

Social science teachers on citizenship education

A comparative study of three European countries

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In this paper, I examine the way teachers in three different European countries present their views on citizenship education. The three countries occupy distinct places on the political map of Europe: the Netherlands is an »established« Western democracy and a founding member of the European Union; Bulgaria is a post-communist country that recently joined the European Union, and Croatia, the newest member of the Union, is a country that emerged after the war in former Yugoslavia. Although the choice of countries was partially pragmatic, it proved to be a fruitful source of insights and raised questions that can be explored in other European countries as well. I demonstrate that there is not one »national« definition of citizenship education. Rather, in each country, different conceptions co-exist, with some themes shared across national borders and others more clearly defined by the country's history and current political and educational climate

The paper is organized as follows: first, a brief explanation of the methodological choice for a Q study based on Douglas and Wildavsky's grid-group theory. Second, a brief presentation of the most important findings in the three different countries, and third, a discussion of some of the more striking insights gained from the comparison of the three countries.

The political force-field of teaching citizenship by social studies teachers

In the last two decades, citizenship education has been high on the agenda of almost all European countries; »old« and »new« democracies alike. With more than 300 definitions of citizenship (Jones and Caventa 2002; Heater 2004), the term is intrinsically political. Furthermore, the very term *citizenship education* indicates the intricate relationship between politics and education. Education is in itself always political. The temptation to shape people in a certain ideological direction, to try to instill in them particular political attitudes and preferences for specific political ideas, and ultimately to influence their behavior, is not new, and takes many shapes in different societies.

In one form or another, citizenship education is present in all school curricula in Europe. School is the institution which has been designated the task of teaching—and has the capacity to teach—about citizenship in a sustained, systematic way, reaching out to practically all youth. In recent years, there have been a number of studies concerning the effects of citizenship education on European youth (for an overview see Neubauer 2012). Often, these studies bypass the role of the teacher, as they seek a correlation between different types of curricula and various indicators of changed political attitudes in young people (Isac, Maslowski, van der Werf 2012; Schultz et al 2008; Torney-Punta et al. 2001). There have been fewer studies on teachers' views worldwide. (Anderson et al 1997; Patterson, Doppen, and Misco 2012) We can speculate that this is largely due to methodological difficulties: school cohorts are easier to construct and to include in large-scale quantitative comparative models. At least on the surface, they share many common traits across schools and across countries. Teachers in contrast, tend to have diverse backgrounds, they are more difficult to reach and even more difficult to organize in cohorts suitable for large-scale empirical studies.

Yet, teachers are key players in the process of citizenship education. Teachers are the ones who daily implement citizenship education, in the

context of implicit or explicit school policies and broader national objectives. Obviously they do this according to their own understanding and skill. Faced with the task of implementing a demanding and often deliberately broadly defined curriculum in citizenship education, social studies teachers have to find a *workable balance* of conflicting demands: how to teach a subject in accordance with their professional criteria and beliefs while fulfilling their obligation to contribute to citizenship education. Should they educate students mainly about their rights or about their obligations? How do they find a balance between learning about freedom and learning about taking responsibility for a local and also increasingly global community? Should teachers remain neutral or rather propagate their own political and ideological preferences? Are they obliged to remain loyal to state policies or, to the contrary, systematically criticize them? Should they shield children from political controversy or use it in the classroom? And finally, what kind of citizens do they wish to educate—»good« and well-adapted citizens or critical and caring citizens? These and other questions delineate the force-field in which social science teachers must navigate.

How can we explicate and classify the different types of viable solutions? In this study, I use *the concept of citizenship education* as the nexus of a number of important, but equally difficult to define, concepts – democracy, politics, neutrality, political education, the place of education in society, and the teacher as a professional. These are not completely independent from each other and do not form random *mix-and-match* combinations. Rather, they constitute *patterns of thinking and subsequent action*, which are based on core beliefs about politics, education, and the teaching profession.

Thus, the question asked in this study was: can we map this force-field of dimensions in order to shed light on the way citizenship is being taught at school? Is it possible to describe the distinct ways in which teachers think? Do they share a common ground? What are the topics that divide them?

I chose to explore these issues with secondary school social science teachers in the three countries mentioned above—Bulgaria, Croatia, and the Netherlands. The choice for a comparative perspective was partly pragmatic, as access to language is essential, particularly access to Slavonic languages, and partly dictated by the idea that inter-country comparisons can contribute to a deeper understanding of the questions stated above. Most comparative studies have been done at the institutional level—through European networks, or through national case descriptions (e.g. Hedtke and Zimenkova 2012; Agarin and Karolewski 2013). More research is needed that focuses on the conceptualization of citizenship education by teachers in different national contexts (Hahn 2010, 17).

In the following section, I explain how I attempted to meet the methodological challenges of investigating the highly subjective views, beliefs, and »theories-in-action« of a relatively diverse group of respondents by combining Q-methodology with grid-group cultural theory.

Research design: Q methodology study based on an application of grid-group theory

a) The choice for Q methodology

I chose to explore the views of social science teachers at secondary school level using face-to-face interviews as part of a Q methodology study. Q methodology is an approach suitable for the purpose of mapping highly diverse views to expose underlying similarities and key themes (McKeown and Thomas 1988). It combines qualitative data (face-to-face semi-structured interviews based on a specific manner of sorting statements) with quantitative data (factor analysis of ranked statements), thus allowing to work with small and diverse samples in exploratory settings (for a detailed explanation see Watts and Stenner 2012). Besides these technical considerations, there are other important features of Q methodology that made it particularly suitable for the purposes of this study.

Q methodology engages researchers in a dialogue with their respondents—in this case the teachers—at all stages of research. It lets teachers speak with their own voices without relinquishing academic rigor. Q methodology not only allows for a great deal of freedom in interpreting any question or statement, it puts the respondent's subjective opinion at the very heart of the research. The relationship between researcher and respondent thereby becomes one of peers exploring ideas. Respondents are engaged in ranking a set of statements while providing comments and interpretations of the views they are presented with. Comparison then becomes a dialogue between different respondents, brought together in a large exploratory community by the researcher. The subsequent factor analysis measures the positions of individual respondents towards each other, rather than the distance to some predefined set of indicators. The respondents are thus grouped together based on the views they share as opposed to expectations based on demographics or other variables.

Q methodology has one particular added merit for this study: it allows us to look at diversity regardless of national borders. As I shall demonstrate below, all three countries exhibited a great deal of diversity that cannot be reduced to one dominant national view. At the same time, the respondents in all three countries shared a substantial number of important views and perspectives, which might have been overlooked if the focus had been on inter-country comparison only. Q methodology makes the central themes, »the bones of a discourse« (Wolf, 2004), explicit by seeing national differences as variations on a general theme.

b) Construction of the statement sample: Choice for grid-group theory

A very important step in Q methodology is the construction of a sample of statements on the topic at hand. In this case, I selected statements on the topic of research. I chose to use grid-group theory as an organizing framework to delineate the boundaries of the force-field areas within which the diverse views could be positioned.

Using grid-group theory (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990), I delineated the dimensions within which these diverse views and beliefs fit. Grid-group theory offers several advantages: it can capture most of the variety in both current and historical debates, in this case on citizenship education; it illuminates central analytic issues across countries and across individual variances; and it allows the identification of views on citizenship education that gravitate towards one of the ideal types in the framework. Not a single one of these ideal types can be considered better, or more viable, or more up to date, without taking into consideration the particular political and national context in which it originated and was developed. (Hood 2008, 3–21)

Grid-group theory defines four core-value cultural types—conservative hierarchy, active and competitive individualism, egalitarian enclavism, and fatalism—that serve as the researcher’s compass in structuring and ordering existing discourses (Hoppe 2007). Applied to teachers’ views on citizenship education, a review of the literature and pilot interviews delivered the following ideal types (Jeliazkova 2009; Jeliazkova 2013):

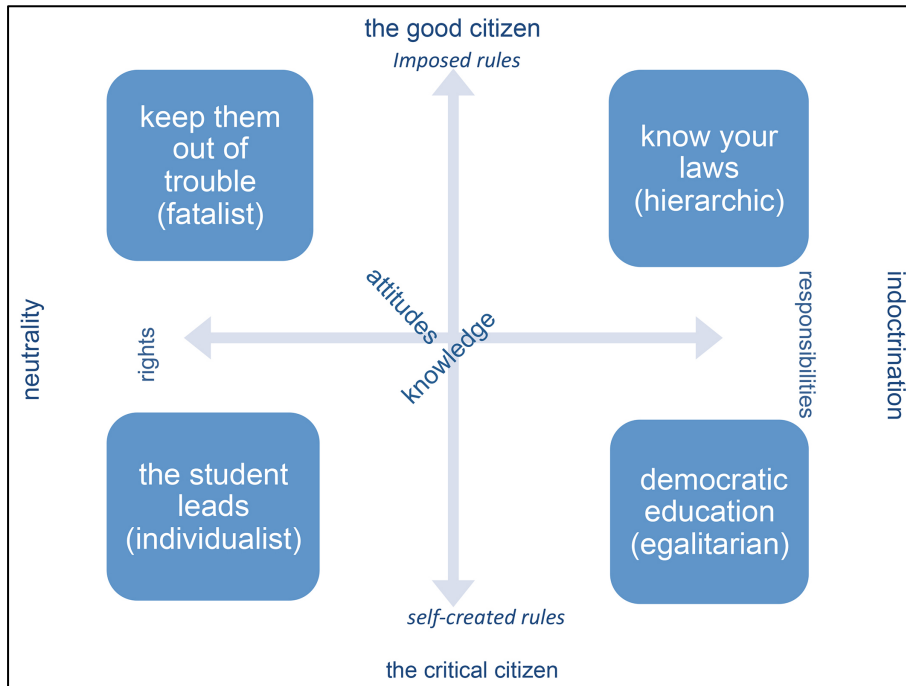


Fig. 1: Four ideal types of views

The individualist (liberal) ideal type is concerned with educating critical citizens, but aims mainly to promote the students' individual progress and gain. The egalitarian type is also critical, but aims at social equity. Both teachers operate as coaches. However, the individualist teacher puts knowledge of »the system« at the forefront, whereas the egalitarian one is more concerned with group values and morality. The individualist type and the fatalist type share the ideal of remaining politically neutral, as opposed to the hierarchic and egalitarian types, who are directly concerned with instilling and reinforcing particular values in their students. The hierarchic (conservative) type is concerned with the sustainability of the system and thus at educating »good« citizens. The fatalist type tends to see the »good« citizen as one who stays out of trouble. The fatalist type shares a preference for attitudes and skills with the egalitarian type, while the hierarchic type's focus is on knowledge about the social order and established institutions. Unlike the individualists, however, they are

concerned with assigning a proper place in society for the future citizens. While both the egalitarian and the hierarchic types encourage participation, the accent is on alternative forms of (direct) participation or using legitimate channels (elections, laws), respectively. These ideal types serve to map the discourse on citizenship education in relation to social studies.

Constructing a set of statements around ideal types in this way provides for the creation of a common space within which an exchange of ideas takes place. Based on this framework, 41 statements were selected from various literature sources and pilot interviews (Jeliazkova 2009; see appendix 1 for a list of statements). These 41 statements represent the spectrum of possible views and stand for the discourse on the topic, as explained above.

Every teacher finds his or her own particular position in this space. This position never overlaps completely with any officially stated objectives, nor does it match exactly with the ideal types outlined above. Every teacher finds his or her own workable balance of views, held together by—often implicit—core beliefs. This study maps and explores these individual views in order to find overarching central themes, as well as important distinctions and similarities between teachers in the three countries. Equally important, the study raises key questions that still need to be explored in scholarly discussion and further research.

The most important findings of the study follow.

Research results: Factor analysis and interpretation

Three sets of interviews were held for this study: 17 interviews with secondary school social studies teachers in Bulgaria (2011–2012), 17 interviews with secondary school social studies teachers in Croatia (2012),¹ and 28 interviews with secondary school social studies teachers

1 Many thanks to Anka K. Kostro, University of Zagreb, Croatia, who collected and transcribed the data and was involved in the preliminary analysis.

in the Netherlands (2013). The samples are not representative, as the method is explorative and does not claim representativeness of the outcomes. However, a balance was sought between diversity of backgrounds and demographics (male/female, experienced/novice, small/big town, type of school) on the one hand and pragmatic restrictions on the other.

In a face-to-face interview, respondents were invited to rank 41 statements in a fixed pattern, from »strongly agree« to »strongly disagree« (see appendix 2). During the interviews, respondents explicated their choices, thus shedding light on their patterns of thinking and on the priorities they set in their work as teachers. The respondents offered their own interpretation of the 41 statements, while remaining in the shared context of the discourse. The rankings were recorded for subsequent processing and factor analysis.

Three sets of data were analyzed, resulting in three sets of factorial groups—five for Bulgaria, four for Croatia and four for the Netherlands. These represent groups of respondents who think in similar ways. In addition, the whole set of data was factor analyzed, resulting in 5 factors. A short description of the factors follows.

a) Bulgaria: A strong sense of responsibility

The five factors found in the Bulgarian data set are presented in figure 2.

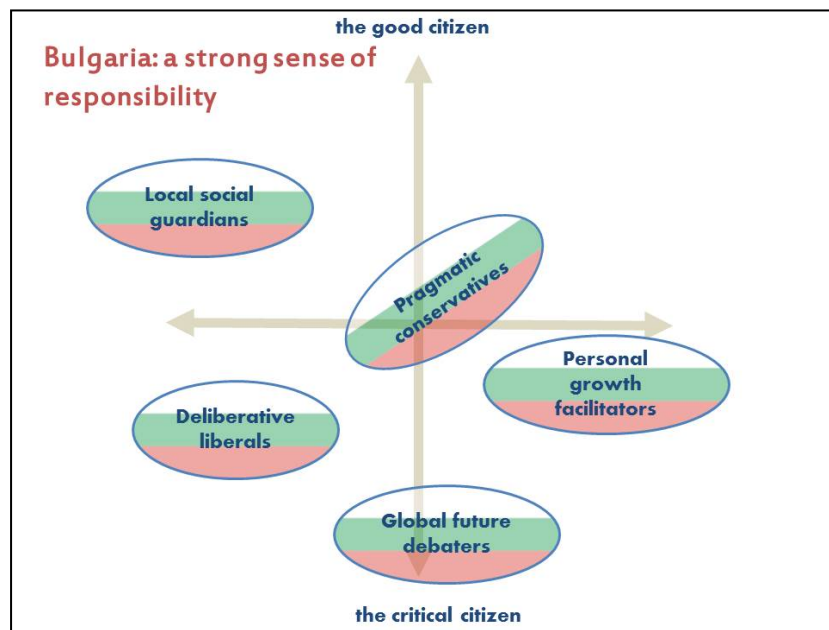


Fig. 2: Five factors in Bulgaria

Common themes

The teachers we spoke to were making a serious attempt to uphold their own professional standards in their daily work, to be truthful, and to demonstrate a clear position on matters they deemed important. The overall impression was that they remained critical, guarded their professional discretion, and assumed great responsibility for the education of Bulgarian youth—even when they felt that school as an institution, and even more so the state, are failing them. In fact, especially when institutions were failing them. This is why they did not feel constrained by state curriculum requirements. This almost allergic reaction to any state interference can be partially traced to old communist times.

All teachers agreed that citizenship education is about participation in a democratic debate and this is why they help students to develop their research and discussion skills. A strong link between citizenship and democracy was found in every interview, in spite of critical remarks about Bulgarian political reality. In the eyes of the teachers, the process of democratization, though far from completed, is irreversible. Teachers insisted on a solid, though not overburdened, knowledge base, which is not the same as just feeding children with facts.

The most distinguishing feature of Bulgarian teachers is their ambivalent attitude towards politics and politicians. Most respondents made a clear distinction between the practice of politics—what politicians do—which they considered in the main unsuitable, if not outright harmful, for students, and the *political nature* of social phenomenon. The latter is often not referred to as »politics.« The term *Политика* had negative connotations for teachers and students alike. Teachers sometimes went to great lengths to explain how they differentiate between active political propaganda (which is considered inappropriate) and allowing for an academic, but not necessarily academically detached, analysis of the most urgent problems of society. A positive role model of a Bulgarian politician suitable for school lessons is yet to be found, however.

Below is a short description of the five factors—five groups of teachers adhering to these five types of views.

Pragmatic Conservatives:² »We give them the rules of social behavior«

Pragmatic conservatives put a strong emphasis on knowledge, take a protective, mentoring position towards their students, and exhibit a great amount of trust towards the school as an institution. They see school as a model social institution, and therefore encourage participation in school activities as preparation for later. The teachers in this group do not wish to encourage students to participate in Bulgaria's current political life. They clearly do what they can to protect students from the hardships of everyday politics. Their attitude towards the everyday practice of politics in Bulgaria is rather negative.

For pragmatic conservatives, the greatest concern is discipline. In their eyes, students do not take their obligations seriously. Very often, respondents mentioned rights in conjunction with democracy, stating that »*democracy and freedom is not the same as doing whatever you want.*«³

Statements concerning the method, process, and critical analytic skills necessary to, acquiring knowledge about institutions, social structures, and politics in general, were rated positively. Respondents were concerned with neutrality and were careful not to promote any particular ideology. Teachers do not see their personal political engagement as linked to teaching citizenship. Rather, to display such political engagement is considered an act of irresponsibility, which may lead to anarchy.⁴

2 The labels are an attempt to capture the »character« of a factor. Terminological references to the group-grid field are not based on strictly quantitative measures, nor are they a measurement of pre-operationalized definitions of »liberalism« or »conservatism« or any of the other dimensions. The nature of analysis in Q methodology does not permit for this kind of labeling. Further large-scale quantitative studies based on these results may lead to more strictly measurable differences along a number of dimensions.

3 Quotes from interviews throughout the text are in italics.

4 Sadly, the recent events in Bulgaria—continuous protests in which various layers of citizens engage in political struggle without calling it political—illustrate the potential effects of these widespread ideas. In Bulgaria, teachers as a part of society tend to see schools as »apolitical« institu-

This is why they are careful about discussions of controversial issues, in order not to »politicize« issues too much.

In sum, these teachers see themselves as contributing to the education of a citizen who would find a place in the fabric of society, who would obey the law out of conviction and as a result of thoughtful deliberation, and who would be mature enough to ensure social stability on the one hand and the safeguarding of personal rights and freedoms on the other. This group is thus situated mainly in the hierarchical quadrant, with a slight overlap with individualism. In Bulgaria, the distrust of power is too great to allow for a genuinely hierarchic position.

Deliberative liberals: »We are here to provoke them into freedom«

The name of this group refers to their two most important vantage points—an individualistic/liberal orientation and a focus on democratic deliberation. Deliberative liberals' main concern is the method of thinking and inquiry, the need to make one's own decision. They steer away from everything that looks like indoctrination and the imposition of specific content or worldviews. Providing *information* to students is important, particularly about civic rights and freedoms.

Deliberative liberals believe that citizenship education is political in its core, and look for a balance between individual and collective action. At the same time, they are careful to stay on a general, theoretical level of political discussion, leaving it to the students to judge current events. They trust their students and aim not to impose any views on them in order »not to make them copies of ourselves.«

These teachers follow their students' interests and needs and adapt their teaching practice to the demands and the capacities of the young people they work with. They focus on the individuality of their students.

tions, in the sense of freedom from partisan struggles. This makes it very difficult to explore, defend, and revise political and ideological positions without being accused of pushing a particular ideological agenda.

In short, deliberative liberals see civic education mainly as a tool for promoting emancipation. Knowledge of individual rights and freedoms is put at the core of their efforts. They strive to equip their students with the necessary tools to operate in a world they see as increasingly complex, to understand political structures and games and to find their path in society. Although they do not promote reckless egoism, these teachers see their students as individuals with inherent rights, and feel compelled to support them in becoming independent, critical citizens who know how to defend and extend their freedom through democratic debate.

Local social guardians: »They need us as a personal example«

Local social guardians differ from all other respondents, who tend to seek a balance between the role of a professional and the role of a teacher. Local social guardians in contrast are convinced that their students need a sense of direction and must be taught to survive. In contrast to pragmatic conservatives, local social guardians see their students as vulnerable and in danger. Their rights could be easily violated because of ignorance and a lack of access to power structures and resources. These teachers see it as their task to educate students about their rights (sometimes also interpreted as entitlements). Teachers do this by providing their students with the necessary knowledge, but also and mostly by establishing themselves as role models. They ascribe an important role to the school as an example of a democratic institution—a safe place to learn the first basics of democracy in a world otherwise chaotic and threatening.

Local social guardians agree with the statement that »politics is too abstract for most students.« However, this agreement is ambivalent, because they see different layers in political education. The respondents claim that their students feel left out, marginalized, and disadvantaged by today's political ruling class in Bulgaria and are thus very cynical towards anything political. The teachers see themselves as an example that there are also positive ways to participate in social life. The respondents strongly encourage community involvement as a low-threshold activity that students understand, even when they are not interested in politics.

They see charitable and community service both as empowering and as a way of teaching responsibility.

In sum, this group of teachers can be placed in the fatalist corner of the grid-group scheme. Their position is unique among all respondents, including those from Croatia and the Netherlands.

Personal growth facilitators: »We teach them to be happy«

A climate of collaboration, to promote free development and personal growth, is a priority for this group of respondents. Participation, action, and involvement are their guiding principles—their motto is »practice what you preach,« also outside the classroom, and set an example of honest and decent behavior. The nature of being human and the values associated with humanity are central to their teaching. Politics as practiced in Bulgaria is seen as something that children should be shielded from for as long as possible.

The respondents in this group use words like »emotions,« »feelings,« »growth,« and »the joy of life,« and care about »overlooked« topics such as ecological education and art education. Growth, harmonic development, and self-realization are the overarching goals of their everyday efforts, Interdependence and taking care of each other are values highly cherished by this group. Not only should students participate and engage in »attitude building,« they should do so as a group, as a way of developing a caring personality.

Personal growth facilitators look at education in a broader context of which school is only a part. Participation in »real life« and engagement at all levels are more important than knowledge and facts. The minimum body of knowledge required is the basics of democracy, as democracy is considered too essential not to be taught explicitly.

This factorial group overlaps most with the egalitarian ideal type, but with a twist. Personal growth is seen as facilitated by participation in a group, rather than directed at group preservation. Again, as in the case of pragmatic conservatives, truly collectivist attitudes are not popular in a

country with a communist past, and are always countered by a healthy dose of self-interest.

Global future debaters: »The street won't turn them into global citizens«

This group underscores the European citizenship dimension the most explicitly. It is, however, divided in its judgment of the value and the success of citizenship education as a European project. One of the respondents who associates strongly with this factor is positive in outlook with a cosmopolitan orientation, while the other, to the contrary, states that citizenship education was implemented under pressure and as an act of compliance—»*just to show off*« and demonstrate that Bulgaria belongs to the European Union.

The global European orientation of this group of teachers makes the choice for an institutional approach logical. Specific social structures and channels of influence are more important than values and abstract ideas. Action is what counts for this group; active defense of and the expansion of freedoms is what they believe makes civic education meaningful.

Global future debaters take a rather pragmatic attitude toward the patriotic discourse that is fashionable in Bulgaria. They do think that students should know »*what this country has achieved in order to go further*.« However, they believe that the growing interdependence of people in the world takes precedence. This interdependence is interpreted at an interpersonal level—students need to learn how to respect each other and to empathize with others and understand their social experience.

In sum, the teachers in this group are more concerned with the future of citizenship education and the future of their students in a global dynamic world than with current practice, which can be disappointing at times. In the grid-group field, this group of teachers is positioned on the egalitarian/individualistic divide.

b) Croatia: On the verge of change

In the Croatian sample, four factors were extracted, presented in figure 3.

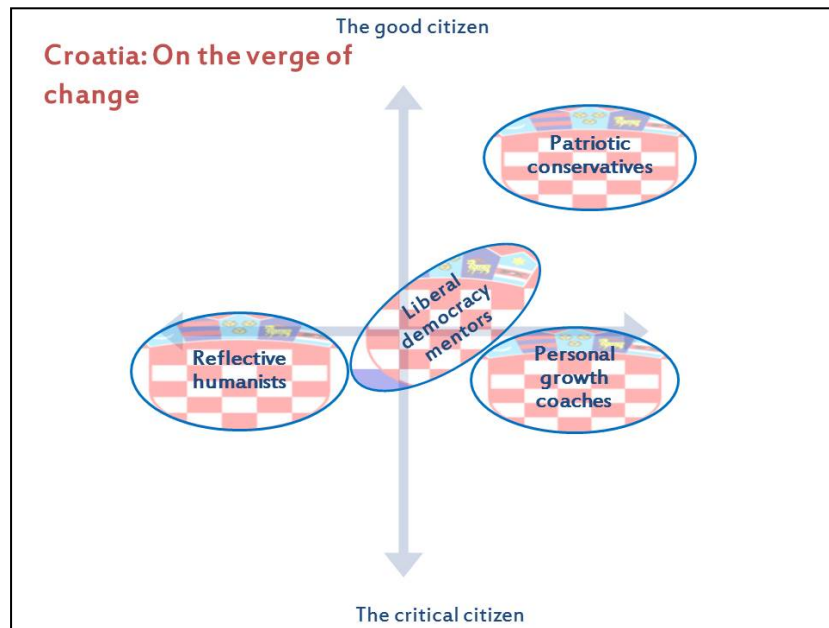


Fig. 3: Four factors in Croatia

Common themes

Croatian teachers show more common ground than their Bulgarian colleagues in their embracing of citizenship education curriculum. Consensus is evident in their emphasis of the need for changing the overall approach to citizenship education in Croatia. The theme of curriculum change was strongly emphasized in the interviews because Croatia, at the moment of data collection, was undergoing a reform of the model and the curriculum for citizenship education as part of acces-

sion to the European Union.⁵ When referring to the current curriculum design process, all teachers expressed disagreement with the practice of putting too much stress on knowledge and uncritical acceptance of »facts.« There also seems to be a strong consensus about an inclusive approach to teaching aimed at empowering all students to understand politics. Teachers believe that citizenship education is for all students, not just for elites, including those who »*just like adults, are disappointed in politics.*« Teachers envision a future political citizen who recognizes the importance of politics for other aspects of life. Acts of compassion and generosity are also seen as political in nature. Finally, teachers share the view that the school as an institution, even with a non-democratic structure, serves as a platform for raising democratic citizens.

Reflective humanists: »I am just inviting students to be reflective, nothing more«

Reflective humanists put a strong emphasis on the development of intellectual skills and critical thinking. They see citizenship education mainly as an instrument to help students »survive in today's complex world.« Reflective humanists act as facilitators of students' intellectual growth, yet they put considerable emphasis on »coping.« Rather than being exclusively pragmatic, they appeal to personal morality and to reflection skills as ways of coping with what they perceive as a harsh reality. Consequently, their main concern is to develop their students' ability to use concepts and methods to analyze and understand the world around them. They do this systematically and professionally, based on solid mainstream theory. These teachers reject the idea that laws and rules should be at the center of citizenship education. The respondents' attitude towards any ideology is neutral, but reflexive and open. They are not particularly concerned with directly fostering students' participation in social and political life.

5 When the final version of this article was submitted, the implementation of the new citizenship education program in Croatia had been postponed one year.

Respondents in this group fit in the individualist corner of the group-grid scheme with a bias towards fatalism.

Patriotic conservatives: »The teacher has to be a model of decent behavior«

The main trait of patriotic conservatives is their loyalty to the state. They see themselves as implementers of official state policy and as »old school« models of decent behavior. Patriotic conservatives place high value on patriotism. The teachers in this group thus subscribe to national pride and loyalty, themes that have been popular in Croatia since the 1990s due to its history of war, newly gained independence, and nation building. The teachers in this group also agree that citizenship education is a palliative measure for the lack of tolerance in society. This is why they insist on holding their students accountable and on getting them involved in charitable activities (charity, as opposed to party politics, is seen as »safe« political engagement, because it promotes unity).

Knowledge of laws and rules is central to these teachers' idea of citizenship education. Their most important objective is to offer students sufficient understanding of the basic rules of the main political institutions. They see this as a step towards preparing students for an active contribution to society, following the rules and within the system. Part of this preparation is connected to the school's task of increasing students' employability.

Being critical towards the media is not a big concern of this group of teachers. In general, the development of a critical attitude is not a priority. They shy away from discussing norms and values, as well as from controversial subjects.

The group of pragmatic conservatives clearly stands out from the others and is positioned at the hierarchical corner of the grid-group field.

Liberal democracy mentors: »Citizenship education prepares students for the role of democratic citizens«

The respondents in this group adhere strongly to the values of liberal democracy. In the classroom, they take on the role of empowering mentors. They are not afraid of being biased towards the active promotion of democratic values. As part of establishing a relationship of trust with their pupils, liberal democracy mentors openly discuss their political preferences. This does not mean that they impose their views on their students, however. The teachers in this group strongly agree with the statement that young people should be taught »to be critical and not to believe everything they see and hear in the media.« In order to achieve this, students need to learn how to »employ various methods, theories, and models to explore the world around them.« Rather than offering ready-made rules, the respondents in this group are inclined to look at the processes of and the underlying debates behind established rules and laws.

Although they encourage young people to be critical and oriented towards change, liberal democracy mentors do not encourage students to follow only their private interests. Rather, they teach them to take the common good into account, to respect conventional political channels, and to learn how to gain influence through them.

In summary, liberal democracy mentors lean towards the hierarchic position on the hierarchic-individualist axis.

Personal growth coaches: »We teach independent and responsible young people«

Personal growth coaches are teachers by calling. The pedagogical core of their work is given priority over subject knowledge. They focus on students' personal growth and helping them develop into responsible and autonomous citizens as well as the development of participatory and intellectual competences, seen in a broader perspective. The social side of citizenship takes precedence over politics. Compassion and generosity

are cherished and encouraged, preferably through taking »real life« action.

Critical reflection is central to their teaching and is also applied to norms, *»which should always be discussed.«* This includes raising controversial issues and even personally taking a critical stand toward the state or the status quo. They are inclined to »stir things up,« but only to an extent; this does not imply *»revolutionary acts, but does imply active citizenship that attempts to improve the situation and foster citizens' rights.«*

Typical for this group is a strong connection between independent thinking and accountability. Teachers provide their students with some guidelines, but let them decide independently, reflect on their decisions, and take responsibility for them.

On the group-grid field, personal growth coaches fit into the egalitarian position, with some prominent hierarchic elements related mainly to their strong sense of accountability.

c) The Netherlands: An established professional community

In the Netherlands sample, four factors were extracted, presented in figure 4.



Figure 4. Four factors in the Netherlands

Common themes

The four factors are relatively highly correlated, which indicates a high degree of agreement among Dutch teachers. Additional qualitative analysis is needed to confirm this observation. It is possible that the respondents adhere to different interpretations of statements while ranking them similarly. However at this stage of data processing, this does not seem very likely. There is an outspoken consensus on a number of issues.

All the Dutch respondents approve of the statement: »We have to teach young people to be critical and not to believe everything they see and hear in the media.« This is interesting on two counts. On the one hand, teachers are obviously concerned by the growing power and increasing

influence of the media. In many cases, they see the media as a competing force to the messages they receive at school. In addition, many of them believe that using examples from the media is suitable for teaching critical thinking and reasoning skills. On the other hand, in the new social studies curriculum, which is in its pilot phase now, »Media and communication« is no longer a separate topic of the examination program, in spite of indications that students find it appealing (Schnabel 2009). It will be interesting to see how teachers and students alike will accommodate their preference.

The need to teach »how democracy works and why it is worth defending it« is also undisputed. Teachers do not see this as an attempt to indoctrinate students. Rather, they see it as a specific contribution of their subject—social studies—to the overall task of schools to educate future citizens. In addition, teachers subscribe to the statement »It is better that the teacher discusses norms and values instead of stiffly adhering to neutrality.« On the one hand, this reflects a general consensus on the importance of going beyond »the established facts,« both in the overall sample and in the Bulgarian group. On the other hand, the statement can be seen in the context of an ongoing debate in the Netherlands about the neutrality of the teacher. The topic has a prominent place in teacher training programs and is discussed at length in the standard teacher training textbook (Olgers et al. 2010).

The statement »My task as a teacher is to defend state policies and interests, because I am an employee of a state-financed educational institution« was rejected. Bulgarian teachers also rejected this statement, because they were adamant about not seeing themselves as part of the state. Dutch respondents, however, defended their position with pluralistic arguments – there is no such thing as »a state interest,« so even if they wanted to, they would not know what exactly to defend.

The statement »Citizenship education should cultivate a spirit of unity, loyalty to the state, and national pride« was unanimously rejected using very strong language: »*nationalistic nonsense*,« »*I am allergic to this kind of language*.« Given the current political debate about national identity in the

Netherlands (Pels 2010), it is worth mentioning that teachers do not take part in this discourse. How exactly they will deal with this issue in the classroom, when it is inevitably brought up by students, remains to be seen.

Action learning idealists: »The curriculum is frustrating«

Many of the respondents in this group are young teachers. They are change-oriented, thinking skills-oriented, and act as coaches toward their students. They strongly agree with the statement: »It is not enough to engage in discussion about how to improve the world, it is important to give young people the chance to participate in real life.« The other groups are neutral on this issue, mostly because they think this is not their task as teachers.

The most striking feature of action learning idealists is their frustration about examination programs and the conflict between what they see as important and what they »should« teach for their students to pass the exam. This frustration stems from their strong preference for controversy in the classroom. While the other three groups also agree that controversies should be discussed in class, action learning idealists put controversy and discussion at the center of their teaching. Knowledge and »facts« take second place, however at the end, »*facts are on the exam.*«

Compared to the other teachers, this group does not strongly disagree with the statement »In my opinion, citizenship education is an emergency measure by the state against the obviously growing lack of social tolerance.«

On the grid-group field, these teachers occupy the middle ground between the individualist and the egalitarian positions. The hierarchic elements can be explained with the high correlation between factorial groups.

Critical academics: »Students must think systematically and independently about social structures«

This group consists of teachers involved in national policymaking and social studies curriculum development. This may be coincidental, of course, since our sample is not representative, but it also helps clarify the views of the respondents. In the main, these are teachers with many years of experience.

The critical academics feel more strongly than anyone else that their goal is »to educate thinking citizens who can employ various methods, theories and models to explore the world around them, and who are able to assess facts and arrive at conclusions.« Remarkably, they are the only respondents who subscribe to the suggestion that official study programs are uncritical of democracy. Most of them are involved in writing and evaluating textbooks in one way or another. The users of textbooks do not share their concern. I shall come back to this point later.

These teachers are the least concerned with the pedagogical side of teaching. They are not overly worried about creating a safe environment in their classroom. In conjunction with this, they stand out as a group that shows some understanding for the suggestion that politics »belongs more to elite schools.« While they share this position with the Bulgarian local social guardians, their reasoning is rather different. The Dutch teachers in this group feel that the highly rational and abstract teaching which they greatly prefer is not suitable for every type of student.

Critical academics reject the suggestion that their teaching will contribute to developing the skills necessary for the labor market. They do not see it as their task to encourage students to participate in society. Their focus on theory and academic skills keeps them in a strictly academic role as teachers of a subject with a clearly political core.

The rational, systematic, theory-oriented features of critical academics place them on the individualist side of the group-grid field, with strong hierarchic elements.

Loyal citizens' teachers: »Get involved in social life for the common good, respect the system«

The Loyal Citizens' Teachers are clear about their acceptance of the Dutch political system. They encourage students to contribute positively to Dutch society. The suggestion that the official curriculum is »essentially uncritical« is rejected most by this group. This does not however mean that they blindly follow and implement official state policies.

loyal citizens' Teachers subscribe very strongly to the statement »Students should learn to take into account the common good, rather than follow only their private interests.« Most of all, they encourage their students to get involved in social life through the established institutions, and to listen to experts.

Compared to the action learning idealists and critical academics, these teachers tend to focus more on knowledge and on the acquisition of the skills needed to participate in society. For these teachers, loyalty means active defense of the democratic system—participation in discussion and debate, a critical, but tolerant attitude toward the media. The Loyal Citizens' Teachers are the only group that tends to agree with the idea that school is not democratic enough to help students learn about democracy.

The strong focus on adapted participation, combined with the importance of democratic values and the tendency to abandon neutrality when necessary, places the Loyal Citizens' Teachers in the hierarchical segment of the group-grid field, with some egalitarian elements.

Moral democratic educators: »Coach students to adopt democratic moral standards«

Moral democratic educators define their role very clearly as pedagogical, as opposed to subject specialists. Fostering their students' independence is their most important mission. They do not take a back seat in this process; neither do they assume the role of a devil's advocate, as their Bulgarian colleagues are inclined to do. Rather, these respondents see

themselves as personal examples of moral behavior. The common good is important, but less so than for teachers of loyal citizens. They instead place an accent on encouraging participation and helping students find their place in the world. Moral democratic educators are neutral about specific knowledge, and also not particularly concerned about discussion, debate or research skills. Moral categories define their engagement more than issues and structures. Participation and action are seen as more important than theory. Moral democratic educators adhere to a value-oriented view of citizenship, within the undisputed framework of democracy and a critical attitude toward the media.

In sum, the place of the Moral democratic educators is a mix of an egalitarian and an individualistic position, with a slight preference for the egalitarian one.

d) The three countries compared: Ownership of citizenship education; National divides visible

Similarities and differences

In the following section I present some of the interesting findings from a comparison of the three countries. The comparison is based on the qualitative data (only partially processed at the moment) and quantitative data (factor analysis of the whole set, which revealed some shared underlying themes and put some differences in a new light).

When we look at the distribution of the different factors in the three countries, we clearly see a different pattern. In Bulgaria, the factors seem to be distributed predominantly along the fatalist-egalitarian axis, with some individualistic elements. The Croatian sample leans very strongly toward hierarchy, and the Dutch sample is evenly distributed along the individualist-hierarchic axis.

It is not really surprising that respondents only agree in cases of negative consensus—that which teachers do not want to be associated with. There seems to be a bottom line standard of integrity and professionalism for secondary school teachers engaged in political education which

goes beyond national borders. None of the teachers see themselves simply as transmitters of information about a firmly established body of knowledge about rules and laws. Also, none of them think it is enough to teach the »established facts« about society.

The strong rejection of the suggestion that citizenship education would be something for the elite schools is heartening at first glance. However, there are indications that in two of the country-sets, Bulgaria and the Netherlands, this is far from undisputed. In Bulgaria, teachers with a relatively large number of disadvantaged students tend to agree with the statement. In the Netherlands, teachers with long experience and a strongly academic approach are also not so quick to reject it.

In the general sample, some subtle lines of division become visible. Whereas the theme of national unity and loyalty was only strongly represented in the Croatian case, it was implicitly present in Bulgaria as well. The Dutch reaction to anything that referred to »national« was extremely negative. This item was the point of strongest disagreement between respondents. It is very tempting to suspect those East European teachers who emphasized the importance of national cohesion of exhibiting nationalistic tendencies.⁶ However this would do injustice to these teachers' earnest attempts to find a difficult balance between their professional standards and the dominant discourse—dictated by the political reality of the day—of pride in one's national identity. Further research including other European countries would shed light on this particular aspect of the study. One thing has become clear so far; although it seems logical to tie different conceptions of citizenship education to different traditions in nation building, our study shows that the particular national context does not define teachers' views in a uniform fashion. Rather, the theme of national identity varies in different

6 Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers of history and Dutch literature may hold different opinions on the issue of nationalism. Also, the uncritical acceptance of Dutch and »Western« superiority in the textbooks testifies to more ambiguity than our data suggests, but this is a matter for separate investigation.

groups of teachers and is mixed with other contributing elements. This is why no official doctrine would reflect the views of all teachers, and probably not even of the majority of teachers.

The choice between being a teacher and being a subject specialist seems to be a game-changing item. Although most teachers would say that they combine both roles, the final ranking of choices resulted in strong positions in both directions.

Although statistically not a consensus item, the statement »We have to teach young people to be critical and not to believe everything they see and hear in the media« is generally given approval. However, when it comes to an estimation of their success in teaching students to deal critically with the media, teachers tend to give diverse answers.

A substantial number of Bulgarian and Croatian teachers tend to focus more on problems and on the need for a place to discuss and eventually alleviate them, placing less stress on participation. The societies they operate in are somewhat troubled, and normal channels of dialogue are frequently blocked. This is very visible in Bulgaria and to a lesser extent in Croatia. The teachers' mission can be seen as directed toward emancipation and a positive affirmation of the values of nations in transition, still marred by serious corruption scandals, and with a very vulnerable civil society.

One of the surprising emerging themes concerns the dichotomy of knowledge and attitudes. Although initially most teachers claimed that both were important, later they made a clear choice in one direction or another. Two things are worth noting in this respect. First, there seems to be a shared consensus that there is a minimum required knowledge which students should acquire in the course of their education, no matter what the teaching style or teacher preferences. Second, the more experienced the teachers, the less inclined they were to focus on skills without a solid knowledge base. This could be interpreted as conservatism, but maybe the reasons lie elsewhere. Too much stress on innovative teaching methods without taking »no nonsense« teaching into account may unnecessarily alienate many teachers who derive their sense

of professionalism from their subject knowledge. For those eager to introduce yet another innovative, competence-oriented teaching method in the area of citizenship education, this outcome should perhaps act as a warning.

Implications for curriculum and teacher training

The diversity of positions found in each of the three countries should not conceal one important positive feature—teachers have a strong sense of ownership of the idea of citizenship education and a shared baseline professional standard. However, they differ in the ways in which they conceptualize and execute their tasks, not only from country to country, but also from school to school. The research findings demonstrate that taking the national context into account is not enough when adapting curricula from other countries or from European sources. The »national context« is only a common space within which several distinct perspectives coexist, held together by unifying themes. Equally important, a state-initiated policy on citizenship education does not automatically ensure promotion of state-imposed objectives. Quite the opposite, as the case of Bulgaria demonstrates, teachers may use the existing state curriculum as a starting point to demonstrate a corrective position towards what they see as serious shortcomings of the current political reality, in an attempt to educate future citizens who would hopefully do better.

Our data shows that no amount of detailed curriculum requirements, specifications of standards, objectives, and evaluation criteria would erase the diversity of perspectives on citizenship education that teachers exhibit. In this sense, citizenship education in any given country cannot be seen as a single policy project without making it void of its most important feature—preparing young people to be citizens in a presumably pluralistic and democratic society.

In the field of citizenship education, a relatively large amount of attention has been paid to the content and quality of teaching materials. Our data demonstrates that, in general, teachers do not put too much weight

on the books and materials they work with. They remain neutral towards the idea of too much political correctness or lack of criticism in the books. Most mention that they feel equipped to create the necessary discretionary space to work around whatever limitations a book may have. Although the explanations they offer may differ from country to country, the important message for curriculum developers is that too much focus on teaching materials, textbooks, and official programs, as opposed to supporting teachers to develop their professionalism, may prove to be a waste of resources.

Finally, though the ideal of »democratic citizenship« (Council of Europe 2010) may be appealing to many, the majority of teachers do not adhere to this model. Democratic citizenship as promoted by the Council (as one authoritative example) is strongly associated with the egalitarian bias in our typology. All three countries exhibit variations of this type of view. Bulgarian personal growth facilitators, Croatian personal growth coaches and Dutch moral democratic educators share many common elements, in spite of specific accents. But compared to the factors on the hierarchic-individualist axis, these teachers are certainly not a majority. For those who find it desirable to promote »democratic citizenship education« through teacher training, the study sheds a light on the different routes they might follow in order to achieve a substantial shift in teachers' core beliefs.

Discussion and future research themes

Current political events, in particular the protests throughout Eastern Europe, allow us to revisit some of the findings of the study. Since the beginning of the year, Bulgaria is in a state of a deep political crisis, the signs of which we already could demarcate in this study as an enormous divide between political reality and the ideological aspirations of teachers and schools. In a more cynical vein, the study revealed the undercurrent of spouting »official discourse,« largely due to the demands of European Union membership in a country that increasingly exhibits features of a façade democracy. Recent events show the way in which political institutions as a whole are seen as void of content. This makes the value teach-

ers ascribe to school as an institution and the hopes they place in the positive influence of education as a whole and political education in general even more remarkable.

One issue that emerged during the study, though speculative, deserves attention. This is the issue of intergenerational trust. In post-communist countries, the breach between the totalitarian and post-totalitarian generation is so great that teachers often are ready to abdicate from the role of ideological guides for the younger generation, out of fear of contaminating them with what they see as the irreparable damage they suffered from not being brought up as free citizens. By the same token, the opposite position is also possible: teachers tend to minimize the differences between the two systems and in doing so implicitly accuse their students of rejecting everything from the past, including the good things. In general, the theme of intergenerational dialogue may prove to be of great importance to making post-totalitarian societies more comprehensible to »outsiders,« mostly from Western democracies. It is exactly this intergenerational gap that exposes the depth of the problems these societies face on the road to building viable democracies. In the course of the study, it became clear that another dialogue was taking place—not only between researcher and teachers and between teachers themselves, but also between teachers and students. Teachers implicitly and sometimes explicitly referred to their perceptions of students. They explained and justified their ideas about good citizenship education as a response to particular features of their students that they believed needed to be addressed. The ways in which these images of students, as they emerge from the teachers' responses, are intertwined with teachers' views and educational practices is one of the most intriguing issues and remains to be explored in continuations of this study.

Looking back at the theoretical framework of this study, we can formulate two conclusions. First, the data seems to confirm the assumption that views on different aspects of citizenship education, beliefs about education, and the role of the teacher and the school are not randomly combined, but organized around basic core beliefs about politics and

society in general. These can be located within the four main biases of the grid-group framework. Second, the ways these biases are manifested in the respective countries are influenced by specific historic events, by the current political climate, and by educational traditions and practices. The most striking differences between the three countries were in their definition of »political« and »social,« as well their perceived distance to official power. The factor distributions tended to follow the expected general patterns of the national political culture of the three countries: a generally fatalist attitude of mistrust towards power in Bulgaria, a rather hierarchically-oriented and united around its national ideal in Croatia, and a classic liberal democracy with strong trust in government and, simultaneously, strong communitarian features in the Netherlands. A more detailed analysis of the qualitative data is needed to formulate further conclusions in this regard.

A future expansion of the study to include other countries may shed more light on the interplay between universal biases and specific national biases. Particularly interesting would be to see if any shifts occur as regards two topics. First, the issue of national loyalty and identity proved to be game-changing in Croatia, was strongly present in Bulgaria, and adamantly rejected in the Netherlands. Adding other countries to the mix, particularly »old« democracies with a strong tradition of positive national identity, may reveal other undercurrents in this debate. Second, the issue of political education for the masses and for the elites demands further attention. The strong rejection of the idea that politics may be too difficult for most young people may be an artefact of our sample construction, combined with the specific educational structure of the countries. In Bulgaria, there is officially no tracking at high school level, which is where teachers found it most difficult to teach some of the young people. In the Netherlands, the slight approval of this statement by one of the groups was clearly linked to the form of education as well as to the thinking in terms of »levels« inherent to the Dutch education system. This is related to the current debate on what has been dubbed »diploma democracy«—the claim that the uneducated do not participate in political life (Bovens and Wille 2009).

The question of practice still remains open. Do these different views result in observably different teaching practices? Observations of lessons in Bulgaria offer a strong indication that this may be the case. I hope that this research will help teachers to reflect on their views and principles, and make their practice of educating the future citizens of Europe more informed and ultimately more effective.

Finally, I would like to come back to what I consider the two major methodological implications of my findings for comparative studies of post-transition societies. First, if we want to shed a light on developments in post-communist societies beyond national descriptions and post-transitional clichés, such a comparative approach seems viable. It allows for analysis on multiple levels and from various angles, thus transcending national discourses and exposing common themes and potential problems. Second, this approach initiates a dialogue within communities defined in other than national terms and beyond the traditional juxtaposition of East and West. There is a tendency to engage in a »top-down« transfer of knowledge and expertise from the West to the East only. Looking in the opposite direction may provide valuable lessons for Western countries as well. Most of all, this approach offers the opportunity to seriously explore common themes and directions of development for »old« and »new« democracies alike. We need to find ways to »unpack« post-transition societies by highlighting shared themes that are also of great relevance to »established« democracies, thus allowing the East to take on the role of corrective and warning to the West. Transcending national boundaries does not mean ignoring them, however. As I have demonstrated, national educational traditions, general attitudes towards democracy and politics, and current events can all influence the ways teachers think and talk about citizenship education. A word of caution is in order here: this study must be seen as a snapshot of an ongoing debate. This may turn out to be both the most obvious strength and weakness of the method. If we are looking for definitive answers and how-to recipes, the method seems to be a weakness. But if we see research as a step towards deeper understanding and a contribution to a larger democratic dialogue, it is a strength, and the questions

raised shall hopefully invite other scholars and practitioners to look for more complete answers.

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Appendix 1: English statements

The original sample was a mixture of Dutch, English, and Bulgarian sources. The long list was made in Dutch and English. The final short list was translated first into English, then into Bulgarian (discussed and edited by colleagues in Bulgaria), then back into Dutch (double-checked by native speakers and colleagues) and then back into English. The same procedure was followed for Croatia. Three sets of statements were used for each country's native language.

1. Students need an environment in which they could discuss the problems of society without anyone pointing a finger at them and correcting them.
2. We need to teach young people to be independent and to make their own decisions.
3. I encourage my students to get involved in social life through the established institutions and to listen to expert opinion.
4. These are the rules, these are the laws. I think this is the bulk of citizenship education.
5. The teacher should be a model of honest and decent behaviour, this is the core of citizenship education.
6. We have to teach young people to be critical and not to believe everything they see and hear in the media.
7. The teacher should make it clear to the students that they need to participate in public life if they want to advance in society.
8. Citizenship education should contribute to the development of competences required by the labour market.
9. We should pay more attention to knowledge: to look at how things really are, instead of just discussing how they should be.

10. It is not enough only to engage in discussions about how to improve the world, it is important to give young people the chance to participate in real life.
11. The teacher should stress first of all the anatomy of government: the separation of powers, the functions and prerogatives of the institutions, the different types and purposes of democratic systems.
12. I am pleased when my students begin to discover structures and regularities and when they begin to understand the world of politics.
13. The goal is to educate thinking citizens who can employ various methods, theories and models to explore the world around them, and who are able to assess facts and to arrive at conclusions.
14. It is important that students learn to defend their views in political discussions and social debate; this is why I help them to develop research and discussion skills.
15. Citizenship education should focus on the development of skills and attitudes, much needed for students to survive in today's complex world.
16. Young people may learn the law by heart, but this does not mean they will necessarily obey it.
17. Students should learn to take into account the common good, rather than follow only their private interests.
18. I feel that I am first and foremost a teacher and only then a subject specialist. The subject matter is only secondary.
19. Controversial political problems should not be discussed in class.
20. Citizenship education should not be associated with politics, because individual acts of compassion and generosity are more important.

21. The subject »*Whatever it is called in the country*« is in fact citizenship education. Both are aimed at educating future citizens.
22. Young people should acquire knowledge about democracy: how it works and why is it worth defending it.
23. It is very important that students learn how to analyse social problems, but also select the most important ones.
24. The teacher should present to the class only established facts about society. Social norms are not a suitable topic for teaching.
25. Official citizenship programs are essentially uncritical: democracy is good, we are a democratic state, therefore we are good.
26. The democratic approach to inquiry and debate should be demonstrated in class, in order to encourage students' interest in politics.
27. Students cannot learn democracy at school, because school itself is not a democratic institution.
28. Citizenship education means to hold students accountable for their behaviour and to get them involved charity and community activities.
29. It is better that the teacher discusses norms and values instead of stiffly adhering to neutrality.
30. The teacher should not disclose his or her political views to the students. Quite the opposite, only broadly accepted social and political values should be discussed.
31. My task as a teacher is to defend state policies and interests, because I am an employee of a state-financed educational institution.
32. I am obliged as a citizen and a teacher to stir things up if necessary, and not only through the so-called legitimate political channels.

33. In my opinion, citizenship education is an emergency measure by the state against the obviously growing lack of social tolerance.
34. We should not declare any ideology to be correct; instead, we should give students an opportunity to get acquainted with various ideas about political and social order.
35. The most important task of citizenship education is to inform students about their civil and political rights and freedoms.
36. Citizenship education should be of some use to society, for instance by contributing to greater safety.
37. Citizenship education is an outdated concept, because it conveys to students the values of the middle class.
38. Civic obedience means more than just obeying the law, it means obedience to higher personal standards and higher social interests.
39. Students should be made to realize that they live in a world of growing interdependence. Even though we do not respect each other, we still depend on each other.
40. Citizenship education should cultivate a spirit of unity, loyalty to the state and national pride.
41. For most students politics is way too abstract and incomprehensible, it belongs more to elite schools.

