

CIVIC SOCIALIZATION OF THE YOUTH IN THE POST-COMUNIST SOCIETIES

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Abstract

*Sociological studies demonstrated that the level of civic culture leaves its mark on achievements of the democratic institutions and on the level of national and European inclusion. **The purpose** of this paper is to x-ray the co-ordinates of Romanian political culture by using comparative and three-dimensional analysis . It is named comparative because it aspires to reveal the fundamental elements which make it similar with and at the same time different from the European culture model. It is, also, three-dimensional because it aims at disclosing cognitive, attitudinal and participative characteristics of Romanian political culture. We notice that the research' results regarding the political culture pattern can orientate the directions and the intensity of the civic socialization process. **The general conclusion** of this research is the main characteristics of the political culture in Romanian society nowadays are a low level of political communication, low values of the subjective civic competence and of the attachment of the political system , the insufficiency of the cooperation, solidarity, civic organisational participation. These are the typical co-ordinates for the dominance of the "dependent" political culture model in which the feedback from bottom to top (from electors to governors) is insufficient and inconsequent. It is a political culture of passivity and indifference which expresses and maintains a fragile democracy. Under these circumstances, the political socialization agents-school also-are faced with a new provocation: finding the most efficient strategies for a multidimensional development of democratic citizenship. In Romanian society, teaching civic culture in primary, secondary and high school-along with other educational strategies, tries to answer such provocation. Unfortunately, in universities there is no discipline meant to support such an objective. This is why I consider it necessary to introduce a new discipline in universities : Civic sociology...*

Keywords: *political culture, youth, political/ civic socialization*

Introduction. Models of political culture-comparative analysis

Nowadays, civic culture and participatory political culture play a major role both in the life of the national societies as well as in the European and international societies. We notice that "democracy is consolidated in the societies which develop their own social-inclusive capacities. The degree of social inclusion does not depend only on the existence of democratic institutions but also on the predominance of a participatory political culture, and that is a civic culture. The aspiration and the integrative tendency of civic culture manifest not only at national level, but also at international level. Today, the increase in number and diversity of the actors on the scene of the world demands with more acuity the development of a political culture capable to give meaning and to support the process of conciliation, harmonization and international community solidarity."²

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² Nedelcu E., *The Aspirations and the Inclusive Social Tendencies of Civic Culture in the Era of Globalization. A New Paradigm: "Civic Sociology" – Epistemological and Social Premises*, INTED2009, Valencia.

To what extent can we talk today about such a political culture? Did most young Europeans get hold of their role as subjects of the political life? Beyond all these common, repetitive, ubiquitous aspects, the present European political culture has a heterogeneous structure. Among the numerous variables which are at the basis of its differentiation are: age, education, residence, nation, etc.

This paper focuses on the analysis of the political-civic culture models representative for the young Europeans and on the factors that contribute to their formation and development. Is there a participatory political culture deficit among young people? If yes, could the intensification of the civic socialisation be an answer to this problem? From the sociological studies which brought forth the common characteristics and the significant differences of the young Europeans (belonging to different nations) political culture, I will mainly consider the following: The IEA Study (1999), Euyopart (2005), Eurobarometer 2007 - 2008.

The 1999 Civic Education Study, the first IEA study in this subject area since 1971, was ambitious both in concept and in scope. About 90,000 fourteen-year-old students from twenty-eight countries as well as approximately 10,000 teachers and thousands of school principals took part in the study³.

Three domains were identified as important topics in civic education across democracies: Democracy, Institutions, and Citizenship; National Identity and International Relations; and Social Cohesion and Diversity. Test and survey items were then written to assess students' knowledge and skills as well as attitudes in these three domains.

Romania took part in all the stages of the IEA Civic Education Study. The study was conducted on 150 school children from 150 schools, including 2993 8th grade school children, aged 14. At this educational level, civic education is taught as a compulsory discipline, one hour per week.

When it comes to civic knowledge, the results of the research show that, with 42% correct answers, Romania is situated under the international average (with 52% correct answers). The Romanian school children results regarding the amount of knowledge they have about democratic education were as follows:

- identifying a non-democratic government: 42% correct answers versus 53% the international average result;
- the importance of many organisations for democracy: 48% vs. 69%;
- the existence of a multi-partite system: 67% vs. 75%;
- the importance of having more than one newspaper in a country: 39% vs. 57%;

In all the 28 democratic countries that took part in the IEA study, people aged 14 are only on the average interested in politics. In Romania, 45% of the schoolchildren have declared that they have a genuine interest in politics (versus 39%, the international average). Although the experience in this area is relatively new, Romanian schoolchildren are interested in civic involvement in classrooms, schools and youth organisations. The research showed the importance of classroom climate in shaping and developing the civic competencies of the schoolchildren. Students were asked how frequently (never, rarely, sometimes, or often) they were encouraged to make up their own minds about issues, how often they felt free to disagree with their teachers about political and social issues during class, and the extent to which teachers respected student opinions and encouraged them to discuss their opinions during class. Students were also asked how often

³ International Assessments - Political Democracy and The IEA Civic Education Study: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2114/International-Assessments-Political-Democracy-IEA-Study-Civic-Education.html>, according to: "Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen. Amsterdam: IEA" (Torney-Purta, Judith; Lehmann, Ranier; Oswald, Hans; Shulz, Wolfram, 2001.)

teachers presented several sides of an issue and whether the students felt free to express opinions even when the issues were controversial. Classroom climate was also positively associated with students plans to vote as adults—an essential element of democracy. Furthermore, positive classroom climate was related to students' trust in government institutions, their confidence in school participation, and positive attitudes toward immigrants and women. Across the twenty-eight countries in the IEA study, about one-third of the students reported that they were often encouraged to voice their opinions in the classroom, but an almost equal proportion said that this rarely or never occurred (especially when the issues were potentially controversial). Teacher responses confirmed the students' perceptions. They reported that teacher-centred methods of instruction, such as the use of textbooks, recitation, and worksheets were dominant in civic-related classrooms in most of the countries, although there were also opportunities for classroom discussion of issues⁴.

In Romania, according to a study from 2000, approximately 60% of the interviewed subjects (of various ages) declared that they did not feel free to protest in school, and 78% weren't given the opportunity to discuss in school controversial social and political issues⁵.

More recent studies, such as the Eurobarometer2007, present the significance of EU and of European citizenship for the young Europeans (aged 15-30) and the extent to which they are interested and take part in the political life. According to these statistics, when asking young Europeans about what the EU means to them, 90% of respondents say that, for them personally, it represents the freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the Union. A plurality of them also underline the fact that its existence represents a way to protect the rights of citizens (72%) and a means of improving the EU's economic situation (71%). More than half of the respondents (56%) feel that the EU is equivalent to a European government.

When asking about possible negative features of the Union, 40% of young adults state that it means an excess of bureaucracy and some waste of time and money. Just over a third see the EU as a threat to cultural identity and diversity⁶.

EU 2007 confirms that almost all young adults (92%) agree that in 10 years it will be easier to travel, study, work and live anywhere in Europe because of EU. Large majorities of respondents also agree that in the next decade, the EU will bring more opportunities for people like themselves to find work (73%), more equality between men and women (71%), less discrimination against foreigners and people from other cultures and ethnic groups (68%), and a better quality of life for most people (67%). On the negative side, 39% of respondents believe that the EU in 10 years time will mean more social problems, such as unemployment and strikes.

For most young Europeans, to be a citizen of the European Union means to have the opportunity to study, the right to work in any country in the EU.

We notice that 94% and 88% of respondents mention these two factors. A majority of young adults also agree that EU citizenship means access to healthcare and social welfare anywhere in the EU (82%) and the right to move permanently to any member state (77%).

One in two young Europeans (49%) mentions that being a European citizen means the right of non-nationals to vote, or to be elected in local elections, in the member state in which they reside. The individual country results show large variations in respondents views about the meaning of being a European citizen. In Luxembourg, for example, 69% of the young adults think

⁴ Idem.

⁵ According to the results of the sociological research on the Romanian pattern of political culture published in: Nedelcu Elena, *Democracy and Civic Culture*, Paideia, 2000.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/youth/results-eurobarometer2007_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_202_sum_en.pdf : The results of the Eurobarometer 2007 regarding youth.

that being an EU citizen is symbolised above all else by the right of non-nationals to vote or to be elected in local elections in the member state in which they reside, but in Hungary only 24% of young adults agree with that. Similarly, while 93% of respondents in Slovakia mention that being a citizen of the EU denotes access to healthcare and social welfare anywhere in the EU, only 54% of respondents in Estonia agree.

EU 2007 points out that most young Europeans say that they are very interested or interested in politics and current affairs: 82% of them are interested in politics in their own country, 73% claim to be interested in politics at a city or regional level and 66% say they are interested in politics and current affairs in the EU. Young Greeks have the highest level of interest in politics and current affairs on all three levels while young people in Romania, Belgium and the Czech Republic have the lowest level of interest in politics.

In general, young adults in the EU are not active in organisations or associations; we find that only 22% of young Europeans are members of an organisation. Focussing on the countries of the EU15, we find a north-south divide, with the northern countries having higher percentages of membership than the countries in the south. We find the highest percentage of those who are members of an organisation in Denmark (47%), followed by Germany (46%) and Sweden (45%). Portugal (14%), Italy (13%), Spain (12%) and Greece (11%) have the lowest percentages of membership. Sports clubs are the most successful examples (with just under 50% of all respondents reporting membership).

When it comes to taking part in voluntary activities, the Romanians take the last position. In general, young Europeans are unlikely to be engaged in voluntary activities; only 16% of the young adults that were interviewed mentioned this. However, three out of four consider such programmes as an incentive for their greater participation in society (see page 12 increasing activity as citizen in society). Comparing engagement in voluntary work in the NMS12 countries, we find that the largest percentage of young adults who are engaged in voluntary activities is found in Slovenia (30%), followed by Slovakia (25%) and Hungary (22%). The lowest percentages are located in Bulgaria (8%) and Romania (7%).

When asked which measures would help to encourage young people's active participation in society, a majority of respondents (81%) suggest consulting young people before any public decision concerning them is taken. Slightly less than three out of four respondents (74%) think that a good measure would be the availability of more programmes encouraging voluntary work and 70% of young Europeans think that the introduction of a compulsory educational programme about citizenship at schools would encourage greater participation of young people in society. Lowering the voting age as a measure to increase young people's active participation in society is mentioned by less than one out of five respondents (19%).

A large majority of young Europeans (88%) say that they received information about their rights and responsibilities as a European citizen through the media. 72% of respondents got this information from schools and universities and 69% from parents and friends⁷.

It is alarming to see that the electoral turnout for the European Parliament was the lowest since the introduction of these direct consultations, 30 years ago, in 1979. At the 2009 elections there were only 43,1% of the 375 million Europeans with the right to vote, with two points below the one in 2004 which, at the time, was the lowest in the history of the European Parliament. Besides Belgium and Luxembourg, where voting is compulsory, electoral turnout is somewhere around 90%, only in Malta it was almost 80%. The newest EU member states (Bulgaria and Romania) showed radically different situations. While the Bulgarians went through an obvious

⁷ Idem.

electoral “enthusiasm”, 37,5% going to vote, compared to the 29% of the Romanians at the European elections in 2007.

If at the 2004 elections, 50% of the European citizens with the right to vote were at the polls, the participation percentage in the new member states was only of 25%, the young people aged 18-24, electoral turnout was extremely low: 75% of them didn't go to vote, an indicator of the fact that they have a reduced level of understanding the importance of these elections and a limited awareness of the issues on the European agenda.

The Intensification of Civic Socialization – National and European Priority

Civic socialization transmits not only political democratic culture and the perennial values of humanity but also the development of a multidimensional civic identity (individual, national and European). It can have a major contribution to the consolidation of the European integration process and to a better administration of its economic and socio-cultural effects. It is known that in democratic societies, even more in the post-communist ones, participatory political culture does not happen by itself, it needs a serious and constant civic socialisation process.

The present patterns of political culture in Europe, especially those present in the new member states, support the intensification of civic socialisation. The above-mentioned studies bring forth the low percentage of political participation of the young Europeans (voting, activity in political, civic organisations, etc.). They have civic knowledge and declare their interest for political and civic life and have a positive understanding (vision) of the EU and its institutions. The results show that European institutions, such as the European Parliament and the European Commission, enjoy more confidence than national institutions.

The weak political participation of the young Europeans is seen in the low percentage of the trust in national political institutions. According to a new survey, European Youths trust NGOs like Greenpeace or Amnesty International much more than they trust political institutions⁸.

In the case of the post-communist countries, Romania also, the situation of the civic involvement of the youth is even more dramatic. The Romanians take the last places when it comes to organisational affiliation, voluntary involvement, civic participation. According to a series of researches made by The Institute of Education Sciences, the young Romanians are faced with a major deficit of abilities and basic competences needed to adapt to the new challenges of the civic society: exercising their rights and citizenship liberties, responsibility, group negotiations, critical thinking, social dialogue, solidarity and tolerance. (Anghel, 1995) Other studies made by N. Marginean, A. Hotos, G. Badescu, E. Nedelcu and others lead to the same conclusion. Civic initiatives are significantly lower with Romanian students than with European students from the countries with democratic tradition. Under these circumstances, developing a participatory civic culture needs the intensification of the steady process of civic socialization. The efficiency of civic socialization achieved both in formal and informal area registers also modest percentages. According to a study made by C. Bârzea, Romania is the 27th out of 28 countries when it comes to the efficiency of civic education through various means⁹.

The main characteristics of the political culture in Romanian society nowadays are: a low level of political communication, low values of the subjective civic competence and of the attachment of the political system, the insufficiency of the cooperation, solidarity, civic organisational participation. “These are the typical co-ordinates for the dominance of the

⁸ Euobserver/ Brussel (<http://euobserver.com/9/21177>).

⁹ Barzea, C. - (2000) Education for Democratic Citizenship. The Perspective of Permanent Learning, The Council of Europe.

“dependent” political culture model in which the feedback from bottom to top (from electors to governors) is insufficient and inconsequent. It is a political culture of passivity and indifference which expresses and maintains a fragile democracy”. (E. Nedelcu, 2000)

The situation is approximately the same even when it comes to students: although they have a higher level of instruction, they do not aspire to join and to commit themselves civically and significantly more than the other categories.

Under these circumstances, the political socialization agents - school also -are faced with a new challenge: finding the most efficient strategies for a multidimensional development of democratic citizenship. In Romanian society, teaching civic culture in primary, secondary and high school, along with other educational strategies, tries to answer such provocation.

Unfortunately, in universities there is no discipline meant to support such an objective. This is why I consider it necessary to introduce a new discipline in universities meant to support the process of civic socialization, civic national and European inclusion, to correct the present deficit of participation is so much more needed.

Conclusions

Teaching education/civic culture only in pre-university education, although welcomed, is insufficient in comparison with the need for civic socialization felt by Romanian society. Introducing Civic Sociology as a subject matter at an age (18-19 years old) when the interest for politics and civism are well shaped is even more important. In my opinion, introducing, especially in post-communist countries, Romania also, a university discipline meant to contribute to the civic socialization of youth, constitutes an educational and social priority worth taking into consideration.

This university discipline is meant to answer not only some internal needs but also some international ones. The process of European integration, of edification of a common identity in the age of globalisation must be supported by a political culture based on knowledge, communication, civic participation and tolerance. (E. Nedelcu, INTED2009) Introducing in the curriculum the new discipline, named Civic Sociology, is in agreement with the objectives of a global education with a legislation regarding the global character of education.

Analysing the necessity and the social and epistemological premises of this paradigm, has been the subject of a recently published paper: “Civic Sociology”, INTED2009, Valencia.