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Education for Citizenship – A Step Towards Democracy

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Abstract: *This article encompasses an interdisciplinary approach regarding the concept of education for citizenship which has multiple implications in the contemporary world. Thus, the paper tries to highlight the close connection which establishes between the citizen and the state, due to the citizenship status one acquires and to emphasize how important it is to educate the individual in terms of assuming this status. The main purpose of this type of new education is to approach citizenship and its advantages with a great sense of awareness, permanently trying to promote the contouring of an identity oriented towards democracy and a set of principles centered on respect for fundamental rights and freedoms and the rule of law. Concomitantly, the paper aims to define education, the „new educations" and to also underline the legal approach regarding education for citizenship as it was foreseen recently in the European recommendations as well as the way in which the Romanian legal provisions were harmonized accordingly.*

Keywords: *education; citizenship; the Council of Europe Charter; education for democratic citizenship; new educations.*

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1. Introduction

Education represents the prerogative of a developed, proactive society, anchored in contemporaneity, which is why a community engaged in this complex development process can highly contribute to the foundation of a healthy society, whose trajectories could lead to progress. In other words, this individual status, put under the spectrum of acquiring the citizenship of a specific state, generates additional rights and obligations. But sometimes, in the absence of a continuous learning engine or without certain educational milestones, deficiencies can occur in the citizen's identity. Therefore, a good knowledge of the catalog of rights and obligations conferred by the citizenship status can lead to a strong identity culture, as well as to the community's responsibility in assuming differences and blurring cleavages.

The relationship between *education* as a complex notion and *citizenship* – an intensely debated concept with multiple valences both at the level of constitutional theory and the international protection of human rights is extremely strong and it is of paramount importance that each of us gets acquainted with it. Thus, the aim of this paper is to underline the importance of *new educations*, especially citizenship education, a concept that has been reinvented under the auspices of the states, which deals with the problematic of the contemporary world, generated by the economic, cultural, political evolution and that of the communities in the postmodern society. (Cristea, 2010, p. 238)

2. The premises of a „new education"

The concept of *education* is not a new one but comes from a long process of research so that, from an etymological point of view, it comes from *lat. educo - educare* which means „to feed", „to take care of", „to raise" but there are also references to *lat. educo - educere* which denotes actions such as „to lea"", „to take to". (Cucoş, 2002, p. 39)

It is well known that education is a main pillar in the contemporary societal construct and it materializes in various forms, depending on the concerned field of interest. To begin with, education was defined as „the influence exercised by the adult generation on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its objective is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states that are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieux for which he is specifically destined." (Durkheim, 1956, p. 28)

Unequivocally, it is known that education starts from an early age, when the emphasis is placed on the child, in the first place, especially on the path he takes towards acquiring knowledge and also on the way in which he contributes to shaping an educated community. However, along the years there have been multiple approaches in the attempt to define the idea of education, as they were emphasized by professor Ioan Cerghit who has identified a series of factors according to which education can be defined. Whether we talk about „education as a process" – which defines that „action of transformation in a positive and long-term sense of the human being" or whether we emphasize the idea of „education as a social action" - meaning „that planned activity carried out on the basis of a social project, which includes a personality model", it is important to reiterate the fact that education is not only limited to one stage of the individual's life, for example childhood, but has the ability to extend throughout a person's life. (Cucoş, 2002, p. 40)

As for the pedagogical concept of education, it aims at „scientific knowledge, at a high degree of generalization and abstraction, of a psychosocial reality with a very large area of expansion in time and space and of complex and contradictory development at the system and process level". However, it should not be forgotten that the central element of this entire endeavor is the individual so starting from this leitmotif we can emphasize the fact that „education is a psychosocial activity with the central function of personality formation-development, carried out in order for it to integrate in society". (Cristea, 2010, p. 143, p. 152)

While getting to the core of the topic discussed in this paper, the following question arises: to what extent can education contribute to improving the idea of citizenship? As an answer, Milton Friedman stated in a doctrinal opinion that „a stable and democratic society is impossible without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens." (Milligan, Moretti, Oreopoulos, 2003, p. 2) Citizenship represents „that permanent political and legal link between a person and the state" and the catalog of rights conferred to the individual by virtue of this link arises precisely as a validation of this status and as a guarantee of the fact that they secure the connection between the citizen and the state he belongs to. (Ciucă, 2019, pp. 87-88) Therefore, as far as the education - citizenship relationship is concerned, it is unequivocal that through his actions an educated citizen can consciously and actively contribute to the political, economic and social activity of a state.

The approach of the citizenship education would not be possible without the knowledge and understanding of the concept of *new educations*.

Being a result of the issues raised by the contemporary world, under the auspices of economic, political, social, cultural changes and those which appear in the postmodern community, the *new educations* are particular contents that materialized in Romania since the 80s in order to offer responses to developments with a positive or negative impact in modern and postmodern society. They materialized in areas that concerned democracy, the health system, changes produced at the social level, international relations, mass media, nutrition, economy, civic culture and so on. (Cristea, 2010, p. 238)

These new categories of special particular contents target areas of interest which appeared in counterweight to the actions that occurred at the global level, being anchored in the reality of the 19th-20th century. They varied from ecological education, demographic education, nutritional education, to community education or education for communication and mass media. (Cucoş, 2002, p. 54) In the 90s the Romanian pedagogical space faced other categories of new educations which mainly targeted the individual, the moral and civic component, as well as the relationship with nature. It was that moment when *education for democratic citizenship* started shaping as a content aimed to contribute to the citizen's awareness in matter of social responsibility, in a context in which the doctrinaires claimed it involved "the local, national, European and global aspects of democracy." (Cristea, 2010, p. 240)

The new educations appeared, therefore, as a reaction to the societal changes occurring globally and took shape, as we saw earlier, in different categories of content that cover matters that the individual faces every day. With the aim of covering deficiencies and contributing to a better management of everyday situations, citizenship education appears as a purpose and an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the citizen and the state. This way, knowing their rights and obligations as well as being involved, aware and participating in community actions, the citizens can create homogeneous, solid structures with a well-defined purpose.

3. Education for democratic citizenship – a new horizon. Evolutionary perspectives.

Historically, citizenship education originated in Ancient Greece, but it flourished in the classical era, when pedagogical and literary activities revolved around citizenship, so that individuals had to learn how to relate to each other and to act according to their status. Consequently, being a citizen in that period of time represented the individual's ability to have a say in

„policy-making", depending obviously on the political form of government followed by states – either oligarchy or democracy. (Heater, 2004, p. 1) Derek Heater refers in his writings to a quote from Swanson J. (1992) stating in one of his paperworks that „education should […] prepare and encourage individuals to actualize their human potential, in the sense that Aristotle appeals not only to excellence but also to diversity. […]. Shortly, education must emphasize three aspects: the qualities of an excellent citizen, human being and individual." (Heater, 2004, p. 16)

Therefore, the connection between the citizen and his state is also manifested by the way he understands to relate to the community he belongs to. Thus, the purpose of citizenship education, that of shaping a prototype of a good, efficient or capable citizen, depends mainly on the way in which the fundamental nature of policies, on the one hand, and the balance of freedom or equality, on the other, are understood. (McCowan, 2009, p. 5)

However, what follows is an attempt to underline the contemporary approach regarding education for citizenship as it was foreseen, recently, in the European recommendations as well as the way in which the Romanian provisions were harmonized, leading to a variety of „new educations". This type of education aimed at forming and developing, from a civic point of view, the personality, "in the context of new cultural, economic, political, community values, which anticipate quality education in a knowledge-based society". (Cristea, 2010, p. 241)

At the European level, education for democratic citizenship represented an ambitious project of the Council of Europe, launched in 1997 under the auspices of the Education Committee of the Council of Europe, being an initiative-response to the urgent requests of the member states undertaken within the Ministerial Conferences in Madrid (1994) and Kristiansand (1997) where they reaffirmed the need to „intensify activities on education for democracy, human rights and tolerance, monitoring civic and humanitarian education programs and monitoring teaching methods of education for democratic citizenship in schools, adult education institutions and vocational training of teachers." (Bîrzea, 2000, p. 15) Due to this approach, as well as to the multiple meetings that followed, the Council of Europe, through the Committee of Ministers, adopted in 2002 the first reference document – the Recommendation (2002)12 regarding education for democratic citizenship, a document that reiterates the fact that education for democratic citizenship is fundamental to the primary purpose of the Council of Europe, that of „promoting a free, tolerant and just society, contributing to the protection of the values and principles of freedom,

pluralism, human rights and the rule of law, these being the foundations of democracy".

Later, taking into consideration the efforts of the European bodies and the stringent reaffirmation of the member states regarding the necessity of a relevant document in the field of education for democratic citizenship, the Charter of the Council of Europe on education for democratic citizenship and education for human rights was born and it was adopted in the Recommendations CM/Rec (2010) 7 of the Committee of Ministers. This way, the document reaffirms the mission of the Council of Europe in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, with the conviction that education plays an essential role in achieving this goal. Being a recommendatory and non-binding document, the Charter represents the effort of many years of extensive consultations and aims to act as a „catalyst for the actions of the member states and a way of disseminating good practices and raising standards throughout Europe and beyond." (Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Education for Human Rights, 2010)

The charter defines *education for democratic citizenship* in Section I, point 2, letter a) where it is stated that „*education for democratic citizenship* means education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law".

At the same time, the provisions of the Charter emphasize the link between education for democratic citizenship and education for human rights, two fields that find mutual support but differ in terms of the scope. Therefore, what should be outlined is the regulatory area of the Charter and the fact that Section I, point 3 includes the „rights, responsibilities and active participation in relation to the civic, political, social, economic, legal dimension and cultural of society."

In Romania, the provisions of the Charter have been introduced through the internal legislative instruments. Thus, the National Education Law no. 1/2011, updated, states in Article no. 4 that the main purpose of education and professional training deals with „the formation of skills and the necessary abilities for social integration and active citizen participation in society, education in the spirit of dignity, tolerance and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, the cultivation of sensitivity

towards the human problematic, towards moral-civic values and for nature, the social and cultural environment." (Legea educaţiei naţionale nr. 1/2011)

Regarding the practical way in which citizenship education materializes at the curriculum level, doctrine emphasizes the fact that the main tool for its implementation is the National Curriculum, a context in which citizenship education is enshrined both in the sphere of formal education and in compulsory subjects (common core) such as: Civic Education (3rd, 4th grade), Civic Culture (7th grade, 8th grade). Later, in upper classes, there are various themes of education for democratic citizenship which lead to disciplines such as Sociology, Philosophy, Social Studies or optional disciplines from the national curriculum offer (e.g. Education for Democracy, International Humanitarian Law). (Velea, Căpiţă, Teşileanu, Stoica, 2013, pp. 35-36)

In Romania education for democratic citizenship is also taught in other institutions such as Palatul Copiilor (Children's Palace) - which is a school unit where specific instructive and educational extracurricular activities are carried out, with a role in deepening and completing knowledge and learning how to efficiently organize children's free time. An essential role is also played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which, based on the recommendations encompassed in the text of the Charter in terms of providing opportunities and support to international and youth organizations, have taken the initiative to promote education for democratic citizenship through various initiatives (e.g. Our Village Schools Project – Education for Active Citizenship and Human Rights, School for Democracy – British Council Romania).

4. Conclusions

Citizenship education wants to „promote harmonious coexistence and encourage the mutually beneficial development of people and the communities in which they live." (De Coster, I., Sigalas, E., Noorani., S., McCallum, E., European Commission, Eurydice Synthesis, 2017, p. 3) More than that, according to the Charter, the aim of education for democratic citizenship is to promote social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, as well to value diversity and equality, including gender equality. The main purpose of this „new education" is to create the necessary levers for citizens to exercise an active role by engaging in actions focused on defending and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. (Charter of the Council of Europe, 2010) Finally, this continuous struggle of the civilizations and some emblematic figures to contribute to the education of the individual in the sense of his orientation towards the community,

through active involvement and participation in public life is indeed a laudable approach. This mechanism requires awareness, a close knowledge of citizen rights and obligations, the elimination of cultural, racial, ethnic barriers, as well as the shaping of an identity oriented towards the valorization of democratic principles.

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