Unit 2
The key to a dynamic concept of citizenship[11]

1. Challenges to the traditional model of citizenship

Since the end of the Cold War, several processes of modernisation that shaped our history for a long time before (see the box below) have accelerated and intensified, taking on a new quality. The events experienced and changes taking place across Europe have challenged the traditional model of citizenship:

- The globalisation of free trade and competitive market economies has brought a higher level of welfare to many people in many countries – but not to all. The gaps of unequal distribution between rich and poor have increased, both within and between societies, threatening social cohesion and solidarity among people.
- Competition drives enterprises to permanently increase their productivity to lower their costs of production. This has given rise to a permanent process of innovation, directly affecting products, technologies and jobs, and indirectly affecting our whole way of life. Joseph Schumpeter called this permanent process of innovation "creative destruction".[12] The transformation of whole economies in eastern Europe may be considered as a particularly striking example of such creative destruction.
- Economic growth has produced increasing welfare, but also increasing consumption of natural resources. Rising CO_2 emissions make it increasingly difficult and costly to avert, or to adapt to, climate change.
- New information and communication technologies have provided new ways to increase productivity, to exchange and obtain information, and to deliver entertainment, to name but a few. We live in a media culture, and media literacy – how to use the new media both for producing and receiving messages – is becoming an elementary skill like reading and writing.
- Due to economic growth and the achievements of modern medicine, the population in many European countries is ageing, while it is growing in the world as a whole. Both developments pose serious problems for the 21st century.
- Nations have the right to sovereignty and self-determination. But the concept of nations is both inclusive and exclusive. Since the end of the Cold War, we have seen the emergence of new forms of formerly suppressed collective identities.
- Modern societies are typically secular, pluralist societies. Migration across Europe – particularly within the European Union – has contributed to this development. Pluralist societies are more dynamic and productive, but also are more demanding in terms of social cohesion in order to integrate people with different beliefs, values, interests, and social and ethnic backgrounds.
- Democracy offers the best chances to meet these challenges, as any attempt to solve these and other problems by authoritarian rule will fail to take the complex reality of society, economy, environment, conflict resolution, etc., into account on a national, let alone a supranational level. On the other hand, democracy stands and falls with the pledge of equal participation. The more complex our world and the challenges that define our future become, the more difficult it is for the "ordinary citizen" to understand and take part in decision making. Mistrust of traditional political institutions, forms of governance and political leaders are rooted in the feeling of being

11. Based on Huddleston T. (2004), *Tool on Teacher Training for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, pp. 9f., revised by Peter Krapf.

12. Schumpeter J. (1942, 2008), *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* Harper and Brothers, New York, p. 83.

left out and not listened to. Democracy and human rights are precarious projects, and their survival depends on whether their heritage can be passed on to the younger generation.

These lines of development can only be briefly sketched out here. They are man-made, not natural, processes, linked to each other, mutually influencing and reinforcing each other. Because they have been "made", they can also be influenced and changed in their direction and outcome, but not in their complexity.

Modernisation

Modernisation is a sociological category referring to the multi-dimensional process of social change. It has increased in speed, scope and complexity in the last two decades, but in a historical perspective, its sources include the Reformation, the invention of the printing press, the era of Enlightenment, the English, American and French revolutions, and the industrial revolution. Modernisation has changed literally every aspect of human life, including the following: how we work and what we do there, where we live and how (often) we travel, our level and distribution of welfare, the development of human rights, globalisation, technology, the values and beliefs we adhere to or abstain from, and how we take part in society and politics.

Modernisation is an ambivalent process, but we cannot avoid it, it is our "fate", for good or for bad. Scientists and philosophers hold controversial views as to whether modernisation is, on the whole, to be considered a burden or a blessing. We judge modernisation as a challenge, holding both risks and opportunities. Challenges must be met to keep the risks under control.

For many people in many societies, modernisation creates potentials and opportunities to enjoy a higher level of welfare and liberty. On the other hand, citizens and their leaders face higher demands to stay abreast of the increasing risks and dangers involved in processes of modernisation.

Education plays a key role to equip people with the competences they need to achieve a positive balance between increasing gains and increasing demands.

In the face of challenges such as these, it has become clear that new forms of citizenship are required: citizens should not only be informed and understand their formal responsibilities as citizens, but should also be active – able and willing to contribute to the life of their community, their country and the wider world, and actively participate in ways that express their individuality and help to solve problems. Mounting challenges require strong societies, with competent – and therefore adequately educated – leaders and citizens.

Educators are optimists. They believe that through adequate education, young people, but also lifelong learners, can acquire the understanding and the means to influence the development of their communities and the planet. Active citizenship, however, is best fostered by learner-centred instruction, rather than instruction emphasising rote and passive learning.

1.1 A new kind of citizenship requires a new kind of education

Rote-learning oriented models that are simply reduced to instruction are insufficient in creating the kind of active, informed and responsible citizenship that modern democracies require.

What is required are forms of education that prepare learners for actual involvement in society – forms of education that are as much practical as theoretical, rooted in real-life issues affecting learners and their communities, and taught through participation in school life as well as through the formal curriculum.

The role of the active citizen corresponds to that of the active learner. The concept of constructivist learning provides support for learners who face problems that are new to them. In school, the teacher may already have found an optimal solution. Later, when dealing with the challenges addressed above, the future generation will act as pioneers.

The need to provide such learner-centred teaching presents important challenges for the teaching profession. It means learning new forms of knowledge, developing new teaching methods, finding new ways of working and creating new forms of professional relationships – both with colleagues and with learners. It emphasises teaching based on current affairs over the understanding of historical systems, critical thinking and skills teaching as well as knowledge transmission, co-operative and collaborative working rather than isolated preparation, professional autonomy instead of dependence on central diktat. It requires a change in how we perceive learning, from an idea of learning as teacher-centred to learning through experience, participation, research and sharing.

A didactic, teacher-led, textbook-dominated, knowledge-based orientation has to be replaced by one emphasising student involvement, a broader range of teaching methods and a more skills-based approach. That is what this EDC/HRE edition attempts to contribute to.

2. Political culture

2.1 Democracy comes to life through its citizens

An example:

Parliamentary elections produce winners and losers. The majority forms the new government, the minority the opposition. The former government may lose office, and a new government with a different political outlook replaces it.

The rules are clear, but this is not enough. The election system will only work if we can rely on the losers, the minority, to accept the result. If they do not, an election can spark off violent conflict, tearing a society apart, instead of strengthening cohesion among its members.

An election campaign gives parties the opportunity to communicate their ideas to the citizens. But what happens if parties that take part promote a racist, fundamentalist or antidemocratic agenda?

For elections to function as one of the most important ways for citizens to participate in democratic decision making, a society apparently needs more than just a framework of laws that put the election system into place. There needs to be trust in the political process and ways of ensuring that these processes have been carried out properly.

The example shows that democracy depends equally on a set of rules and on the citizens' attitudes towards democracy. They must understand and appreciate the system, and they must feel responsible for its stability. Parties must treat each other as competitors, but not as enemies. Only then can democracy show its strength as the only system in which a change of government is possible without changing the political system.

Democracy consists of a system of institutions and processes that include general elections, parliamentary representation and control of power through checks and balances. Some constitutions include direct participation through referenda or a constitutional court. This is the stage, and the citizens are the actors. Literally, the citizens must therefore be willing and able to play their part, and they must identify with the political system of democracy.

Democracy is a system of institutions rooted in a political culture. The institutional system can set the framework for this culture, but cannot create it or ensure its stability. The same principle applies to autocratic government. An autocrat also depends on a suitable political culture, based on politically docile subjects rather than active and committed systems.

2.2 The cultural dimension of human rights

Human rights that are civil and political in nature spell out what democratic processes are in practice, including freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of the media (that is, the prohibition of censorship), the right to vote, and the principle of equality and non-discrimination that applies to the enjoyment of every human right. When countries ratify a human rights treaty, they promise to harmonise national laws and practices so that they are consistent with these international standards. They do so out of free will.

What happens if the state fails to uphold its human rights promises? There are different mechanisms of protection that have been established by the UN and by regional human rights institutions that have promulgated regional human rights laws that governments can sign up to. For example, in Europe there is the European Convention on Human Rights, which concentrates on civil and political rights. Governments can also sign up to the European Social Charter, which specifies economic, social and cultural rights. If a government has signed up to the Convention but acted in a contrary manner, citizens (and, indeed, any person within the state's jurisdiction) of the member states of the Council of Europe can ultimately refer a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

In most cases, the enjoyment of human rights takes place within governments organised as constitutional democracies through the usual mechanisms of democratic processes. These mechanisms involve evolving laws but also a culture of participation and engagement by citizens.

Democracy and human rights depend on an institutional framework that consists of two components: a set of rules and principles established in the constitution and legal system, and a political culture. Democracy and human rights are embedded in a set of principles, values and responsibilities. Democracy and human rights allow dissent on issues, but they can only do so if there is strong consent on the framework that allows and protects, but also limits liberties. You may disagree on almost anything, but this works only if all identify with the system that allows disagreement.

2.3 Teaching through democracy and human rights – democratic culture in school

There can be no democracy without committed democrats.

Each generation receives its democratic heritage, and will hopefully understand and appreciate it, and learn how to make active use of it. It is the task of EDC/HRE, and education as a whole, to support and encourage the young generation to become active and committed democrats.

The cultural traditions that are favourable for democracy develop slowly, as the historical experience in many countries has shown. Nation-building projects in post-civil war societies face their most serious obstacles in the absence of a democratic cultural tradition. A blueprint of a democratic institution can be imported, as it were, but the cultural roots of democracy cannot – they must literally stem from the society's cultural heritage.

Political culture can therefore be conceived in constructivist categories. It is acquired through processes of learning and socialisation. Therefore it makes a difference whether schools are governed democratically or autocratically, as the students may be expected to learn how to live in, or under, the form of government they experience in early life.

School as a micro-society can support its students to acquire and appreciate key elements of a democratic and human rights culture, including the following:

- The students are able to know and express their interests and views with confidence and self-esteem.
- The students treat each other with mutual respect, including listening and empathy, that is, the willingness and ability to switch perspectives.
- The students are able to settle conflict through non-violent means, that is, negotiation and compromise.
- The students appreciate the function of institutional frameworks that protect and limit their individual rights of liberty. They add the "soft", informal element of political culture to the "hard", formal element of rules.
- The students appreciate politics as a practical effort aiming to solve problems that require attention and a decision.
- The students participate in the process of electing representatives and in formal decision-making processes.
- The students engage in non-prescribed ways to influence decision making, such as through awareness raising, activism, lobbying and by handling problems on their own.
- The students take responsibility for their decisions and choices, considering their impact both for themselves and for others.
- The students are aware that if they do not participate in decisions that affect them, others will make them, and the outcome may be unfavourable for them.

Political culture is strongly linked to the attitudes and values that young citizens acquire through processes of socialisation, including their school experience. There are other agents that also strongly influence the socialisation process of young people, particularly the family, peers and the media. On the other hand, the school community offers children and adolescents the earliest opportunities to experience interaction in society and in public; we may therefore assume that school has a decisive influence on how the democratic heritage is passed on to the young generation. Through their learning and experience in the school setting, young people can develop the habits and skills for lifelong engagement with democratic process and human rights values, both through formal decision-making processes as well as through everyday interactions.