learning at school, self-education, involvement in a variety of extra-curricular activities, participation in after class and school activities, local and national events not only as participants but also as organisers, contribute to a more purposeful civic position

and participation in youth non-governmental organisations.

The quality of civic learning components can be achieved through the interaction of several processes:

- analytical process – the study of a student's personality, e.g., by exploring the individual's social and

civic interests and preferences, needs and characteristics

- diagnostic process – determining personality development and civic position by understanding the patterns that determine personality formation.
- anticipatory process – the formulation of the expected outcome and the preconditions for achieving the desired outcome, i.e., targeted planning to contribute to the development of the student's citizenship.
- design process – appropriate development of the programme, work plan, pedagogical approaches and methods used to achieve the goal of purposeful formation of the student's civic position.
- organisational process – fostering student motivation, organising the pedagogical process in various ways, both in terms of civic attitudes and cognitive development.
- evaluation process – assessment of the effectiveness of pedagogical activities, applied pedagogical approaches and methods, achieved and unachieved goals and objectives, analysis, and reflection of the process of formation of students' civic position.

The effectiveness of the processes is determined by the pedagogical mastery of each teacher and an individual interest in the process of students` civic position formation. It should be noted that the teacher's activity cannot be divorced from the goal set in relation to the students` individualities. The pedagogical approaches and methods chosen by the teacher should also not be seen as fixed units. Pedagogue Malenkova (2002) in her book "Theory and Methodology of Education" highlights that „no pedagogical approach, method and form can be classified as the only universal truth that is constant throughout the diverse system of pedagogical activity, because the pedagogical approaches and methods chosen change with the development of the personality of the students, the rapid changes in society and the surrounding environment. Any pedagogical activity must be professionally clear, explicit, purposeful and meaningful" (Маленкова, 2002, p. 96).

The basic principle of civic learning highlights the formation of an individual`s civic position, which results in the formation of a civically responsible attitude of the student towards himself, the people around him and the environment. Thus, the aim of civic learning and education determines the structure of an individual's civic position (see Figure No.1).
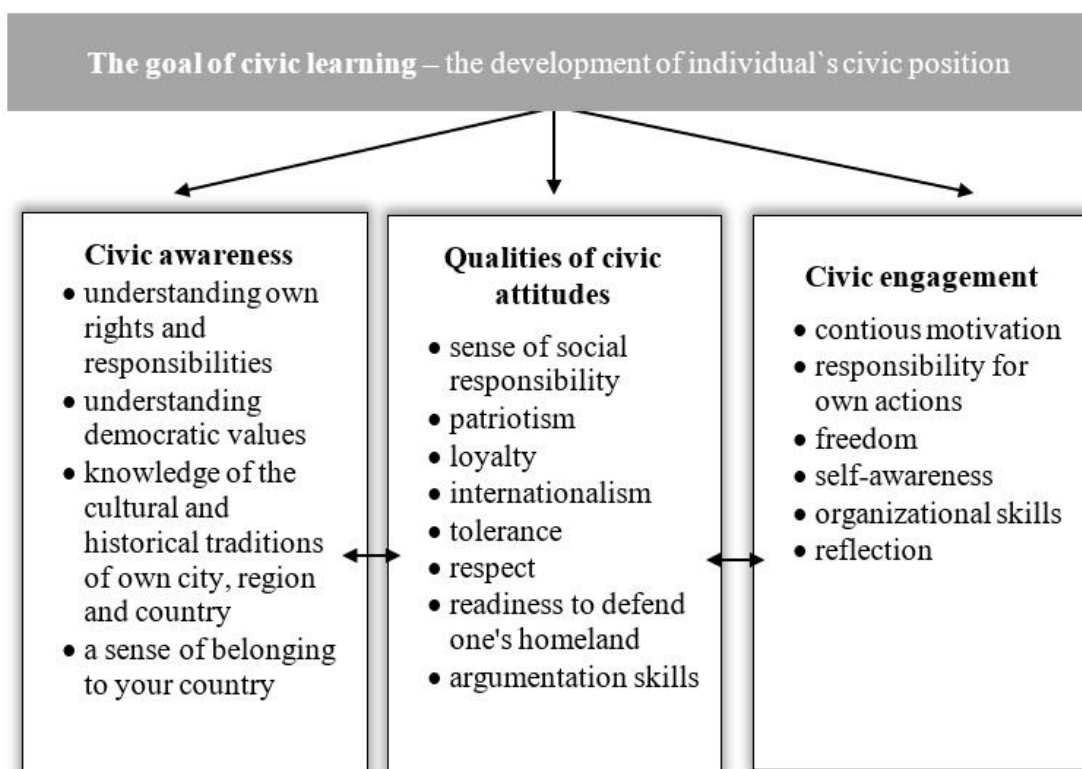
Figure 1. Structure of civic position (Jurs & Samuseviča, 2020)

Based on the analysis of the nature of civic learning, as well as the identification of the structure of the civic position, it can be argued that if civic learning within the general education process is oriented towards the purposeful formation of an individual's civic position, then civic education is implemented based on active civic participation of the individual in the social processes of society. It is undeniable that civic learning plays an important role in the development of responsible citizenship, but it is important to recognise that it is not the only factor that determines an individual's readiness to engage in the processes that matter to society, realising oneself as a civically motivated, responsible and loyal citizen. To achieve the goals of civic education, e.g., being a civically active member of society who can and does contribute to the solution of existing problems, a variety of methods and approaches to guide actions become essential. As a result, the element of self-regulation becomes an essential prerequisite for the development of active citizenship, as students become aware and conscious of their individual, social and emotional needs, and desires. Kula & Aytac (2022) emphasize the necessity to "ensure that students can express their own opinions and thoughts and participate in decision-making processes by encouraging them with teaching strategies, methods and techniques which provide democratic participation. Students should be supported to acquire a feeling of responsibility by developing self-management and self-regulation skills (Kula & Aytac, 2022, p. 254).

In addition to the factor of civic learning, which stems from the process of value education and upbringing in the family and at school, it is important to note the influence of the process of self-education in the formation of a civic position. Disterveg (1956) highlights the importance of value learning in the context of self-education, pointing out that "the goal achieved during value learning is a personal maturity in one's strength and willingness for self-education in the process of life-long learning" (Дистервег, 1956, p. 261), as self-

education is the result of the realisation of the goals of learning. Self-management is based on an understanding of the individual's needs and willingness to change oneself, as well as on self-regulating behaviour through which personal qualities are developed.

During the formation of civic position, students understand the need for active citizenship and develop character traits that contribute to their active citizenship. This is followed by self-analysis, self-assessment, and the setting of goals for future action. Üztemur & İnel (2018) in their research "8th Year Secondary School Pupils' Perceptions Democratic Values: A Phenomenological Analysis" emphasize that self-analysis and self-assessment are effective tools to promote students` mindfulness and understanding of the importance of democratic values in the process of becoming a civically active member of society. They highlight that perceptions of democratic values can vary depending on the place, situation, and people. Therefore researches that focus on the frequency and the manner of the use of democratic values in everyday life gain importance (Üztemur & İnel, 2018, p. 802). To achieve the goals, e.g., being a civically active member of society who can and does contribute to the solution of existing problems, various methods and ways to direct own behaviour should be used. As a result, self-education as a process of individual development becomes an essential prerequisite for the development of an active citizenship, as students become aware of their own needs and desires.

Civic learning is based on the development of certain values and virtues, the formation of values and attitudes in the lives of individuals. It cannot be divorced from the basic postulates of humanistic pedagogy. Uniqueness and inimitability of each student's personality must be recognised. In this complex process of formation of attitudes and relationships between the individual and society, a value system and a shared understanding of values becomes essential. Education, as a process of transmitting history and culture from one generation to the next, which is oriented towards balanced and harmonious human development, lays the foundations for personal development and value orientation, while civic learning lays the foundations for individual responsibility for the processes around us, i.e., it promotes the formation of responsible attitudes. At the same time, it is difficult to fully implement civic learning at school if the issue of co-responsibility is not raised in the family, or if the actions of the teacher do not correspond to postulated morality and showing students discrepancy between words and deeds. The pursuit of the objectives of citizenship education imposes obligations on both the family and teachers to show the right example for the younger generation.

3. Research methodology

To achieve the objective of the study, the authors carried out empirical research. The aim of the empirical research was to diagnose the civic attitudes of young people. Civic attitudes and civic position are the result of civic learning. Therefore, the authors of the publication carried out a survey of school-age youth. The Likert scale (from "Completely disagree" to "Completely agree") survay was used to measure civic attitudes and opinions by asking respondents X questions on a research topic. They were provided a fixed choice response statement.

School-age youth, who are at a transitional stage in their lives, have unlimited potential for growth. They are social capital and a development resource that should ensure the long-term development of each country. Civic learning is directly and subordinately implemented both in the family and at school, which is why the authors chose to survey upper-secondary school students (grades 10-12) from three schools in different regions of Latvia including the capital city. To identify the civic attitudes of young people which are formed within the framework of civic learning, the authors carried out theoretical research on the

elements of civic learning (see: Table 1). Theoretical research served as basis for carrying out a survey the manifestations of young people's civic awareness, civic attitudes, and civic participation.

The empirical research methods are: (I) data collection method – survey; (II) data processing (electronic) and analysis methods (diagnostic and descriptive). A Likert scale is used to measure attitudes (Geske & Greenfeld, 2020). The Likert scale was chosen becouse it is easier

for respondents to answer and carry out data analysis (Peterson, 2000).

4. Research results

There were 435 respondents (students (grades 10-12)) participating in the research. The survey was carried out from March 2022 till May 2022 using the electronic Google Survey platform. There were 138 students (32%) from grade 10; 132 (30%) from grade 11; 165 (38%) from grade 12 (see: Figure 2).
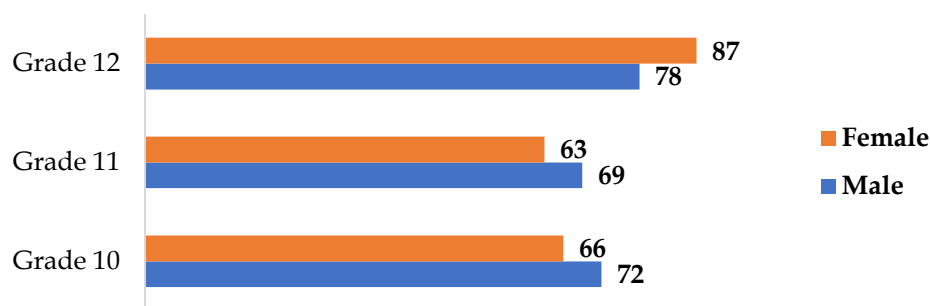

Figure 2. Characteristics of respondents

Theoretical research highlights that civic awareness is identified as one of the elements of civic learning (see: Table 1). Therefore, respondents were asked to do self-assessment of their civic awareness. Data analysis shows that:

- 215 respondents (50%) believe they understand the importance of democracy, while 188 respondents (27%) cannot formulate their position;
- 273 respondents (63%) do not feel a sense of belonging to their country,

while 78 respondents (18%) cannot formulate an opinion on this issue;

- 166 respondents (38%) consider knowledge of their country's history and cultural and historical traditions not personally important, while 51 respondents (12%) cannot formulate their position on this issue;
- the majority of respondents (385 or 89%) are confident that they know their rights and obligations (see: Figure 3).
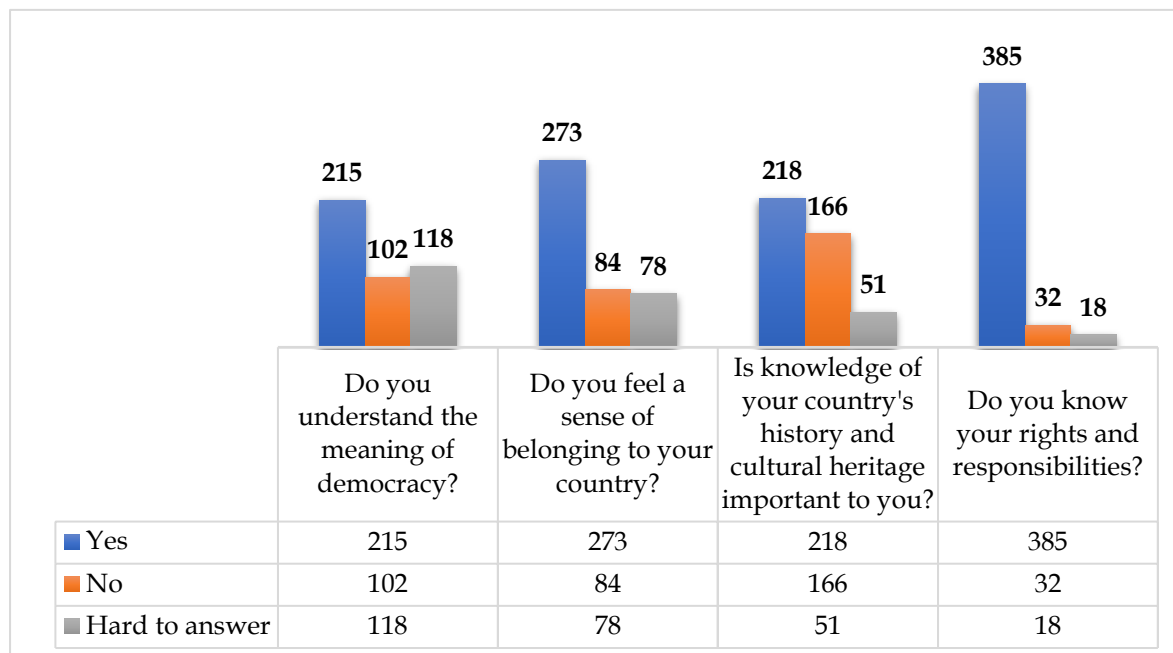
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	Do you understand the meaning of democracy?	Do you feel a sense of belonging to your country?	Is knowledge of your country's history and cultural heritage important to you?	Do you know your rights and responsibilities?
■ Yes	215	273	218	385
■ No	102	84	166	32
■ Hard to answer	118	78	51	18

Figure 3. Respondents' self-assessment of civic awareness

Theoretical research highlights that the qualities of civic attitudes (Table 1) were identified as one of the elements of civic learning. Respondents were given the opportunity to carry out self-assessment as well. After summarising the results of the questionnaire (see: Figure 4), it can be concluded that:

- the majority of respondents (284 or 65%) consider themselves as patriots of their country, but at the same time, in the previous question, respondents (63%) stated that they do not feel a sense of belonging to their country. Respondents' understanding of the concepts of patriotism and sense of belonging varies and they do not identify similarities between these concepts;
- the majority of young people (327 respondents or 75%) consider themselves being tolerant;
- the most of the respondents (337 or 77%) consider themselves as civically responsible young people;
- the most of the young people (343 respondents or 79%) consider themselves able to defend their position.
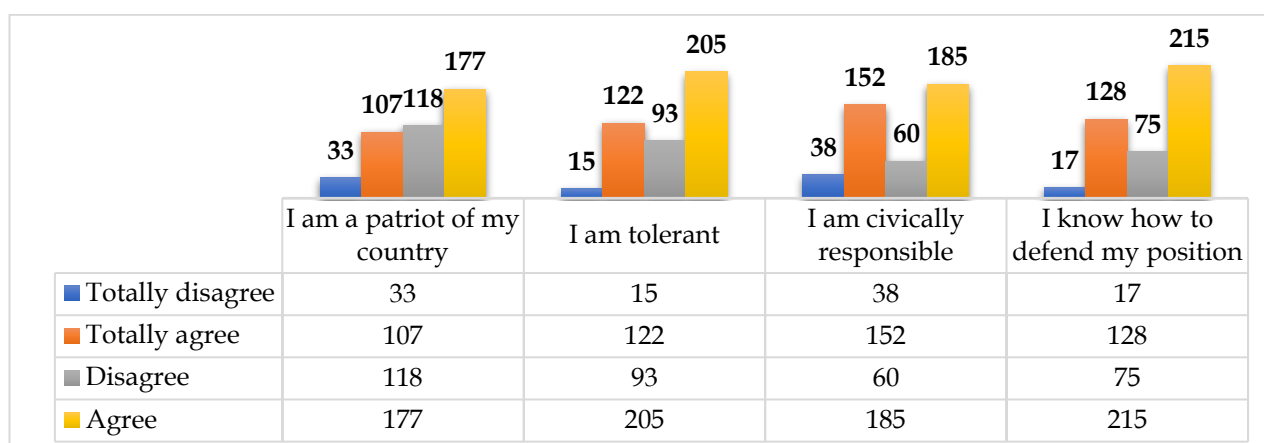
	I am a patriot of my country	I am tolerant	I am civically responsible	I know how to defend my position
■ Totally disagree	33	15	38	17
■ Totally agree	107	122	152	128
■ Disagree	118	93	60	75
■ Agree	177	205	185	215

Figure 4. Self-assessment of the quality of civic attitudes

Theoretical research shows that civic participation can be identified as one of the elements of civic learning (see Table 1), thus respondents measured their level of participation in different categories. Summarising the results of the survey (see: Figure 5), it can be concluded that:

- 214 respondents (49%) participate in social actions, while 154 respondents (36%) do not participate and do not wish to participate in social actions;
- only 53 respondents (12%) participate in the organisation of school events, while 340 respondents (78%) do not participate and do not wish to do it;
- only 88 respondents (20%) participate in youth NGOs, while 335 respondents (77%) do not participate and do not wish to participate;
- only 15 respondents (3%) participate in political organisations, while 416 respondents (96%) do not participate and do not wish to participate.
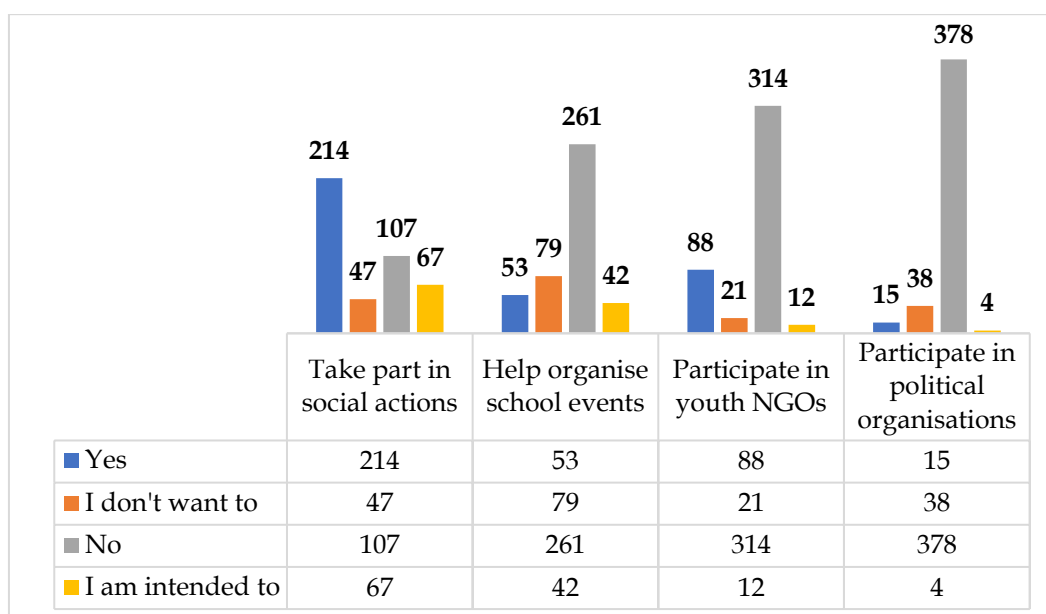
	Take part in social actions	Help organise school events	Participate in youth NGOs	Participate in political organisations
Yes	214	53	88	15
I don't want to	47	79	21	38
No	107	261	314	378
I am intended to	67	42	12	4

Figure 5. Manifestations of respondents' civic participation

Respondents were asked to identify and name the categories for what young people feel responsible. They completed the sentence "I am ready to take responsibility for ..." (open question). The analysis of gathered data reveals that young people are mainly ready to take responsibility for: themselves (171 or 39% of respondents); their actions (103 or 24% of respondents); their family (82 or 19% of respondents), while 28 respondents or 6% of the respondents could not define what they are ready to take responsibility for. Gathered data also emphasize that there were no significant differences between girls and boys. The only difference is that girls are more civically active than boys by about 7%.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The civic position of young people, which is defined by civic learning as an integrated attitude-forming component, is the individual's relationship with society, expressed in terms of the young person's duties towards the state, and his or her conscientious and responsible attitude towards people and his or her country. Civic learning, in turn, is based on the development of certain values and attitudes in young people's lives.

It is very important to find strategies in a varied pedagogical process that enable students to take on civic responsibility in terms of practical action, giving them all the support, they need. It must be admitted that students` civically responsible actions and behaviour, both in learning process at school and in extra-curricular activities can be purposefully and effectively promoted. Civic responsibility is reflected in a specific pattern of behaviour, thereby also meeting students` own social and emotional needs.

The concept of civic learning reveals the need to enrich not only students' knowledge, but also to promote the development of civic skills and attitudes, preparing students for the objective realities of life, being aware of the needs and values of others, recognising their potential contribution to the development of society and their country, and finding the ways to improve the quality of their lives in the long term. The implementation of civic education in schools can promote students` confidence in their ability to act responsibly in accordance with an active citizenship.

Holistic and purposeful civic learning has a significant impact on the development of civic competence of young people, resulting in the development of their civic responsibility and influencing the expression of civic participation. Learning, both in the family and at school, has the most direct influence on the formation of attitudes, while civic education emphasises the development of civically responsible attitudes, which manifest themselves in the form of individual citizenship. By developing civic attitude, students can more fully meet social and emotional needs. By actualising learning at school, the student's civic competence can be more effectively influenced, as well as conviction of the need to act in a civically responsible manner, to be a patriotic, proactive citizen of the country, who can and is able to contribute to the growth of the country.

Learning is not the only factor that determines an individuals' readiness to engage in important social processes, thus realising themselves as civically motivated, responsible and loyal citizens. It must be admitted that education is the most important factor in the development of young people's capacity for responsible citizenship. It is logical to argue that the multifaceted implementation of civic education and learning in schools is becoming not only a topicality, but also an important component and necessity of general education.

The empirical study confirms the need to increase the focus on civic education in the curricula in order to promote responsibility and civic participation in the long term, as well as the ability to be aware of democratic values and understand their importance. Analyzing the obtained results, the study confirmed the need for further research.

The empirical research highlights a negative tendency, i.e., young people can be characterised by passive civic participation focusing on consumerism, despite a relatively high self-esteem and self-assessment of responsibility. Young people may be more willing to participate in events, but they are less willing to take part in the organisation of events themselves and can be characterised as apolitical and socially inactive. As a result, if this negative tendency persists, democratic values and the development of civil society could be undermined in the long term.

Declarations of Competing Interest
None.

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