

## Unit 2

# The key to a dynamic concept of citizenship<sup>11</sup>

### 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”.<sup>12</sup> 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<sub>2</sub> 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 life-long 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.