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Citizenship education in the Czech Republic with focus on participation of children at schools

Edukacja obywatelska w Republice Czeskiej z ukierunkowaniem na partycypację dzieci w szkołach

STRESZCZENIE: Autorka analizuje edukację obywatelską w czeskich szkołach ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem partycypacji dzieci. Dla lepszego zrozumienia obecnych problemów dotyczących realizacji edukacji obywatelskiej prezentuje krótką historię edukacji obywatelskiej realizowanej w Republice Czeskiej oraz analizuje ogólne warunki efektywnej edukacji obywatelskiej. Chociaż edukacja obywatelska, która zmierza do poprawy realizacji wartości demokratycznych, jest włączona w narodowy program edukacji i ma charakter obowiązkowy, to faktyczne efekty wśród czeskich uczniów nie są satysfakcjonujące. Porównania na poziomie międzynarodowym pokazują, że chociaż wiedza uczniów jest nieco powyżej średniej, to ich umiejętności i postawy znajdują się daleko poniżej średniej. Pomimo iż szkoły w Czechach mają dużą autonomię w sposobach realizacji edukacji obywatelskiej, najczęściej jest ona realizowana na tradycyjnych lekcjach, jedynie połowa szkół umożliwia dzieciom doświadczanie demokracji w życiu szkolnym, a bardzo rzadko uczniowie są zaangażowani w obywatelskie aktywności poza szkołą. Temat jest tak naprawdę marginalizowany zarówno na poziomie szkół, jak i krajowym. Nauczyciele, którzy chcą realizować edukację obywatelską uczniów metodą partycypacyjną otrzymują wiele wsparcia od organizacji non-profitowych, które jednak niesystematycznie otrzymując wsparcie finansowe, same często walczą o przetrwanie. Tak więc, jakkolwiek w programach i dokumentach silnie deklaruje się znaczenie edukacji obywatelskiej, to rzeczywistość szkolna pod tym względem nie przedstawia się optymistycznie.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Edukacja dla demokratycznego obywatelstwa, edukacja obywatelska, partycypacja dzieci, szkoła, Republika Czeska.

ABSTRACT: The article provides an analysis of citizenship education in the Czech schools with a special regard to participation of children at schools. For a better understanding of actual problems connected with

realization of citizenship education, the text presents a brief history of citizenship education in today's Czech Republic and also summarizes conditions for successful citizenship education in general. Although citizenship education, which aims to improve democratic values, is enshrined in the national curriculum, which makes it in some form compulsory for every child, actual results of Czech pupils are not satisfactory. An international comparison reveals that their knowledge is slightly above the average, but their skills and attitudes are deeply below the average. Although schools are provided with freedom in the ways of teaching citizenship education, they mostly teach it in special lessons, only about half of the schools gives their children an opportunity to experience democracy in the school life and very rarely teachers involve pupils in activities out of school. The topic is marginalized on both school and national level, and much of the needed support for teachers willing to teach citizenship education in a participative way is provided by non-profit organizations that are not systematically supported and struggle with their own existence. Curricular documents declare the importance of education for democratic citizenship quite strongly, the situation at school is however not so bright.

KEYWORDS: Education for democratic citizenship, citizenship education, participation of children, school, Czech Republic.

*Well, we already have democracy,
what we need now are some democrats¹.*
Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Introduction

Democratic society will not automatically come into existence, if we want to live in democracy we have to nurture it. Educational experts as well as democracy theorists discuss broadly what the role of citizen is. This discussion has wide consequences on education as it is legitimate way of cultural reproduction and states that conceive its establishment as a democratic, seek to ensure that their education systems lead children, young citizens, to skills and attitudes needed in democracy. A well-known educator John Dewey pointed out that democratic society is a sphere where people are supposed to treat each other as equals. As democratic society refuses external authority, values and social norms originate from agreement of its members. Everyone has a right to contribute to the wellbeing of the society and this fact of course presumes conflict of various interests. This should not be seen as an obstacle to coexistence, instead it should be an intellectual challenge that helps everyone to flourish, enriched by opinions of the others (Dewey 2011²). It implies that

¹ Originally: „Tož demokracii bychom už měli, teď ještě nějaké ty demokraty“. Translated by the author.

² Dewey's famous book *Democracy and education* was published for the first time in 1916.

if we want to live in a justice society we have to learn the way to negotiate about particular interests (Schoem, Hurtado 2001), not only on interpersonal level among citizens but also on the level of state power, as civil rights are not guaranteed by the state itself, they in reality exist to such an extent to which a certain group of people enforce them (Janoski 1998). Involvement of citizens in decision making is also a source of legitimacy of decisions made in democracy (Warren 2010). Democracy obviously cannot exist without some form of citizens' engagement. Citizens need to be equipped for this demanding task with knowledge and skills as well as they have to be willing to participate. Human being can learn to live in the democracy in family, in organizations of civil society, and at school; only school is place that can be influenced by the state policy, so that formal education is very important field in education for democratic citizenship (Kymlicka 2001).

The article concerns citizenship education at schools in the Czech Republic with a special regard to participation of children at schools. It presents how the citizenship education is understood by teachers as well as how it is implemented and with what outcomes. At the beginning it summarizes findings about citizenship education in order to identify the conditions for successful citizenship education that serve as a base for assessment of contemporary state of citizenship education in the Czech Republic. It presents also an insight into the history showing that the tradition of education for citizenship in our country is long and colourful. It helps us to understand why the substance of citizenship education is sometimes misunderstood by Czech teachers and politicians. The analysis of the contemporary state of citizenship education is provided with aim to point out the key elements that could improve the quality of citizenship education in the Czech Republic.

Conditions of successful citizenship education

A very important remark to the discussion about education for democracy has made Gert Biesta (2011) when he distinguished education as socialization in the sense of passing the existing values on one hand, and as "subjectivization" in terms of the development of critical thinking and the ability to independently assess what is right and good on the other hand. A society based on traditions suppresses individuality in order to fit into conformity. In a society where individuals equally negotiate their interests, norms are constantly evolving, and the ultimate goal of education cannot be determined. Education in democracy therefore should not be focused primarily on passing current social norms (although it also belongs to education) or conceived as

a kind of preparation for something that will come in the future (preparation for participation in politics, preparation for the profession), education should focus primarily on the development of child's ability to be responsible and to take part in the creating of common future (Dewey 2011). There is no better way of teaching about democratic values than the democratic one, and therefore we have to be prepared for the possibility that children will discuss them and potentially transform them. (Print et al. 2002) Democratic education has to be based primarily on subjectivization (Biesta 2011).

The goals of citizenship education are so comprehensive that they cannot be taught only at the level of knowledge, they have to be taught also through experience, e.g. discussions on various subjects or student's involvement into the school life (Rowe, Newton 1997; Deakin-Crick 2008). The most effective way of teaching citizenship education is within the reality of everyday life (Eurydice 2005). Teaching therefore should go beyond the boundaries of citizenship education lessons. It should be taught in class (e.g. discussing relationships in class), at school (e.g. students should be encouraged to represent their own interests in students democratic institutions) and even out of the school (e.g. organization of projects focused on improvement of the city). The possibility of cooperation with people outside school (parents, alumni, representatives of community or non-profit entities) seems to be crucial (Eurydice 2005).

According to educational specialists there are two main conditions for such effective citizenship education: competent teachers and democratic school culture. Teachers should not overwhelm students with information, they should serve as qualified mediators (Staněk 2007). Students should be generally encouraged to express their views. This leads not only to development of their knowledge about the context of discussed topics but also to greater participation and involvement in school and in society as well as to their overall personal development. This approach to students has to be included in school development strategy (student's participation is limited when members of management or staff are against it) (Deakin-Crick 2008). Therefore school culture is crucial element. It expresses the idea that a school represents not only an educational institution, but also a community, space where people share values and norms and are interested in developing good relationships (Higgins, Sath 1997; Moree 2013).

Student's participation is one of the most effective ways of learning democracy, since it encourages personal development (promotes positive self-esteem and develop personal and collective responsibility); the *educational aspect* is according to Ted Huddleston (2007) only one of three arguments for the importance of pupil participation. Another arguments lies in *normative*

reasons that are based on existence of children's and human rights embedded in legislation. Students are understood as citizens who have rights and responsibilities, and the school is obliged to provide them opportunity to learn how to handle them. The last group of arguments, *instrumental* or *pragmatic* justification highlights the benefits of student's participation at school and in a wider society as students views can be helpful when deciding on an educational plan or policy on education. Oser and Veugelers (2008) add one more reason supporting the importance of student's participation in form of *social and interpersonal dimension*. To "get involved" means to become a human being through activities that one does for others and that connect him with the society. Life in a society simply requires people to be active in social life. The modern concept of citizenship sees engagement as a way to become free and autonomous citizen who, through his commitment influences the environment in which he lives.

Important remark has been made also about the age of pupils included in citizenship education, as it should be incorporated not only in the higher educational levels, but also in the lower ones (Eurydice 2005). Younger children can learn participation through issues related to direct life at school, such as the rights and obligations of the pupils, school rules, thinking about whether pupils and teachers behave fairly. Older children can learn in conjunction with real social events and issues (rights and responsibilities of citizens in specific situations, their justification, the functioning of democracy and its institutions in the context of specific events, the role of police in society, environmental issues, social and political issues and different views of how society should work) (Rowe, Newton 1997).

Although participation is crucial in citizenship education, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) made very important remark based on analysis of the impact of different types of teaching. When citizenship education focuses only on the development of participation, it often does not develop the ability to analyse and critically assess the causes of social problems, and vice versa, if the educational programs focus only on the development of sensitivity towards justice, they often do not develop a willingness to participate. The connection between participation and justice is not guaranteed, therefore, it is necessary to cover both components into the curriculum as well as the practice.

To sum up, citizenship education should be taught in the sense of subjectivization. The participation on the life of the school as well as outside school is crucial in this process. At the same time we cannot base education only on participation, as it automatically does not lead to development of critical

thinking. Citizenship education is very complex field that should be realized on various levels of school life as well as in various ages of students.

This part was dedicated to general conditions of successful citizenship education. It helps us to assess the current state of citizenship education in the Czech Republic. Before we focus on contemporary situation, we will make short excursion into the history of the field at the area of the Czech Republic, because it helps us to understand some of the present problems.

Citizenship education in historical perspective

Tradition of the field is quite long in the area of contemporary Czech Republic. Already during the reign of Maria Theresa in the 18th century it was decided that the state should have influence on education of its people; we cannot speak about citizenship education at that time as it did not exist as a school subject, and moral education was a component of religion education. Even Emperor Act from 1869 still does not speak about citizenship education as individual subject, nevertheless the mention of its content reveals that it was focused on homeland and constitution (Staněk 2007). The formal beginning of the citizenship education can be dated in 1923 when it was included in the school curriculum, and the aim was to develop respect for the democratic state and the republic (instead of former respect to the emperor); after 1948 the subject was strongly influenced by Marxist ideology and citizenship education may be seen as clear indoctrination; the latest milestone was 1991 when the need to develop democratic dialogue of citizens about the society occurred and so the new curriculum of the subject based on democratic values was introduced (Staněk 2007). But even after the Velvet revolution in 1989 the development of this field was not without problems. Citizenship education was understood by many as ideological manipulation, citizens were, the critics argued, intelligent enough to orient themselves in the social, political or personal problems and citizenship education was seen as unnecessary or even harmful (Staněk 2008).

Interest in citizenship education however increased in whole Europe during last decades and David Kerr (2008) notes several reasons for that: first is the democratic deficit that is reflected in the low election turnouts and the general lack of citizen's interest in participation in activities of the local community and other voluntary activities. Another is the fall of the Soviet regime in Central and Eastern Europe, which represents a major challenge: we should effectively replace the old structures by democratic regimes, which, by nature of their existence need active engaged citizens. Kerr also sees in

citizenship education an opportunity to enable people to better cope with the problems posed by coexistence in a globalized world (with the issue of diversity, inclusion, cultural and social differences). Finally also the expansion of the European Union with the idea of construction of Europe for the 21st century (a cohesive and fair society with strong economic potential and an educated workforce base) led to an increased interest.

Also Czech educational professionals point out several reasons supporting importance of citizenship education³. People must be able to understand the system of state authorities, in order not to be lost in a tangle of state institutions and civil duties (Jirásková 1999). The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004 was an impulse for teachers to become more knowledgeable in European institutions and the system of law (Staněk 2008). Growing influence of non-profit organizations on political decisions also raises demands on citizens as they should be able to use them to promote common interests and their demands should be reasonable at the same time, otherwise the growing influence of citizens could be risky for the society (Dvořáková 2009). Very important during transformation from a non-democratic to democratic society is also the transformation of thinking of citizens that should be able to participate responsibly in the life of society (Staněk 2009). Another aspect is the growing extremism and intolerance, the current issues with which society must deal (Demjančuj, Drotárová 2005). Only a self-confident and responsible citizen is able to cope with the diversity and appreciate it (Staněk 2009). Even in the Czech Republic, therefore, the professional community declared that there should be enough space at schools given to citizenship education, because people who are not prepared to live in democratic arrangement are not able to take advantage of the opportunities that democracy offers (Pol at all 2006).

Post-revolutionary citizenship education was realized as a separate subject with unified curriculum compulsory for all primary schools. The curricular reform (implemented in 2004) gave autonomy to schools in order to open space for greater creativity of teachers, and for greater flexibility of the education system (MŠMT 2001). Instead of a unified syllabuses for every school (it was compulsory to teach concrete content within concrete years) the more open curriculum was created. State Educational Program⁴ (i.e. the national curriculum) expresses key principles of the state educational

³ Most of the other authors' arguments are summarized also in: Staněk 2008.

⁴ In Czech: "Státní vzdělávací program".

policy and defines the general objectives of education. Also the Framework Educational Programs⁵ are elaborated centrally, and they specify outcomes mandatory for particular stages in particular types of schools. Within the bound of Framework Educational Program schools create their own School Educational Programs⁶ determining concrete schedule according to their needs.

Citizenship education is in the Framework Educational Program incorporated as a cross-curricular theme that can be elaborated by the school in various ways, as a specialized subject, multidisciplinary-subject where citizenship education is connected with history or any other subject, or it can be dissolved in many various subjects (Soukup 2010). Framework Educational Programs work also with Key Competences, a sort of universal competence that a student develops and utilizes in all subjects. One of the groups of key competences is called Citizenship Competences (VÚP 2007a). Framework Educational Programs also mention the possibility of teaching with the help of school councils (VÚP 2007b) but it lacks a description of what exactly it should be and also criteria for quality assessment are missing, so eventually a school council can be practically anything the school decides to call a “school council”.

Contemporary state of citizenship education at Czech schools

Definition and aims

Analysis of the curricular documents of all member states of the European Union shows that citizenship education is aimed at strengthening social cohesion and active participation of citizens in social life (Eurydice 2005). This is a good news, because civic participation may not be a moral obligation, but citizenship education should be based on idea that political involvement in democracy is based on the moral responsibility (Power, Power 2008). Responsibility as a moral and political virtue leads to a willingness to care for others and concern for the consequences of one's own actions, not only at the level of interpersonal relationships, but also in matters of policy decisions. Such involvement is not matter of course, therefore it is necessary to lead children to a responsible approach from the earliest age. Besides the responsible approach that brings us to civic engagement, we have to be able to participate appropriately and effectively. That is why we need to develop children's healthy self-confidence, not only in relation to their peers, but also to

⁵ In Czech: „Rámcové vzdělávací programy“.

⁶ In Czech: „Školní vzdělávací programy“.

the authorities. Personal development and moral values are therefore essential preconditions for democratic citizenship (QCA 1998).

Also actual fundamental curricular document “Strategy of Educational Policy of the Czech Republic to 2020”⁷ declares that “development of active citizenship creates a precondition for society of solidarity, sustainable development and democratic government”⁸ is one of four main aims of education (among personal development, cultural development, and preparation of individual for successful employment) (MŠMT 2014, p. 8). Unfortunately this is the first and last mention of citizenship education in the document and therefore, as Ondřej Horák aptly titled: „Declaratory mentions of citizenship education thus primarily serve NGOs as a footing for advocacy“ (Horák 2015, p. 4).

Citizenship education in Framework Educational Program is more specified; we speak about justice, tolerance and responsibility, schools should serve as „laboratories of democracy,” where individuals meet in a democratic dialog (VÚP 2007b). Professionals from Civic Education Centre provided analyses of Framework Educational Programs for particular stages of education (concretely for primary schools, secondary schools and grammar school)⁹ displaying that citizenship education is differently approached in programs for particular stages: the stages do not follow one after another, every stage uses different vocabulary and together they do not form comprehensive curriculum (COV 2012). Hence they published conception of citizenship education additional to Framework Educational Program¹⁰ accompanied by a website¹¹ with teaching lessons that are frequently used by teachers.

The Czech curricular documents deal with topic of citizenship education in terms of democratic values, but they lack comprehensive conception of the field. It probably influences also the teachers and headmasters understanding of the topic.

Teacher's view

Although it was decided to keep citizenship education as an important part of the curriculum, the opinions of headmasters and teachers on the topic

⁷ In Czech: „Strategie vzdělávací politiky České republiky do roku 2020”.

⁸ Originally: „rozvoj aktivního občanství vytvářející předpoklady pro solidární společnost, udržitelný rozvoj a demokratické vládnutí“ (MŠMT 2014, p. 8).

⁹ Grammar school means Gymnasium, i.e. comprehensive secondary school not focused on preparation on concrete profession, absolvents are supposed to study at universities.

¹⁰ COV (2012), *Výchova k občanství. Doplnující koncepce k současnému kurikulu*, Centrum občanského vzdělávání, Masarykova univerzita, Brno.

¹¹ See at: www.vychovakobcanstvi.cz

vary (Soukup 2010). The most important goal of citizenship education in the view of headmasters is to learn what are citizen's rights and duties, second most important is to gain knowledge about social and political institutions, and similarly important objective is to promote critical and independent thinking. Even for teachers it is the most important goal of civic education to increase knowledge on the rights and duties of citizens, second one is development of critical and independent thinking of students, and the third most important goal is to develop the skills and abilities of students to resolve conflicts. Headmasters generally emphasise the dissemination of knowledge about the rights and duties of citizens, and they marginalize developing skills and abilities of students to resolve conflicts, and to develop effective strategies to combat racism and xenophobia (Soukup 2010). Interesting is also that qualitative research of a primary school showed that 9 teachers (teaching in one class) understood the concept of citizenship differently¹². We can observe fundamental differences among their opinions on "what is citizenship". Consequently they also understood aims of citizenship education differently, often even oppositely (Bucvanová 2011). Sometimes teachers are still influenced by the communist past of citizenship education and they are worried that citizenship education is focused on building noncritical approach to the state policy¹³.

View on teacher's understanding shows that there is no general agreement on what the citizenship education is. Even more important is to consider whether the curriculum established in 2004 was successfully adapted by teachers at schools, and therefore we will have a look on student's result as well as on what actually happens at schools.

Student's results

A valuable source of information about results of citizenship education in 38 countries represents the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study¹⁴ (hereinafter referred to as ICCS). Findings about Czech students are

¹² The variety of opinions can be shown on these 6 categories of "what is citizenship": Formal membership in a state; Space for the relationship to the state-patriotism; Community of polite people; Universal moral commitment; Commitment to responsible engagement; Space for voluntary activity; Ability to understand one's own uniqueness.

¹³ Although there is no research proving this fact, we can sometime hear this opinion at school (not from citizenship education teachers) or in public debate.

¹⁴ ICCS was accomplished in 2009 by International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. (Schulz 2010) In the Czech Republic ICCS collected data from 4 630 students (age 14), teachers and headmaster from 144 schools. Study was focused on findings concerning knowledge of students as well as their attitudes.

not encouraging. Although the knowledge of Czech students was slightly above international average, they were below average in all other measures (Schulz et al. 2010). And even in the category of knowledge, Czech results are far from being encouraging. Firstly, there were extreme differences between students from primary schools and their peers studying at grammar schools. Also the status of parents correlated with results of students considerably (the higher the status of parents, the higher knowledge and more pro-engagement attitudes of students) (Soukup 2010). Another unfavourable findings are that in comparison to previous similar study (CIVED¹⁵) realised in 1999 the results in knowledge of students decreased rapidly (Czech students show one of the biggest decrease of all countries comparable with decrease detected in Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria) (Soukup 2010, p. 42).

At regards the attitudes, Czech students scored strongly below international average in recognition of equal rights and opportunities for all ethnic or racial groups in society. They placed significantly low rate of trust to country where they live as well as in internal political efficacy and citizenship self-efficacy. Also their readiness to participate in elections (both actively and passively) is strongly below the average of all participating countries. They are slightly below average in recognition of equal rights and opportunities for immigrants and in question of gender equality (e.g. they agree with the equal rights for both genders, but many of them says at the same time that most important task of woman is to take care for children). Slightly lower than average is also their trust in civic institutions and their interest in political and social issues. Interesting is that they are slightly below average in the possibility of participation in legal protest activities and slightly above average in illegal protest activities (Schulz 2010).

Very low rate of trust to political parties (only 28% expressed trust) and parliament (33% expressed trust) among students participating in ICCS corresponds with similar results of periodical surveys among Czech adults (Soukup 2010). Relatively higher rate of trust students gave to army, schools, police, courts and media, all institutions not connected with politics (Soukup 2010). Also other surveys confirm that young people trust more to the police and courts and the least trustworthy are for them political parties and government (Šerek et al. 2014). Generally interest in politics is traditionally low in the Czech Republic and it is still decreasing (Zajíc et al. 2014). Focus groups with 25 students from secondary schools and grammar schools detected

¹⁵ W. Schulz et al. 2010 (publication cited in: Soukup 2010, p. 42).

higher interest of youth in personal topics and problems than in civic and public themes. From public themes they were more attracted by those that are physically or personally closer to their experience (like racism in their city, drugs, domestic violence), or actual in that time (earthquake at Haiti that was frequently reported on in the media) (Gillárová 2010).

According to the survey of a non-profit organization *Člověk v tísni*, 80% of Czech students do not believe that they can influence the world around them on any level (local, state or global). (*Člověk v tísni* 2009) Another alarming findings of this survey is also a growing intolerance towards Roma minority, particularly among grammar school students, which is quite interesting in comparison to findings from ICCS where grammar school students had higher rate of civic knowledge as well as more pro-engagement attitudes. Also results of students elections organized by organization *Člověk v tísni* in autumn 2012 showed critical development, because the Workers Party of Social Justice and Pirates Party, parties that do not accept existing political system and want to change it, were very successful (*Člověk v tísni* 2012, cited in: Čáp, Matějka, Protivínský 2013, p. 12). Also participation of students is quite low and corresponds with their trust to institutions. According to a research focused on participation of the youth¹⁶, the most often practice to express opinion is taking part in a cultural event (two thirds of students took part at least once during 12 months), and activity on social media (one third at least once in last 12 months); the rarest form is on the other side participation at demonstration (10% took part in last 12 month) and helping in campaign of a political party or political candidate (5% experienced at least once) (Šerek et al. 2014).

We can sadly sum up that the main aims of citizenship education are not fulfilled. The willingness to participate in election as well as in other forms of citizenship engagement is very low among student. Also their respect to diversity and willingness to solve problems growing from the necessity of cohesion of different ethnic groups is quite low. They are more interested in personal topics and they do not feel responsibility for the society because they feel powerless. The cause cannot be found only at schools. It is obvious that students' opinions grow up also from the atmosphere in the society. But as stated at the beginning, education organized by the state is very important tool to educate citizens for their demanding role. And therefore let's have a look on what is happening at schools.

¹⁶ 2090 participants from 68 schools, average age of participant was 15,7 years.

What is happening at schools

In the context of the curricular reform schools were given fairly wide freedom in the ways of how and when to teach particular topics. Despite this freedom in the majority of schools citizenship education has remained single subject as before the reform, or it has been integrated with other related fields into the multidisciplinary subject (Soukup 2010). The school culture is therefore in most schools not considered as important instrument for implementation of citizenship education.

According to the Czech national report about ICCS, citizenship education is taught rather in a communicative form, with a focus on discussion among students, between students, and finally group work. Conversely, the traditional form (teacher lecturing, work with textbook) is less frequent during the lessons (Soukup 2010). Crucial is that students are not commonly encouraged to get engaged in activities connected with citizenship education realized out of school (Soukup 2010). In an international comparison offered by ICCS we can observe that Czech teachers organize¹⁷ considerably less activities related to underprivileged people or groups and activities related to the environment and to the local area; slightly less frequent below the international average are activities related to human rights projects and multicultural and intercultural activities within the local community; cultural activities and campaigns to raise people's awareness about dangerous topics (like AIDS, tobacco etc.) are on international average (Schulz 2010).

At the beginning of the article we could see that very important is school culture – a crucial question when focusing on citizenship education is whether students are seen as partners for discussion and whether they are supported to get involved. From this perspective, it is fundamental to what extent the students are invited to participate in Czech schools. While 80% of students believe that their participation in school decision-making would help to improve their school, and 91% of students think that it would bring positive changes, the actual participation of Czech students in civic activities at school (participation in decisions concerning school matters, participation in student discussions on substantive issues, etc.) as well as outside school (environmental organizations, human rights organizations, a group of

¹⁷ Important to mention is that findings are not based on direct observation but on personal views of teachers. It would be interesting to verify the same research question with direct observation.

volunteers to help the local community, etc.) is lower in comparison with the international average of ICCS (Protivínský, Dokulilová 2012, interpretation based on: Schulz 2010).

To express their opinions on schools they attend, Czech students can discuss their problems with any teacher individually, within lessons with their class teacher specially dedicated to discussions about the class, school, and relationships or personal interest of students¹⁸, at some schools also via school council, or they can directly ask the headmaster¹⁹. According to survey focused on youth participation realized in 2014 among 2090 young people, students most often talk about the problems with schoolmates (40% did it at least once during last 12 months), only few then turn the activity into discussions with the school management (18% did at least once); they also use internet to discuss what is happening at school quite often (at least 33% of students did it during 12 months), the discussion however rarely turns into writing longer articles or blogs (only 7% did it at least once) (Šerek et al. 2014).

We cannot say exactly how many schools work with school councils, but several researches have been done on this topic. According to ICCS 66% of primary schools and 80% of grammar schools work with school council²⁰ (Soukup 2010). According to more extensive research among primary schools almost 45% schools worked with school council in 2010²¹. (UIV 2010) According to the latest research among primary schools²² there are 55% schools working with school council²³ (Bucvanová, Protivínský 2015). Every research works with different aggregate, but we can see that school councils are not rare in the Czech Republic; at the same time we have to admit that it is still not a common feature of every Czech school. Another question is how these school councils in fact work. Some school councils were in headmasters view dissolved due to low interest of student (Bucvanová, Protivínský 2015). In the view of the author, based on six years' experience of practice as teachers' trainer in organization focusing on development of school councils, this statement is not accurate. If we know how to motivate children

¹⁸ Currently we have no data on how many schools work with these lessons.

¹⁹ Information come from interviews with 30 teachers at 3 primary schools that have been done during autumn 2015 within author's dissertation research, not published yet.

²⁰ 144 schools was in aggregate.

²¹ The aggregate of 2488 schools is very representative, as there were about 4000 in the Czech Republic.

²² The actual amount of primary school in the Czech Republic was 4095 schools at during the realization of the research.

²³ 1075 primary schools in aggregate.

and how to run a school council properly, children mostly want to be part of it. The problem in many schools is therefore not the lack of interest on the side of children, but poor practice on the side of the link teacher²⁴ that is not adequately trained for this specific activity (teachers are not prepared for this job on faculty of education, only some of the link teachers absolved courses offered by the non-profit organization where author works).

In the Framework Educational Program there are no guidelines on running an effective school council (they are provided in the course books published by non-profit organization dealing with this field, but not all school know about them). It is quite common that a school council exists, but its function is just formal (students meet three times a year in the headmaster's office and then they just bring information provided by the headmaster to their classroom). Usually the school councils at primary schools²⁵ are organized for children from the age of 11 years old, only on 20% of primary schools they are available also for the youngest children in the school (i.e. for the children old 6 or 7 years) (Bucvanová, Protivínský 2015). Almost 40% of teachers indicated the lack of time for school council's meetings as an obstacle in the effective operation of their school council (Bucvanová, Protivínský 2015). Although it is recommended in the curricular documents to work with school councils, time is not provided and schools mostly do this activity in the free time of both included groups, children and teachers²⁶. Pupils can most often intervene in issues relating to rules in the classroom or leisure activities at school (their comments are taken into account by 98% headmasters), less accepted are their opinions in the organizational affairs of the school as the timetable or the selection of textbooks (40% percent headmasters agreed) (Soukup 2010).

²⁴ Link teacher is the teacher who is in charge of school council.

²⁵ Primary schools are visited by children from 6 to 15 years old.

²⁶ There is no research supporting this statement available. Information is based on author's practice in organization providing educational support to teachers and headmasters dealing with school council.

Problems and their possible solutions

*It is not enough to stare up the steps,
we must step up the stairs²⁷*

Václav Havel

It is definitely positive that the Czech Republic, despite its experience with citizenship education devastated by strong ideological influence during the communist era, decided to keep citizenship education in the curriculum after the Velvet revolution even though there had been voices against it. Citizenship education therefore is firmly embedded in the Czech curriculum. Nevertheless this field is marginalized at schools (there is usually only one lesson per week, and it is sometimes even taught by a teacher with different teaching specialization) as well as in politics and the public sphere. The topic is also often misunderstood; due to its communist past it is sometimes seen as an ideological manipulation, due to the lack of professional debate and therefore not clear conception of the field it is often overburdened by many various topics that are actually trendy and need to be taught in some subject (e.g. health education, financial literacy, ethics, environmental education etc.).

Curricular reform strengthened the autonomy of schools with the aim to enable teachers to adapt lessons to actual affairs in the society. Also the matter of school culture was strengthened as the citizenship education is not part of just one subject, but it is understood as cross-curricular theme. Schools are also encouraged to run school councils in the curricular documents. Despite of all of these positive effort the reality at most of the schools is different. Citizenship education is still mostly taught only in one subject, not connected with overall school culture. Teaching knowledge is emphasized over development of skills and attitudes. The reform brought many positive aspects to schools that were prepared to develop themselves. On the other hand many schools were not prepared for that so that they did not take the advantage of this freedom and the implementation of the reform presented mostly additional administrative work.

²⁷ Quotation adopted from „AZ QUOTES“, [online], accessible at: <http://www.azquotes.com/author/6389-Vaclav_Havel>(access: 27.12.2015). In Czech: Nestačí se na schody dívat, musíme po nich jít. [online], accessible at: <http://www.hnutiduhastrednicechy.cz/> (access: 27.12.2015).

Good news is that children are willing to participate at school if they have the opportunity. Unfortunately they are encouraged to take part in decision-making only at some schools, their opinions are taken into account usually only in less important topics. There is usually not enough time for school council meetings, in the schedule there are usually more important topics so that activity of school council is often transposed to free time of students as well as teachers. Although there is complex educational support for teachers consisting of set of seminars and handbooks as well as consulting centres offering excursion into well-organized school councils, teachers are often not provided with adequate educational support in matter of children participation. They are not systematically prepared for using participatory methods on faculties of education, but they can attend specialized seminar developed by non-profit organization (their participation depends on their personal interest as well as on the school budget). Since citizenship education is not a priority also the investments into this field are typically quite low. The existence of consulting centres for school councils depends again on personal commitment of teachers who run these centres as they have no support from the Ministry of Education. Sometimes the school council is abolished due to the lack of interest on side of children. In fact the reason for children passivity lies in the lack of teacher's knowledge or the form of school culture. To sum up, participation is seen as useful in the curricular documents but schools are not provided with wide systematic support and its implementation depends mainly on personal interest of headmasters and teachers.

Similarly as in the case of school councils, educational support for citizenship education teachers is generally carried on shoulders of non-profit organizations. Problem is that these organizations are not systematically supported. Many first-rate educational projects have been realized, but they are not coordinated and the sustainability of these projects depends on the ability of particular NGO to survive. Granting programs focused specifically on citizenship education are very rare, and organizations have to melt into various granting incentives.

In 2009 very important attempt to improve these arrangements have been realized in form of establishing the Civic Education Centre²⁸ at Masaryk University in Brno²⁹ with support of the former Minister of Education. Since the beginning the organization provides analyses of the field as well as

²⁸ More information on the website: <http://www.obcanskevzdelavani.cz/english-version>

²⁹ Organization moved in 2014 from Masaryk University Brno to Charles University Prague.

educational support for teachers. The original ambition to serve as coordinating body in the field of citizenship education couldn't be fully realized as the Minister of Education changed since the establishment of the Centre for the sixth time and the organization is currently perceived as one of several NGOs in the field with no stable granting. A very good news was an establishment of Association of Citizenship Education Teachers³⁰ in 2014. The goal of the association is to raise awareness about the field in the professional as well as in public sphere, and to help teachers to struggle with contemporary problems of the field.

Growing interest of politicians in the field has been recently registered as the society tends to radicalize and people vote for anti-system parties more than in the last decade. The right step in the right direction was an approval of Resolution supporting citizenship education by the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic³¹. Nowadays also promising conception of citizenship education development for the next three years is being prepared by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with non-profit sector, but it is not yet certain that it will come into existence³². We cannot forget that at the same time that we did not take the opportunity to participate in another international civic and citizenship education study (following CIVED in 1999 and ICCS in 2009) even though the researches are recognized as valuable source of information about our educational system (e.g. we regularly take part in PISA and the results are amply medialized, we also have National Institute for Pedagogy providing high-quality analysis on education).

Several attempts to improve the field have been made, but we still miss the systematic development of the field. Few recommendations can be made at this point. Firstly, the widely accepted conception of the field should be developed and implemented in the national curriculum. Secondly, based on this conception, it would be useful to develop systematic support for organizations dealing with education of teachers and also modernize educational programs on faculties of education. Last but not least, schools should be encouraged in words as well as funding to work with their school culture.

³⁰ More information on the website: <http://www.obcankari.cz/kdo-jsou-obcankari>

³¹ *Usnesení Poslanecké sněmovny u příležitosti 25. výročí obnovení svobodného, samostatného a demokratického právního státu na území České republiky a k podpoře rozvoje systému demokratického občanského vzdělávání v České republice*, [online], accessible at: <<http://www.psp.cz/eknih/2013ps/stenprot/023schuz/s023100.htm>> (access: 27.12.2015).

³² More information on the website: <http://www.pressreader.com/czech-republic/lidove-noviny/20151217/281556584777074/TextView>

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