

CIVIC EDUCATION IN CROATIA: AN OVERVIEW OF ONGOING PROCESSES

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Abstract: The paper presents an overview of crucial moments in the educational and social history of modern Croatia with emphasis on the introduction of civic education in the formal education system. Using the methodology of desk research important documents and secondary literature dealing with the topic have been summarized. Even though the need for civic education is formally proclaimed on the national level, introduction of the civic education in the Croatian education system is seen as a set of long-lasting processes, with a lot of opposition within the state, changes in the form of proposed curricula, and changes in government support for it.

Keywords: civic education, active citizenship, curriculum, Croatia

1. Introduction

The introduction of democracy into newly established democratic states after the change of prior undemocratic forms of state government demands the active involvement of citizens. Democracy is instituted not only by democratic institutions and processes but by the involvement of citizens who are able to maturely, without paternalistic instructions, act for the benefit of themselves and their society. To have citizens properly prepared to act for themselves, and to understand the values of life in a democratic society, they must be familiarized with the values and the processes of democratic life. Civic education is sometimes also regarded as education for democratic citizenship, and as such, it is strictly defined in a narrower aspect than the broader term which is mostly used. Civic education is not specific to democratic societies; every form of political government has a certain type of education for its citizens so they could follow the rules accordingly. However, what differentiates civic education in a democracy from those in other political systems is education for the plurality of opinions, individual activity, and responsibility. And that has to be properly introduced to the citizens from an early age so they would be able to adequately participate in later life without being passive subjects of the prevailing trends of the time. As American President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated: "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education." (1941: 538). The expectations of the average citizen to adapt and just behave in a democratic fashion have shown to be inadequate; therefore most of the democratic countries introduced, in some form, civic education as part of the curriculum in their education system. Civic education does not ensure the establishment of a fully democratic society in each of its aspects; however, it ensures a proper path toward it.

This paper presents an overview of the history of the introduction of civic education in the Croatian education system, its proposals and forms of introduction, and the opposition it had regardless of the presented form. Starting from the middle of the 1990s, following almost every parliamentary election and realignments of political parties in the parliament seats, the introduction of civic education had a specific place in political programs and national plans. Various "last moment" changes and direct or indirect obstructions were the only continuous markings of the efforts of the introduction of civic education into the formal education system. Throughout the years, some overviews of the history of attempts to the introduction of civic education in the Croatian formal educational system, and its success have been done (Batarelo et al., 2010; KLJP, 2016; Mrnjauš, Vrčelj and Zloković, 2014; Pažur, 2017; 2022; Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015), however, it is still an ongoing process. The main

methodology used in this paper is desk research; primary and secondary literature on the topic has been summarized in the presentation of the historical path of the introduction of civic education in the Croatian education system. Critical opinion regarding the future and quality of civic education in the formal education system is given at the end of the paper. As this paper is written in the English language, the author hopes that this paper will serve as the starting point in research (with included references) for other foreign researchers for potential comparative analyses of civic education in other post-transitional Southeastern European countries.

2. New times, new needs

The change of the political and economic system from socialist self-management as an official governing form of communist lead federative Yugoslavia to democratic independent Croatia has shown to be a process that is easier to imagine than to implement. The proper transition between two different political systems, one ruled by a single party to the other where the plurality of political parties serves as the representative of various social groups was negatively influenced by the Croatian War of Independence at the beginning of the 1990s and the conditions it brought to every aspect of social life. From the start, it affected on political polarization of the nation between the two biggest political parties with their center-right and center-left politics, where the so-called ‘third way’ was redistributed to various parties that served and still serve mostly as token-parties for the collection of parliamentary majority if they get enough of votes to enter the parliament. The economic, thus social transition of Croatia was mostly affected by the war. The aftermath of the war, in a political sense, did not bring any bigger changes than the one introduced after the first democratic elections. Most of the changes were (it could also be said, still are) made with the purpose of European integration, that is satisfying the expectations of the European Union.

The research done by Domović, Godler, and Previšić used the data collected in 1993 during the project *Genealogy and Transfer of Models of Interculturalism* [*Genealogija i transfer modela interkulturalizma*], and the data collected in 1998 during the project *School Curriculum and Characteristics of Croatian National Culture* [*Školski kurikulum i obilježja hrvatske nacionalne kulture*], for the comparative analysis of attitudes of high school students, their parents, and teachers towards the selected democratic values. The comparison showed that high school students held the same hierarchy of values towards selected democratic values (such as human and civil rights, private property, life standards, regional autonomy, etc.) however the percentage of support for the same decreased. It has also been noted how they had an increased level of “don't know” answers, which shows a rise in their uncertainty in making decisions on the values of life in a democracy. Additionally, it was noted that a higher level of positive attitudes depends on the higher level of education in the family background and the type of high school (gymnasium versus vocational school) they attend. Out of all the values observed, the the highest level of acceptance of selected democratic values had the teachers, followed by high school students’ parents, and the lowest level had the high school students themselves (2004). Even though the first research was made in the middle of the war years, and the second a couple of years after the war, the results have been showing unexpected results that are open for further interpretations and are symptomatic markers of the need for civic education. Has the post-war period been disillusioned with idealized expectations of life in a democracy prominent during the war times, or have new generations become saturated with options in a democratic environment, it is hard to tell. However, it has become noticeable that as time passed, new generations showed that they need better education on the rights and responsibilities of civic life in a democratic environment. With time, the political literacy of young people deteriorated even more towards the attitudes that are not part of democratic life; a humble social capital brings them to the margins of social life (Ćulum Ilić and Androić, 2020).

As Ilišin writes, the presumption is that the deficit of democracy in Croatia is the result of a socialist (totalitarian) heritage and one of transition (authoritarian), however, concerning that the life of Croatian society now is for the decades in a democratic political environment continues to show to be an inadequate presumption. A conclusion that follows is that if there is no ongoing democratic (formal and informal) political socialization and mobilization of citizens, there is no setting of a fully pluralist

society and democratic political establishment. The reason for the lower activity of youth in political social life is the same that furthermore negatively affects their understanding of democracy – a flawed democratic environment in Croatia that causes their dissatisfaction with it, and a lack of trust in political, state, and religious institutions. An anomaly that appeared at the same time is that with the drop of trust in democracy and democratic institutions, there has been a rise both in political membership in political parties and of those who do not consider themselves to be aligned with any political party. Membership in a political party is seen as a form of securing existential and social position, that is - becoming a follower rather than a democratically responsible citizen (2015: 15-45).

The quality of political life in the new democratic environment has been marked by various political scandals where corruption seems to be the biggest problem (Skube, 2015). According to the *Democracy Index* by the Economist Intelligence Unit of the Economist Group, which provides an index measure of the state of democracy in countries all over the world since 2006, Croatia has a continuous drop in democracy (from 7.04 in 2006 to 6.50 in 2022) and is described as a country whose system is defined as – flawed democracy (2007; 2023). Considering how Croatia joined the European Union during this period, in 2013, the continuous drop of democracy represents a serious issue. The issue shows the lack of and the need for civic education, not only for the benefit of sociopolitical life in Croatia but also for adequate cooperation within the European Union.

Croatia became a member of the Council of Europe in 1996 and took part in its summit the following year. The Second Summit of the Council of Europe, 1997 in Strasbourg, followed in the spirit of the First Summit, held in 1993 in Vienna, stressing the importance of the promotion of human rights and strengthening of pluralist democracy throughout Europe. The *Final Declaration* of the Summit officially recognized the future issues of European development and with it expressed “[...] desire to develop education for democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the participation of young people in civil society”, and in its appended *Action Plan* of the four main areas for development in oncoming years held the initial point for launching of initiative for education for democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 1997). It is necessary to mention that besides the general theme of the need for further democratic stability and development omnipresent in the *Final Declaration*, in its *Action plan*, the member participants obliged to launch initiative for the education for democratic citizenship (ibid. 1997). This could be considered to be the first official initiative on a state level in which Croatia considered and accepted the idea of the need for civic education. However, since then, until the first introduction of civic education in the school system on the national level (not voluntary in selected schools) has passed many years. Those years have, paradoxically, been filled with the creation of various documents on parliamentary and ministerial levels, documents that have been changed, abandoned, or ignored, depending on the political standings.

In 2005 Croatian Government adopted its Ministry of Science, Education and Sports’ *Education Sector Development Plan 2005-2010* [*Plan razvoja sustava odgoja i obrazovanja 2005. - 2010.*] in which the emphasis was put on the need for the promotion of active citizenship and democratic principles. The process of consideration and development of civic education further resulted in the *Croatian National Educational Standard* [*Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard*], in 2006 which introduced human rights education and education for democratic citizenship, and the *Outline of National Educational Curriculum* [*Okvir nacionalnog kurikuluma*] in 2008 mentioning the term - civic education (MSES, 2005; Mrnjauš, Vrcelj and Zloković, 2014: 19). In 2010 Council of Europe adopted the *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*, which even though is a non-binding document, has influenced the creation of documentation regarding civic education in other European countries, as it gives concepts and principles of education for democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2010). This was also reflected in documents created in Croatia that followed the main lines of this *Charter*, but also all prior recommendations by the Council of Europe dealing with the development of civic literacy, education for democratic citizenship, etc. what could be called civic education (Council of Europe, 2002; 2005).

Introduction of the civic education should not be seen as an idea that has originated in Croatia as a way of improving the civic literacy of the population in new political conditions, but as an imitation of processes introduced in countries of European Communities, originally, and its development within European Union, to whose membership Croatian political elite aimed since the early 1990s. The vague

approach with uncertain forms of the introduction of civic education in the educational system, and the first properly developed curricula for modules and textbooks, published by the national Education and Teachers Training Agency (AZOO, n.d.) in the early 2010s according to working parts of *National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education*, when Croatia was on a sure path of accession to membership of the European Union, only confirms that. The importance of accession to full membership of the European Union is seen as the ultimate goal of recognition as a democratic country. The requirements or better to say, the high expectancy of sometimes idealized membership of the European Union positively influenced changes in Croatian society. Changes that should have been a natural step since the 1990s, regardless of the European Union. At the same time, as the *Democracy Index* showed, there is a paradoxical but measurable drop in democracy. As Sablić writes, except for the opportunities that citizenship of the European Union brings, it requires assuming the role of an active citizen that stands responsible for its decisions and actions (2014: 85). This is still an ongoing process in the Croatian society, a process that demands more political proactivity.

A significant part of the research on the topic of the necessity of civic education was done in the period 2015-2016 after the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education [Nacionalni centar za vanjsko vrednovanje obrazovanja (NCVVO)] took part in the international study *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Pažur, 2017: 612-613). However, at the same time as the various processes dealing with the intentions of the introduction of civic education in schools, various research among the young showed a continuous democratic deficit among them. Čulum Ilić and Androić's overview of certain research on the topic conducted in the period of ten years 2009-2020, which is intersected with Croatia joining the European Union in 2013, just showed that various research regularly had similar results. Except for holding opinions (traditionalism, authoritarianism, nationalism, homophobia, etc.) that are contrary to the ideas of modern democracy, Croatian youth showed both a lack of political literacy and a lack of interest in daily sociopolitical events in the society. Results showed differences between the type of schools and their social background. Additionally, the confusion and indecision they showed through the answering of various research questions of their political literacy, showed them being susceptible to manipulation in life by established political actors (2020). Overall, it can be said that the new generations, born, raised, and educated in a democratic environment seem not to be able to adapt to the basic ideas of life in a democracy. Therefore, civic education is something that should be implemented not just as a formality but as a requirement for an inclusive life in a modern, democratic environment.

3. Non-formal and informal education as a path towards formal education

Before any ideas on the development and introduction of civic education (either as an individual subject or cross-curricular theme) in the Croatian education system already have existed subjects which had many topics that dealt with civic education: Homeroom Class, Nature and Society, History, Geography, Politics and Economy, Philosophy, Ethics, Sociology. Some of these subjects were taught during primary and others during secondary education. As all these subjects had their developed curricula and the topics common to the one of civic education were partially included, it cannot be said that the topics of civic education were included as cross-curricular topics which also requires a formally developed curriculum on its own. They were just side elements, and civic education as such mostly belonged to the hidden curriculum rather than to the formally intended education.

During the war times (1991-1995), and the final postwar reintegration of the liberated areas of easternmost parts of Croatia under the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Sirmium (1996-1998) the biggest role in the introduction of civic education to the wider population of Croatia was in hands of non-governmental (civil society) organizations and their platforms of informal education. As Mrnjaus, Vrcelj, and Zlokovic write, since the two decades after 1999, the developed model of education for democratic citizenship (later known only as civic education) is organized as part of informal education driven by civil society organizations and some higher education institutions with the mission of preparation of youth for

being competent and responsible members of democratic society (2014: 19). Some of the activities those organizations organized provided informal education through various activities for children and adults, other were designed as non-formal education through various organized programs ending with certificates for participation. Even though all these actions had a positive impact, their final result was limited due to spatial and population limitations; they were not organized throughout the whole country, and the number of participants was limited to those who could and wanted to take part. As Šalaj writes, it is the school as one of the main institutions of education, the place in which the bare minimum of competencies for political life can be ensured for all youth (2015: 250). Therefore, it must be noted that regardless positive sides of the activities of civil society organizations in civic education, the only proper way that would ensure equal education is within the formal education system.

In 2008 many civil society organizations have organized together to form the GOOD Initiative [GOOD inicijativa] which in 2023 had more than 40 member organizations and continues with their initial program of “systematic and high-quality introduction of education for human rights and democratic citizenship in the education system” (GOOD inicijativa). It can be said that the effort made by this initiative is the only continuous and fully developed effort made by experts in the field, whose actions and presentation in the public sphere successfully showed that the need for civic education is not just a populist idea that spreads before the elections, but something that is necessary for society with falling democratic values and political literacy. The main form of civic education for which the initiative is advocating is the individual subject under the name Civic Education [Građanski odgoj i obrazovanje] given as an obligatory subject.

4. Long-lasting experimental programs

The first model of introduction of civic education in the Croatian educational system was defined in 1999 in the *National Program for Human Rights and Democratic Civic Education [Nacionalni program odgoja i obrazovanja o ljudskim pravima]*. The same year, through the Education and Teacher Training Agency [Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje (AZOO)], a project called *Project Citizen [Projekt građanin]* was started as an optional extracurricular project activity in schools that showed interest in it. It involved various activities done by individual classes through the creation of the class portfolio. The results of most successful portfolios were presented on higher county and national levels. This project remained one of the most spread forms of civic education until 2010. As an optional activity, it was conducted only by schools and teachers who showed interest in it (Pažur, 2017: 607-608). Sablić calls it, one of the efforts in attempts to introduce changes into the Croatian education system and to satisfy the standards that would be acceptable for the European Union (2014: 85). Even though this project showed great success and further potential for the creation of individual subject that would be part of obligatory school curriculum, it had some flaws. The flaws were in the type of conduction that was left free for selection to schools and teachers who showed interest in it. For example; if the school had limited space, too large classes (in many schools a class tends to have over 30 students) or too small classes (in some areas of Croatia some schools have less than 10 students), and the most important - the interest of individual teachers to conduct such a project. Having been an extracurricular activity it also required certain interest from the students, if students had interests in obtaining new knowledge and skills outside of regular obligatory school subjects and hours, which is not always the case no matter how important the topic was.

In 2011 the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport created the first national strategic document that involved civic education as one of the eight core competencies that should be developed in students – *National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education [Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum za predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje te opće obvezno i srednjoškolsko obrazovanje]*. It described civic education as developed through cross-curricular topics and/or interdisciplinary content. The recommendations in the framework further represent the core and framework for the development of the curriculum of civic education. The framework was created on the basis of recommendations from the European Union (Pažur, 2017: 609). Same year the National Committee for Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship was founded with the task of promoting civic education on all levels of education, both formal and informal; and monitoring of implementation of all national programs, strategies, and plans dealing with civic education (Pažur,

2017: 609). The following year, it was dismantled and parts of the Committee were transferred to other institutions.

The creation of the *Civic Education Curriculum Outline* in 2011, and its revised version in 2012 after the public debate can be seen as the first real step in the formal development of civic education in the formal educational system. The Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport accepted the revised version after the public debate and in 2012 introduced the *Decision on the Experimental Implementation and Monitoring of the Implementation of the Civic Education Curriculum in Twelve Primary and Secondary Schools in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 School Year* [Odluka o eksperimentalnoj provedbi i praćenju provedbe Kurikuluma građanskoga odgoja i obrazovanja u dvanaest osnovnih i srednjih škola, u 2012./2013. i 2013./2014. školskoj godini]. The monitoring of the experimental implementation in selected 12 schools was done by the Education and Teacher Training Agency and Croatian Youth Network. The new document *Draft of Curriculum of Civic Education for Primary and Secondary School* [Nacrt Nastavnog plana i programa GOO-a za osnovnu i srednju školu] was put up for public debate in 2014 however its results were not published, but a completely new document *Draft of Decision on Bringing Programs of Cross-curricular and Interdisciplinary Contents of Civic Education to Primary and Secondary Schools* [Nacrt Odluke o donošenju programa međupredmetnih i interdisciplinarnih sadržaja GOO-a u osnovne i srednje škole] was created and put for new public debate by the middle of the same year. The results of this debate were published but only in the form of a summary (Pažur, 2017: 609-610). The change of the Minister of Education during the time had a greater impact on the subject of civic education, where the idea of introducing the individual subject was abandoned and the idea of cross-curricular theme was reintroduced.

The results of the aforementioned experimental implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the civic education curriculum in 12 primary and secondary schools during the two following school years (2012/2013 and 2013/2014) showed differences in students' civic and political culture and the way it is understood; it showed the differences of school culture between schools and how it affects the educational style; different levels of teachers expertise in the subject of civic education that affect conducted activities; different interests and motifs for conducting civic education in schools what at the end resulted in different ways of conducting civic education and its successfulness. Overall, the results were positive, even though they showed teachers unfamiliarity and lack of understanding of curricular outcomes (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015: 234-243).

Since 2014 civic education has been under obligatory implementation in all primary and secondary schools through cross-curricular topics. Civil societies argued that the proposed curriculum of cross-curricular topics of civic education is not the best option and can be considered only as a partial introduction of civic education. Apart from the implementation of civic education as a cross-curricular topic, some schools introduced civic education as an individual subject on an elective form and they could be taken as an example of positive practice. In following years there have been minor changes in the legal formulations, and in 2019 the *Decision on the Adoption of the Curriculum for the Intercurricular Subject Civic Education and Education for Primary and Secondary Schools in the Republic of Croatia* [Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za međupredmetnu temu Građanski odgoj i obrazovanje za osnovne i srednje škole u Republici Hrvatskoj] was brought which is still valid and base of civic education in all schools (except those who additionally conduct individual elective subject). Looking at the whole history of the processes of introduction of civic education in one or another form, it is a valid presumption that there will be changes in its form, and content, as soon as there would be some new greater political redistribution in the parliamentary seats that could preserve its positions for a longer time as ruling majority.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 caused the necessary transition to online distance education in Croatia. In March 2020 the whole education was transferred from traditional to distance education. The topics of civic education were examined on live examples; crisis situations in democratic societies, civic liberties and rights, limitations of civic and human rights, environmental questions, the role of media, etc. Bajkuša, Šarić, and Pecolaj noted how this negatively reflected on the quality of teaching and learning of civic education; high school students had diminished interest in the topics and

for class communication in the digital environment; secondary interactions that affect their interaction (such as parental influence); they had technological issues, logistic issues of class schedules, etc. On the positive side, they noted that the classes are shorter and thus leave more time for preparation for future interaction and doing homework; having guest lectures, and less official interaction; overall the situation offered many real-time events that can serve as a source material for further development of critical thinking (2021). One can note that the full purpose of civic education, either as a cross-curricular topic or an individual subject, can be achieved only in face-to-face education, that is, in a living social life.

As for the final remark on the quality of implementation of civic education so far, it can be repeated what Šalaj writes, regardless of the occasional statements on the development of active citizenship among youth as one of the aims of the Croatian educational system, no Croatian government considered Civic Education to be worthy of systematic implementation in the education system itself (2015: 241). Only presumptions could be given for the reason of that kind of political unreadiness to insist on the deep implementation of well-developed civic education in the formal education system. One of those presumptions is that the positive changes in active citizenship would result in bigger changes in the presence of present political parties in the parliament and general political life, and that does not seem to suit any of the present political sides.

5. Criticism of (idea of) civic education

Even though Croatia formally propagates the need for the introduction of civic education in schools, following the various declarations and instructions of the Council of Europe and the European Union, the introduction itself finds many obstacles, criticism of quality and form, and a political obstruction at the most part. The introduction of civic education in the formal education system found other forms of criticism, quite often far from the topic of civic education itself. The change of governments and political parties that held a majority affected the forms and speed of implementation of civic education in the education system. As Šalaj writes, the 2014 decision to change the implementation of civic education in the education system as a cross-curricular topic instead of previously developed curricula for individual subject, grouped Croatia among the small number of European countries that decided for the implementation of civic education in that way. He also stresses the lack of public explanation of reasons for abandoning the *Outline of National Educational Curriculum*, its previous experimental implementation, and the lack of explanations for the new form of implementation that holds various vague concepts. He sees the new model as another way through which another Croatian government, instead of starting of creation of serious political culture in Croatia, decided to drop the systematical and quality implementation of civic education in schools. Furthermore, cross-curricular topics should be implemented through all school subjects, and the new *Cross-curricular Program And Interdisciplinary Contents Of Civic Education For Elementary And Secondary Schools [Program međupredmetnih i interdisciplinarnih sadržaja građanskog odgoja i obrazovanja za osnovne i srednje škole]* has listed the subject of Religion – which is given as an elective subject. From it, it is vague and open for interpretation should Religion from an elective subject become an obligatory subject (thus ignoring the other school students' different religious belonging or lack of religious belonging); should the (other non-religious) school students visit the classes of Religion only when cross-curricular topics are mentioned; or it is the case that not everyone is obliged to listen cross-curricular topics of civic education mentioned through the subject of Religion. If the last is the case, then the cross-curricular topics of civic education are not obligatory at all, and the model of its implementation is flawed. The question also stays with the topics of Religion which contradict some of the ones covered by civic education (for example, same-sex relationships or abortion rights). Implementation of civic education as a cross-curricular topic through every school subject is not possible as it should require a complete change of every subject to be in correlation with expected outcomes, and some of the subjects do not even have any connection to political life – for example, Music Education, Art, Sports Education, Biology, Mathematics, Physics, etc. And overall, the newly implemented model does not hold any ideal of citizenship which should be aimed (2015: 261-266).

Rukavina Kovačević considers that the curriculum of civic education of the experimental phase of 2013 is too broadly conceptualized and holds even the topics that have been already covered by

existing programs, which makes the Croatian version of the curriculum similar to one of many European countries that, as she states, have shown to be made too optimistically or idealistically. It lacks the neutrality of values, as does every other curriculum. For her, the curricula of Civic Education, and Health Education (which was introduced at the same time) are through the state politics aimed at reeducation and redefinition of human, and the role of culture, tradition, and history to what one should say strict ‘no’, as it opposes the God’s primal plan (2013: 131-135). As it can be noticed, the religious view has an impact on the understanding of the presumed role of any form of civic education. It is (one of) a valid stance, however, it lacks the understanding of the existence and acceptance of “other” in the public sphere and leans more towards the theocratic than democratic understandings of contemporary life.

In one of the public informative video interviews of the *N1* media platform in 2022, one of the guests, I. Peternel, a member of the right-wing *Homeland Movement [Domovinski pokret]* political party, presented the party arguments for the opposition of the introduction of civic education in the Croatian schools in a presented model which they consider to be introducing gender ideology, and is a replacement for some of the school subjects that once existed in time when Croatia was part of Yugoslavia. The party, as he noted, considers upbringing to be in the sphere of family, and not the schools. He furthermore stated that his own opinion:

“Ja ne želim da moje dijete škola upućuje da postane aktivni građanin, pripadnik civilnog društva ili neke stranke, ja želim da to radim ja, njegova majka, baka djed, da ga mi uspmjeravamo, ne društvo, škola, određeni nastavnik.” (N1 Hrvatska, 2022).

“I do not want that school instructs my child to be an active citizen, member of civil society or some party, I want me to do it, its mother, grandmother, grandfather, that we direct it, and not society, school, certain teacher.” (*authors [literal] translation)

Sever and Horvat consider that the criticism of civic education in Croatia can be divided into three basic ideological criticisms: right-wing clerical criticism, right-wing criticism, and libertarian criticism. As they write, the common ground of right-wing clerical criticism and right-wing criticism is regarding the promotion of multiculturalism and tolerance of ‘different ways of life’, but mostly the lack of consultations with the parents on the topics of education of children, lack of emphasis on national history and traditions, mostly worldview based on Roman Catholic faith; while the libertarian criticism is against any too strong influence of the state on the personal ideas of the individual. All three groups see civic education as leftist – a socialist attempt at reeducation of society, regardless of the democratic values and inclusion it promotes following the general ideas of the European Union and ‘unity in diversity’. Authors find the idea held in criticism of civic education by the mentioned three groups as backward views on the idea of civic education, recognizable as anti-liberal and even anti-democratic (2019: 25-28).

Overall, criticism of civic education has an initial ideological background, which was mostly hidden by the counterattack of worry that civic education would be a revival of some totalitarian ideologies. Even though critics formally did not express their main concerns, their supporters did it in the public sphere. From the position of religious people who were against civic education as an individual subject, the biggest issue was the idea of sexual freedoms, that is, homosexuality which in democratic societies is not a taboo. Quite often supporters of this group also belonged to the right-wing population, which is small in numbers but noticeable due to their opinions. For many of them expected ideas of civic education belong to the unwanted ideologies, left ideologies, and the attack on civic education which was supported by many left and liberal-orientated people, was in reality attack on the second main political party. The main problem of this “critic” of civic education was the inability to understand civic education in a democratic environment.

6. As conclusion

Following the establishment of democracy as the government system Croatia entered a transitional period of adaptation to the new form of social and political life. The sole start of it was interrupted by the war that affected the peaceful transition, however participation in supranational, and international

institutions of democratic type made transfer easier. However, the implementation of adopted charters, recommendations, etc. was not so simple task. Civic education has been conducted in experimental types of various types, as a voluntary extracurricular activity, as a cross-curricular topic, and proposed as an individual subject. A large part of the introduction of civic activity in social life, especially during wartime, was in the hands of civil society associations, whose experts conducted various activities, wrote papers, and put pressure on politicians. Civic education was proposed in different forms many times but served as a populist measure which was changed as the need for support changed. It is debatable why has civic education had so many changes. And why so many times there were political uncertainties and changes. Researchers agree that the decision to introduce civic education in the Croatian education system was necessary and was officially supported by the ruling politics, as it followed the recommendations of the Council of Europe, and the European Union, however, no government was willing to systematically implement it on a national level, and everything was left on experimental programs. Developed programs found harsh critique by specific types of critics; groups that see ideological relict of authoritarian regimes in education of democratic values (afraid of critical thinking), and those who are against part of curriculum that conflicts with their religious beliefs (mostly regarding sexuality). Even though in small numbers compared to the general population, these groups have an impact on ruling politicians. Civic education in the Croatian education system is introduced as a cross-curriculum topic dispersed through various subjects. That kind of civic education has been shown to have many disadvantages; some subjects do not correlate with the topic of civic education, some subjects have crude values that refuse some of the values of modern democratic life; faith that every teacher will implement given cross-curricular topics, and activities into the curriculum of individual subject or have cooperation with other teachers, etc. Croatian students have shown that they have low political literacy and represent some values that are not common in a democratic environment, to provide them with better social education civic education needs to be implemented in a new form. The form of civic education that was proposed through years by various civil society associations and experts in the field – as an individual obligational school subject with its own curriculum, and not as a cross-curricular topic.

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