

Dr. Darko Štrajn

Educational Research Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

## **Different Meanings of Citizenship Education**

### **ABSTRACT:**

We cannot expect or, much less, demand any “unified” concept of citizenship education on the world scale, taking into account both nature of the subject and vast diversity of historical, social and cultural situations in different countries. But, I would argue that there is a point of a key difference in understanding the concept, which subsequently determines the form of a particular curriculum and a corresponding practice of teaching and learning. What I mean by the “key difference” is a signifier under which one direction of formulation of the notion of citizenship education leads towards a vision of an autonomous individual and the other direction of formulation of the notion that leads towards a vision, which advocates a primacy of a community (ethnic group, nation, state...) over individuals’ rights and needs.

This difference displays itself as a difference between a “traditional” approach to the problem, which solves the question of socialisation of young people in a form of the typical “civics” education or even some religious and moral instruction, and a “post-modern” approach, which tries to rely on a reflexive and open concept invested with diversity, multiculturalism, etc. The first tendency relies on a more fixed idea of truth, the other relies on an assumption that the truth depends on being recognised as such by an individual, making the notion of truth much more a matter of a cognitive process within a social practice. However, it is probably difficult to find one or the other notion in any educational reality in a “pure” form – let us say, as a definitive “model” of a curriculum and/or an educational practice.

Two points of difference mainly broadly shape a discursive space in which, we can watch a struggle for a definition of the citizenship education within each country and on the international scale. Maybe the word “struggle” sounds too strong for what is basically a debate among educationalists, administrators and – not always – a general public. But, especially in those countries, where the historical, political, cultural and economic

aspects of a particular social situation indicate a conflicting reality, any implementation of the curriculum of the citizenship education on any level of an educational system can be a matter of very fervent confrontations. Especially from the symbolically ascertained triumph of liberal democracy this education is supposed to provide answers to many challenges of the global world, including the governance in each country which makes part of such world.

The concept of citizenship education has its roots in the universalistic ideas of the European enlightenment period. Obviously in many countries, that haven't yet embraced fully the "Western democracy," they take citizenship education as much more "cultural" than as a political notion. What may come out at the end of comparing different "values" and traditions that are supposed to determine the contents of the citizenship education, remains to be seen.