
Civic and citizenship education in the Republic of Croatia: 20 years of implementation

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Introduction: General characteristics of Croatia and its schooling system

The Republic of Croatia is the Central European and Mediterranean country that gained its independence in 1991 after the breakdown of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. According to the latest census (2011), the overall population of Croatia was over four million people but due to the constant emigration flows and negative population growth in recent years, current estimates indicate that this number is below four million inhabitants in 2019. The majority of the population is of Croatian nationality (90%) with 10 national minority groups namely recognized by the Constitution of which the Serbian minority is the largest (4%), followed by Italian, Bosnian, Hungarian, Albanian, Roma etc. minority. The most represented religion is Catholic (86%), 4% are Orthodox and 1,5% of Muslim religion (2011 census data). The Croatian language with Latin letters is formal language and letter. National minorities can have their language, letter and culture acknowledged within the schooling system in the form of three programs for which each school can apply: Model A – national minority school with a complete program in the language and letter of the minority, Model B – school in which classes are dual taught, only social science subjects are taught in the minority language and all other subjects are taught in the Croatian language and Model C – a regular program that is taught in the Croatian language and there are additional classes per week to nurture the minority language and culture.

Croatia is a democratic parliamentary republic with a separation of three types of rule – legislative, executive and judicial. The unicameral parliament is the highest representative body in the legislative branch and can have between 100 and 150 representatives. National minorities have eight representatives in the parliament. The head of state is the president and the prime minister is the head of the government which consists of 20 ministers. There is a universal right to vote for all citizens 18 years old and older. Croatia became the European Union member state in 2013. At the last parliamentary elections in 2016, citizens' turnout was a little over 50% while turnout to European parliament elections were still low (29% in 2019, similar to Czech Republic and Slovenia).

The estimate of Croatian GDP *per capita* for 2018 was \$27 664 which positions Croatia at the back of EU member countries. The current unemployment rate in Croatia (6,8%) is very similar to the EU average.

Description of the basic structure of the Croatian education system
The education system is in most areas centralized and the power lies at the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia. However, the rights and duties of the founders of elementary schools are performed by cities and counties for high schools¹, and both have an important role for allocating funds and cooperating with schools on staffing matters.

On the ISCED 0 level are nurseries for children under the age 3, followed by the kindergartens and preschool programs. Preschool programs are very unevenly dispersed and attended throughout the country (from almost 90% of children in Zagreb to 19% of children in one Eastern Croatia county), but on average the involvement is much lower than the overall EU average (95% in 2016, Eurostat). At the age of 6 and/or 7 years old, children start attending primary education for a duration of eight years (ISCED 1 and 2). Only primary schools are compulsory in Croatia and the student-teacher ratio in primary education was, as measured in 2016, 14:11 (UNESCO). Secondary education has two main streams that represent ISCED 3 level: general education gymnasiums (4 year programs) and vocational education (high schools with 3 to 5 year programs). After secondary education, all gymnasium students are obliged to pass the state matura exams and for vocational students these exams are voluntary, needed in the case when VET students want to enrol to higher education institution and continue their schooling.

1 Units of local government are municipalities (*brv. "općine"*) and cities, and units of regional government are counties (*brv. "županije"*). In total there are 576 units of local and regional government of which there are 428 municipalities, 127 cities and 21 counties (note: Zagreb is both capital city and county).

At the tertiary level (ISCED 5 to 8) Croatia, along with 48 European countries, implemented a set of changes known under the title of the *Bologna process* which reformed higher education across Europe. Since 2005, following major innovations, were introduced in HE with the purpose of joining European Education Area and recognisability, three educational levels in tertiary education, new academic titles (aligned with the qualification frames²) and ECTS points.

Teacher training and continuous professional development

Despite the above-mentioned processes in the national education system, teacher preparation programs did not go through the same substantial reform(s) in a systematic way. In many surveys, teachers stressed that they do not feel sufficiently prepared to efficiently function according to recent developments in the educational system, in particular that they did not receive enough methodological, but also subject matter, knowledge to deliver new forms and contents of teaching. One example of this discrepancy in teacher preparation in Croatia is in the area of seven cross-curricular themes. These themes are: *Personal and Social Development, Learn how to learn, Civic and Citizenship Education, Health, Entrepreneurship, Using Information and Communication Technology and Sustainable Development*³. The general idea is that each and every teacher can teach beside their primary area in which they specialized during the study, any cross-curricular and interdisciplinary content when needed and that short-term training (few hour courses) would be enough to prepare them for these tasks. But results from the ICCS 2016 showed that in Croatia (and Norway), for example, almost half of the teachers reported not having received training relevant to any of the 12 offered CCE topics. On the other hand, more than half of the teachers in Latvia and Peru indicated that they had participated in professional development for all of the topics included in this question⁴ (Schulz et al., 2018).

2 European Qualification Framework (EQF) available at: <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass-support-centre/other-questions/what-european-qualification-framework-eqf> and national qualification frameworks – Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF), available at: <https://www.azvo.hr/en/enic-naric-office/the-croatian-qualifications-framework-croqf>.

3 Proscribed under these titles by new curriculums and implemented since school year 2019/2020, but present in general documents since publication of National Framework Curriculum for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2010).

4 CCE topics researched in ICCS 2016 in which teachers could have teacher training were: Human rights, Voting and elections, Global community and international organizations, Environment and environmental sustainability, Emigration and immigration, Equal opportunities for men and women, Citizens' rights and responsibilities, Constitution and

Although *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (European Commission, 2006) announced significant changes and transition to competence based education across Europe, not all elements of the educational systems were ready to follow that path. Tertiary level and higher education institution, in particular, have a very slow and heavy pace in implementing changes due to the large size and complexity of the system. Nevertheless, this European document was “translated” into the Croatian national system in the years following and its echo has become a part of all reform endeavours.

Teachers in the Croatian educational system can be systematized, in a very broad way, in two groups by their educational paths: (1) those coming from Teacher faculties and (2) those coming from all other higher education institutions; and in four groups by the age of students to which they teach: a) preschool teachers at ISCED 0, b) homeroom teachers for students up to the age of 10 or fourth grade of elementary school, ISCED 1, c) teachers of subject classes for students in grades 5 to 8 of elementary school and all years of secondary school, ISCED 2 and 3 and d) teachers teaching at the tertiary level or students enrolled in university and other forms of higher education programs, ISCED 4 and higher. Teachers coming from Teacher faculties (1) correspond to teaching in ISCED levels 0 and 1 (a and b) and teachers coming from all other higher education institutions correspond to those teaching particular subjects in elementary and high school or becoming tertiary level teachers (c and d). Focusing only on school teachers, the first group has additional conditions in the form of a two year supervised practice during the study, passing formal qualification exam and a one year probation period when they start working. The second group of teachers finish studies in some science area (for example, Geography, Mathematics, foreign languages etc.) upgraded with an additional group of classes in pedagogy and methods for the title “professor”. When they join elementary and/or secondary schools to teach their respective subjects (i.e. Geography, Mathematics, foreign language at ISCED 2 or 3) they also have to have a one year internship or probation program. Teachers at the tertiary level have to go through a set of preparatory academic positions on their way to achieving scientific doctoral title and independence in organizing classes for HE students. Focusing on ISCED 2 and 3 teachers, there are none obligatory continuous professional trainings or certification processes after achieving their titles and school positions. A lack of a formal rewarding system for the high

political systems, Responsible internet use (e.g. privacy, source reliability, social media), Critical and independent thinking, Conflict resolution, European Union. (Databases available at: <https://ilsa-gateway.org/studies/data/59>)

achieving teachers and/or a possible penalty system for the inactive teachers had created the climate of a very individual approach to the teaching profession. For those individuals willing to specialize and professionally develop within the particular theme(s) there is enough official training⁵ to start building capacities for achieving such personal goals. But critics have pointed out that serious reform processes cannot lean too heavily on individual strengths and preferences, and also personal time of school employees, but training should be provided across all types of educational institutions and encouraged (rewarded) in a standardised and consistent manner.

In Croatian, there is a wide array of documentation and practice which focuses on institutionalized and/or formally recognized forms of the increase of teachers' competences as considered under the term "professional development". These can also have different durations, from a few hours or one-day seminars, courses, specialized short-term training to one semester or multiple year's studies. In education, professional development for teachers consists also of different forms and types of seminars, consultations, lectures, courses, workshops and round-tables organized on the level of schools, municipality, city, county or in international level (Horvat and Lapat, 2012). These activities are necessary for teachers to be familiarized with current professional demands and also to nurture their willingness to increase their own competence. Hill (2009) posits that attendance at training does not mean good results and that new modern forms of professional development does not immediately mean quality or effectiveness. The usual short forms of teacher training almost always position teachers as passive and inactive receivers of information. But without the mechanism of participant's feed-back or continuous support to teachers, these forms stay on the superficial level and do not have long-lasting effects⁶. But if professional development is seen as the instrument of the system for fostering development of its teachers, and consequently, the development of the system itself, this instrument needs to be monitored and advanced. Every year, in every country, a large amount of

5 The responsible agency is Teacher Training Agency (www.azoo.hr), and for the vocational secondary schools teachers, it is the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (www.asoo.hr). In the present reform, a substantial part of teacher training is provided by the Ministry of Science and Education itself and another agency CARNet – Croatian Academic and Research Network, due to the many themes being dedicated to the ICT in education.

6 Some research (Powell, Diamond, Burchinal and Koehler; Garet et al., 2008 and 2011; O'Dwyer et al., 2010; Powell et al., 2010) shows under-expected results or effects of traditional forms of professional development on the improvement of their knowledge and instructional practice, as well as on the student achievement.

public funds are invested in traditional forms of development such as seminars, workshops and meetings. Evans (2014) cautions that narrow definitions of professional development need to be abandoned, along with prejudices on where and how these activities are organized. The message for educational experts, and policy makers especially, is that they need to acknowledge that professional development cannot be confined to planned workshops, courses, meetings or formal consultations, but that it is omnipresent and happening in every context, unplanned, in everyday work and interactions which have an effect on the increase of expertise and competence. The learning processes for teachers and their overall achievement therefore are not directly connected (only) with formal professional development, as it is often seen in practice when we meet teachers that see teaching as their “calling” and not their job.

Short history of implementation of the Civic and Citizenship Education in Croatia

Following the armed conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia Republic, after the stabilization of the most important functions in the state, in the late 1990's, the educational system in the new independent Republic of Croatia was undergoing organizational and content changes. The first significant sign of state commitment to building capacities in the area of human rights and democratic citizenship education (hereinafter: HRE & EDC) was joining the activities related to *Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004* (1996)⁷ and forming the first National Committee for Human Rights Education with the aim to develop the first educational program in this area. The program entitled *National Programme of Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship* (Government of the Republic of Croatia, National Committee for Human Rights Education, 1999) combined, for the first time, guidelines for the preschool, elementary and secondary school level of education and had its echo in the *Framework Plan and Programme for Primary Schools* (1999) as optional interdisciplinary content. At the same time, the former Institute for Education (today's Teacher Training Agency) was developing and initiating specialized trainings for HRE & EDC. But in the next few years, the development of documents and practice in this area was slowed down partially due to other priorities within and around the educational system and only a small portion of schools were implementing this content (without any formal monitoring). The

7 Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/PlanofActionfortheUnitedNationsDecadeforHumanRightsEducation,1995-2004\(1996\).aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/PlanofActionfortheUnitedNationsDecadeforHumanRightsEducation,1995-2004(1996).aspx)

new push came along with the first comprehensive national reform⁸ which started with the strategic document *Education Sector Development Plan 2005-2010* (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, 2005) and the consequent implementation of the new *National Program on Primary Education* (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, 2006). All elementary programs were revised and new documents came into power after the experimental period of implementation. Here, HRE was included with integrated content in many, predominantly social science, subjects and the possibility of organizing it as an optional school subject was left up to schools. This “possibility” was not appealing in practice, and again only a small portion of schools and/or local communities was devoted to this implementation due to their objective restrictions in the teaching organization (limited time/space in the schedule, lack of expert teachers, students choosing other subjects perceived as more important as optional ones, etc.).

This ambiguous period ended with the publication of the first *Croatian National Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, 2011) in which Civic and Citizenship Education (CCE) was introduced in the form of cross-curricular themes that needed to be implemented in all subjects and in all levels of compulsory education (ISCED 0 to 3). Here again, the option of organizing CCE as a school subject remained, but with similar effect as up until then. In this period Health Education had its second experimental implementation in primary and secondary education⁹ as one of the cross-curricular themes that opted to become a separate subject but in both cases this was postponed and accompanied with heated public debate. Right-wing parties and NGO’s organized public campaigns for Health Education not to be introduced in its integral form¹⁰ but selective and on a voluntary basis, and in that moment this educational content was successfully disputed on the basis of “acceptable values”. At the same time, a new independent CCE curriculum was experimentally introduced to only 12 schools for one school year (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and Teacher Training Agency, 2012) with the aim of becoming the one

8 Reform known under the name of Croatian National Educational Standard (hrv. “Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard” or HNOS).

9 The first experimental implementation of Health Education was done in school year 2008/2009 and the second one 2012/2013. External evaluation was done by the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education (NCEEE).

10 The most “problematic part” was forth module – Sex/Gender Equality and Responsible Sexual Behaviour, especially in the part of sexual behaviour of youth and possible forms of contraception. Three other modules were: Living healthy, Prevention of Violent Behaviour and Prevention of Addictions.

that would be consequently introduced to all levels. This CCE curriculum had programed four cycles, within three functional dimensions – knowledge and understanding, skills and competences, attitudes and values – and six structural dimensions – culture, ecology, economy, human rights, politics and society. Coincidentally, as soon as Health Education was no longer an issue (and not implemented) conservative powers were focused to “win the battle” over CCE and in the year 2014 this curriculum was also abandoned and some additional changes in content and structure were ordered. At this point, the authorities proposed the new document: *Programme of Cross-Curricular and Interdisciplinary Contents of Citizenship Education for Primary and Secondary Schools* (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2014). By this decision, CCE was implemented in all primary and secondary schools as cross-curricular theme in all subjects and on all levels, with no solid structure and/or monitoring procedure. In parallel, 34 schools (approximately 3% of elementary schools) answered the opened public call to be a part of experimental implementation of CCE as a separate subject in grade 8 but with no additional support in terms of materials or trainings. As school years went by, the number of schools fell to 20 and then still. The next phase of changes started with the second major reform process in Croatia – Comprehensive Curricular Reform (hrv. “Cjelovita kurikularna reforma” or CKR). This reform started in 2015 and is still undergoing with major (political) disruptions all along the way. Nevertheless, in the first half of 2019, all subject curriculums and cross-curriculum content had undergone thorough revisions and new versions were published and put into power. After some disruptions caused by governmental instabilities and having four different ministers leading the way, the reform processes restarted in 2018 with a very ambitious schedule. By that time, teachers felt somewhat overwhelmed with all new training contents and especially with majority of them being moved to the digital environment in the first year of implementation (online platforms and/or webinars). CCE, as well as other cross-curricular contents¹¹, was part of this new package in which mainly old proposals were offered. The multifaceted approach of the 2012 curriculum and two experimental programs from 2014 were abandoned in favour of a more simplistic structure and content focusing on only three domains – Human rights, Democra-

11 Very similarly as before, since the introduction of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2007), the new framework planned for seven important cross-curriculum areas: Civic and Citizenship Education, Entrepreneurship, Health, Learn how to learn, Personal and Social Development, Sustainable Development, Usage of Information and Communication Technology.

cy and Social community – in the currently valid CCE program (Ministry of Science and Education, 2019).

At present, twenty years after the first CCE program emerged in the Republic of Croatia, although there were no comprehensive debates on its implementation, proposed plan of monitoring or built-in possibilities of improvements, this area of education is no longer being widely discussed. The reason is not that everything is being said and done. Unfortunately, the reason is that the time for those analyses have passed and social capital for experimentations was spent along with the openness to more daring solutions. After a few attempts that all fell back into the “cross-curricular” solution, CCE was implemented and thought of as a cross-curricular interdisciplinary theme in all grades and subjects of ISCED level 1 to 3. Under these circumstances, from the point of view of policy makers who mirrored the very slow adaptations within the tertiary level, teacher education had no real need to undergo some more serious changes. As before, every teacher has to be proficient in his/her major area (or subject) and all of them have to be equally able to teach all contents planned in cross-curricular themes. This content comes from numerous science areas, so diverse knowledge and competence are needed to successfully convey it to students. There are only a few formal elements of support: regular teacher training in cross-curricular themes, additional teacher training in new methodologies needed for cross-curricular areas, cross-curricular practices in planning classes within each school (where teachers can cooperate with other teachers that are content-experts in some areas) and the individual enthusiasm of teachers.

During the period in which the second comprehensive reform was trying to ‘push through’ political obstacles on the national level, the bottom-up implementation of CCE started in one regional environment. The city of Rijeka (in Primorsko-goranska County) in 2016 ordered and implemented its own version of CCE as a separate subject in city elementary schools¹². After positive self-evaluation in the first school year, the program was transposed to some other cities and regional administrative units where the “Rijeka model of CCE” was implemented along with available teaching and learning materials. This initiative was not closely monitored nor supported (or disapproved) by the national level authority but it should not be ignored as an example of how an educational system could be influenced and/or changed in an unusual way from the perspective of an exclusively centralized decision-making experience.

12. Recorded also in the Education and Training Monitor 2018, pp. 42. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-2-2018-education-and-training-monitor-country-analysis.pdf>

Previous research on civic knowledge and attitudes

In general, most of the recent research, both with school students and the youth in Croatia, showed a lack of in depth knowledge of civic and citizenship content and engaging attitudes. At the same time, students showed interest towards this subject area and willingness to participate in more interactive and open lessons (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015).¹³

One of the first national pieces of comprehensive research in this area was conducted in 1997 with 37 principals and members of expert staff, 288 teachers, 705 students of grade 3 and 4, and their parents, in elementary schools – one per administrative centre in 21 counties throughout the whole of Croatia. The aim of the research was to provide empirical feedback for developing a program of HRE within the project “Peace and Human Rights in Croatian Elementary Schools” (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2000). This research has shown that teachers, principals and parents have positive attitudes towards the implementation of content regarding children’s rights and human rights in general, peaceful conflict resolution and environmental protection in all subjects. At the same time less than 5% of participants thought that elementary schools should develop students’ political literacy. The popular thesis was that “Children should not be bothered with politics.” Many teachers have stated that the content of HRE are already represented in homeroom classes and more than half of them confirmed that they feel prepared to teach this content, out of which every other acquired their competences in this area through self-education. Among other interesting findings gathered from students was the question of the most important rules that they need to obey in schools. For half of them these were “to sit quietly in their place”, “to listen to their teacher carefully” and “to know the answer when teacher asks a question” which are all oriented to school discipline. Only 6% of students chose the rule “to respect one another”.

The Research and Education Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship (Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Zagreb) has conducted research on knowledge and attitudes of human rights, democracy and citizenship with 1300 students of final years of their tertiary education in Zagreb and Rijeka in 2005. This study was launched to gather empirical data for starting a university program in HRE and

13 Following description of previous research (until year 2015) is adapted from the publication: *(Ne)moć građanskog odgoja i obrazovanja – Objedinjeni izvještaj o učincima eksperimentalne provedbe kurikuluma građanskog odgoja i obrazovanja u 12 osnovnih i srednjih škola (šk. god. 2012./2013)*, pp. 26-28, after obtained permission from the author and principal researcher Vedrana Spajić-Vrkaš. Available at: https://www.ncvvo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GOO_e_publikacija.pdf

EDC. The results have shown that students, especially those from teacher faculties, are not sufficiently familiar with standards of human rights protection, the European system of human rights protection or with legal norms which determine their rights and responsibilities during the study. Also, a very small portion of students have participated in community work and similar activities of the civil sector. On average, they felt moderately informed about many important social issues; they showed an inclination to retreating to the private sphere and a strong distrust towards national democratic institutions and politicians as well as towards European and international organizations. The biggest problems in the country, according to their opinion, were: bribery, corruption and fraud (73%), unemployment (48%), the low education level of population (32%) and government irresponsibility and lack of competence (30%). Most of them saw the way out of these problems through the development of a society based on knowledge and justice. But they mostly did not recognize the connection between human rights, democracy and citizenship and their studies. Around 40% of students did not learn about these themes during their studies and half of them learn about them only partially. The consciousness about this problem can be related to the finding that more of 80% of students were interested in introducing subject(s) into higher education and 25% of them stating that HRE and EDC content should be implemented into all levels and forms of education.

Some findings are comparable to those results. These are from the research on knowledge and attitudes of 1060 students in grade 4 of secondary education (both gymnasiums and VET) from 2009 that was conducted as larger regional research (Spajić-Vrkaš and Žagar, 2012). Croatian high school students showed below average knowledge and were lacking behind their peers in the region. They revealed their discontent with school and self-evaluated their informativeness on the political situation in the country and world as insufficient. They are mostly not involved in civil and humanitarian activities, public life is not one of their interests and they generally do not trust Croatian democratic institutions and political subjects. On the other hand, they are oriented to individuality and their private life. Regarding learning about human rights, democracy and citizenship they recognized those themes only in some school subjects, but think they are insufficiently represented. Teaching methods used are mostly a combination of lectures and discussions and not participative and research methods. Also, lessons usually avoid discussions on controversial social issues and students are not encouraged enough to critically view problems from different perspectives.

Another research was conducted in 2009 by the Centre for Human Rights (an NGO from Zagreb) aimed at assessing the implementation of HRE and EDC in Croatian elementary schools, using the sample of grade 8 students, their parents, teachers and principals that in general confirmed previously stated conclusions, but revealed many new problems on national and institutional levels (Batarelo et al., 2010). Although a large majority of respondents confirmed that preparing students for democratic citizenship is one of the most important tasks of schooling, about one half of the teachers and principals was not able to evaluate if HRE and EDC is implemented in Croatian schools or whether these contents are getting the appropriate treatment within the new national framework. By applying an instrument for the measurement of democratic school culture, five types of predominant school cultures were identified: democratic, egalitarian, traditional, responsive and authoritarian. Based on these results, the authors concluded that the main problem in modern education in Croatia is a crisis of institutional identity and that schools are not promoting democratic values nor national awareness enough. This is concluded to be the main cause for the failure of schooling in the area of upbringing (and not only educating) students regarding their adoption of values and attitudes that are crucial for the development of emancipated citizens.

Somewhat comparable results are found in the study from 2010 on political literacy that was organized jointly by GONG¹⁴ and Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb, on the sample of 1000 students attending the final grades of all school types in secondary education (Bagić and Šalaj, 2011). Political literacy was assessed through informativeness and knowledge on the most important political concepts and events as well as on attitudes important for democratic political culture. This study once more confirmed that students are not knowledgeable and do not understand basic political concepts (on average 2,8 correct answers to 8 questions), characteristics of constitutional political order (on average 3,6 correct answers to 6 questions) and are not informed about recent political events in Croatia (on average 2,1 correct answers on 5 questions). The results on political attitudes were also worrying due to the fact that not a small number of respondents had opinions opposite to democratic political culture. They were oriented towards the authoritarian political option, banning political activities for particular parties and individuals, denying rights of culturally different groups, nationalism and ethnocentrism,

14 GONG acronym means "citizens organized to oversee the voting" (hrv. Građani organizirano nadgledaju glasanje) and was funded in 1997.

homophobia and ignoring the role of organizations of civil society, and also having a distrust in the power of citizens to influence the situation in state and society. These results had led the authors to conclude that goals, contents and methods of programs of political education on the secondary level had to be revised to foster their affective component.

The latest research which is somewhat parallel in content and structure to the previous one, has been done by the GOOD Initiative¹⁵ in cooperation with GONG and Institute for Social Research in 2015. A representative sample included 1146 students of final grades of high schools – both gymnasiums students and three, four and five year VET programs students – from six Croatian regions (Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015). Students showed a limited knowledge of basic political concepts and constitutional political order, and especially showed a lack of political informativeness. On average, high school students in finishing grades gave correct answers to 9 out of 19 questions which tested political knowledge. The significant difference in political knowledge was found between students in gymnasium and three-year VET programs, while students of four and five-year VET programs were in between these two groups. Political values and attitudes of students were measured by using the scale of national exclusiveness, relationship towards own nation and national tradition, gender roles, homosexuals, totalitarian systems and membership in EU. Students leaving high schools demonstrated only a declarative acceptance of democratic principles and national minority protection, but in real life situations they were more inclined to the limitation of these rights and freedoms. Despite the fact that they have shown a preference towards banning some parties, media or limiting freedom of speech, it should be emphasised that these attitudes were diversified i.e. authoritarian attitudes did not dominate, but were present in the amount that cannot be ignored. Regarding the content of school programs, students reported on insufficient representation of socially and politically relevant themes while their political informativeness was reduced to consuming social network content and peer conversations. The differences in the perception of the school climate indicates the different normative and value aspects of school life which has an effect on (not) having a democratic school culture.

The results of another research on needs, problems and the potential of the youth in Croatia from 2013 on a representative and stratified sample of 2000 respondents age 15 to 29 (Ilišin and Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015) con-

15 "GOOD Initiative" since 2008 serves as the platform that gathers more than 50 NGOs involved in non-formal education and human rights. The main aim of the Initiative is the systematic and high-quality implementation of HRE and EDC in Croatian education system. More information available at: <http://goo.hr/good-inicijativa/>

firmed that young people are not satisfied by the state of democracy in Croatia. They consider politics as a dishonest occupation and they do not have trust in the government, parliament and political parties. Despite that, in relation to the generation of youth surveyed in 2004, both citizenship and political activism was somewhat increased. The generation of youth surveyed in 2013 has less trust in political parties but have twice the number of members joining political parties, so the authors concluded that in the overall atmosphere of political clientelism, a not so small portion of the youth see political engagement as an effective way of resolving their existential issues. At the same time, young people do not know enough about the ways in which democracy functions, they believe less and less in basic constitutional principles and they are more and more inclined to authoritarian solutions. Only one quarter think that democracy is the best form of organizing social and political life, and more than one third support the concept of 'great leaders'. Three quarters of students are not inclined to the idea of lowering the active right to vote to the age of 16, which could be attributed to their unpreparedness to fulfil their role as citizens. More than half think that schools should prepare students for the challenges of active citizenship and that the CCE as a school subject would encourage them to further engage in society.

The presented national research and results, along with the formal CCE evaluations¹⁶, point to several important conclusions:

- Students are interested to learn about HRE and EDC contents but their competences in this area, as measured in different ways during the years, are not satisfactory: in terms of knowledge, students show low (national assessments) to medium (ICCS 2016) familiarity with basic CCE concepts.
- Students do not reflect democratic values and beliefs connected to high-functioning democratic societies in some HRE and EDC targeted areas (for example, trust in institutions, overall engagement or recognition of equal rights of different groups).
- Teachers are constantly expressing the lack of detailed and focused teacher training education; a large number of those that were organized did not meet the expected level of quality. Personally motivated and organized learning is still prevailing among teachers.
- Teachers prefer teaching contents in relation to, for example, humanitarian actions, culture and/or ecology over the ones from the political realm. Group work, peer learning, project and research approach are methods that are being used more and more in classes,

16 Conducted in school years 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 by the NCEEE.

- but for some others such as debates or role playing teachers need more guidance.
- Materials for teaching and learning CCE were missing during every attempt of implementation, which could be resolved by preparing digital materials in the future and those can be easily shared, upgraded, changed or replaced.

Results of the first IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study in Croatia – ICCS 2016

Although quite a few pieces of national research were conducted on the school i.e. student samples, they were somewhat deficient in terms of focusing on CCE only. Another common point of regarding their often disappointing results when it comes to student knowledgeability or attitudes was that they were not delving deep enough into the cognitive and/or affective behaviour dimensions. Joining the ICCS 2016 study was an attempt to put previous results and accompanying criticism into the more international and comparable perspective where CCE is being researched by using calibrated instruments and strong concept frameworks.

The ICCS 2016 cycle is an extension of previous world-wide research in the area of civic and citizenship that was organized by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The first one was conducted under the name Six Subject Survey¹⁷ on the sample of fourteen year old students in 21 countries, and one of those six subjects was Civic Education. Second research was conducted in 1999 in 28 countries on the sample of fourteen year old students and in 16 countries on the samples of seventeen and eighteen year old students. The third international survey of student knowledge and attitudes in this area was the first ICCS, conducted in 2009, in 38 countries on the sample of fourteen year old students. In ICCS 2009, civic knowledge scale was established with three knowledge benchmarks i.e. four levels (from A being the highest level to D being the lowest level). Proficiency or achievement levels represented the conceptual hierarchy of civic and citizenship knowledge whereby higher levels reflect higher complexity of contents and cognitive processes. In ICCS 2016 these levels were very similar assuring the comparability of measurements and only “Below level D” was added for a better description of the results on the lower end of the scale. The results of the latest ICCS, on average in all 21 participating countries, show that 3%

17 The study was conducted by the IEA during 1966–1973. The six subjects were: Science, Reading Comprehension, Literature, English as a Foreign Language, French as a Foreign Language, and Civic Education. Report available at ERIC database, reference number: ED128349.

of students were below level D, 10% of students were at level D, 21% were at level C, 32% at level B and 35% at level A (Schulz, W. et al., 2018). Croatian results are comparable to international ones (to the average of participating countries) when looking at levels A and C and other levels differ. Overall, Croatian students achieved the result over the ICCS average (the national score was 531 points and ICCS 2016 average was 517) but when results from only European countries are taken into account (European ICCS 2016 average was 535 score points), this national result is quite close to European average. There are no students with below level D knowledge and on the level D there are (only) 4% of students. One fifth or 20% of students are on the level C, while most of students (40%) acquired level B. Almost the same ratio of students (36%) achieved the highest proficiency or level A. Overall, three quarters of students in Croatia were on the level B or above, which is a very important variable in all further ICCS 2016 data analysis.

When looking at the collected background data from student questionnaires, Croatia stands out in several themes and some of them echo the results from previously presented national studies conducted during the last decade. One of those is student trust in institutions – national and local government, national parliament, courts of justice, police and political parties. For participating countries in ICCS 2016 these results had two directions: in some countries, those with higher levels of civic knowledge had the lowest levels of trust in civic institutions (Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Lithuania, Mexico, Peru and the Russian Federation) and in others it was the opposite way i.e. students with higher levels of civic knowledge had more trust in civic institutions (in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden). Parental levels of education followed the same pattern, so in some countries it meant that students with at least one parent with a university degree expressed slightly more trust in civic institutions (in Flemish Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). The reverse pattern was evident in other countries, including Croatia, where students with at least one parent with a degree had lower average scores of institutional trust (Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Peru and the Russian Federation). Researchers concluded that these two patterns may be rooted in the duration and type of democracy in the two groups of countries (Schulz et al., 2018). Taking other sources into account this interpretation could be supplemented with some other factors, outside the scope of the study that could be of importance such as the economic profile of the country or the general

functioning of institutions in question (their efficiency, perception of nepotism and/or corruption, etc.).

Secondly, Croatian students had below average participation in youth organizations affiliated with a political party or union (4%), in a group of young people campaigning for an issue (3%) and in voluntary group helping the community (30%). The other finding was that in all but one country, students' experience with participation in community groups or organizations also had consistent and significant positive associations with students' expectations of engaging actively in societal issues as an adult. On average, one (national) standard deviation was associated with a very small increase in expected active political participation of little more than half a scale score point (Schulz et al., 2018). The one country differing from this pattern was Croatia. This could mean, that taking into consideration that Croatian students who are not mainly engaged or participating in community activities at present, do expect more out of themselves in the future – which could be an optimistic perspective.

The third distinctive finding from ICCS was in connection to students' attitudes towards European identity as a broader concept and the European Union as a political and geostrategic concept. Overall, the average student from European countries participating in ICCS 2016 expressed a strong sense of European identity. In Croatia, Finland, Italy, Malta, Norway and Slovenia, the average scores recorded were significantly above the ICCS 2016 European average (Losito et al., 2018). In relation to attitudes towards the EU, the highest national averages and percentages significantly above the European ICCS 2016 average were recorded in Croatia, Lithuania, and Malta (Losito et al., 2018). Croatian students expressed high positive attitudes towards almost all researched dimensions within the European student questionnaire. For example, for the scale of cooperation among European countries, the highest average score was recorded for Croatia with 54 score points due to the fact that on every cooperation question, Croatian students showed attitudes above the ICCS average score.

Conclusions

The new curricular reform that was (re)started in 2019 confirmed the place of CCE as one of the cross-curricular themes that shall be taught to all students in every level of pre-tertiary education. In theory, every teacher should dedicate their time and resources for all seven cross-curricular themes and find contents overlapping with their own main subject of teaching. Through meticulous inter-subject planning that should

be done within each school's teacher collective, at least on the level of subject groups, desired curricular outcomes for each level (grade) should be planned ahead, incorporating or linking cross-curricular content with all other school content and activities. The previous monitoring of Health Education and CCE implementation showed that school collectives are not very familiar with such a group method of planning and only some portion of schools are successfully operationalizing cross-curriculum contents through school level planning. Therefore the vast majority of teachers are only formally writing down in administrative documentation the connection between the theme from their obligatory subject to something similar or overlapping in the cross-curricular theme and noting it as CCE content that has been taught to students. Very often students are not even aware that these connections are made with particular cross-curricular theme, and only the teacher's note of the class reflects that. Conscious teachers are coping with this semi-obligatory and semi-visible approach very well, as they would with any other challenge, but those not willing to implement additional cross-curricular contents (for any possible reason) have a large space available for not having to do anything substantial. In lower grades (ISCED 1), the real process of interdisciplinary flows more smoothly due to the fact that there is one home-room teacher and program that has many themes corresponding to contents of cross-curricular themes for younger students. When it comes to higher level (ISCED 2 and 3) subject, classes take most of the daily capacities and cross-curricular content are usually being 'squeezed' into home-room classes (one school hour per week) depending on the issue that the particular class is having. For example, absenteeism could be connected to *Learn how to learn*; organizing field trips could be connected to *Entrepreneurship* or *Civic and Citizenship Education* if it includes visits to some state institutions; in the upper grades, the problem of smoking (addictions) is connected to *Health*, etc. In short, cross-curricular themes are being addressed when it is convenient to take everything else from the schedule into consideration first.

Although there was enough theoretical power and practical international experience behind every form of CCE delivery – as a separate subject (obligatory or optional), as cross-curricular content or through the school experience on the whole – Croatia has repeatedly opted for the cross-curricular approach in the last twenty years. There were two experimental implementations of CCE as a separate school subject but those were on voluntary school/student basis, so the methodology was limited in many aspects. Also, implemented curriculums (the ones from 2012 and 2014) had a very confined time before other documents or directions were

delivered to schools to implement. Practice showed that reasons for not having cross-curricular themes organized in any different way were mainly more of an organizational nature. First of all, having to change many legislature documents to be able to implement the new subject (probably 'at the expense' of the existing subjects) always had strong opposition. Secondly, there is simply not enough time in the already overloaded student schedules for new subjects and the issue of who would teach cross-curricular themes as a separate subject is also of relevance. Last, but not least, if time and capacities are limited why and how can one choose one of those themes over another to become a subject due to the fact that all themes becoming new subjects was never a possibility without the prerequisite of changing the overall concept of subject-oriented teaching. Another stream of "arguments" in these matters are more worldview issues, especially in the case of Health Education and then also CCE, where parents, supported by the right wing political parties and NGOs, protested that school has no right to transfer worldview content to children and that this is the exclusive right of parents only (based on the Constitution¹⁸). There were alternative and opposite interpretations, based on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, signed declarations in the area of education, national strategies and their programs of activities, and other documents in which human rights and freedoms, as well as multi-faced student education and upbringing model, were nominally accepted as the only valid and implemented version of educational goals¹⁹.

For the sake of compromising, the situation with cross-curricular themes was left as it is (and always has been) to the many governments that have changed in the past twenty years and the practice of everybody being responsible 'on paper' and nobody really assigned to the practical tasks of implementation remained. Nevertheless, another set of activities in recent years gave stimulus to the CCE, and other cross-curricular themes, and these were additional projects coming from outside the formal and usual state funding of the schooling system (whether by local communities, national government or EU and/or other supra-nation-

18 Article 64. Parents have the obligation for the raising, supporting and schooling of children and have the right and freedom to independently decide on the matters of child's upbringing.

19 Besides documents from the Ministry of Education, these include: the National Plan of Activities for the Rights and Interests of Children (2006–2012); the National Programme for Roma, of 2002, and the Action Plan for Roma Inclusion (2005–2015); the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2006–2010; 2011–2015); the National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (2006–2011; 2012–2016); the National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (2008–2011; 2013–2016); and the National Programme for Youth (2009–2013; 2014–2017).

al funds and/or organizations). Such projects were developed within the schools themselves and are mostly implemented to resolve some important school and community issues. By writing, organizing and carrying out complex project activities, usually in some form of cooperation, school capacities had grown both in terms of material assets but more importantly in terms of human capacities and competence as well as in the diversity of content that students were in contact with. Some schools, by organizing their own projects through additional national or international funding, grew to be centres of excellence with a remarkable open school climate enabling the learning of a variety of content. As Diković and Letina (2016) concluded, the successful implementation of human rights education requires a school culture where participation based on democratic principles is encouraged and valued, providing students with opportunities to be involved in making decisions which affect them.

Previously conducted national research indicated a rather worrying lack of student familiarity with basic CCE concepts (especially on the level of secondary schools) but ICCS 2016 results placed students leaving elementary school in the middle position on the international scale and they achieved an average score for European participating countries. Furthermore, ICCS 2016 confirmed that Croatian students are sufficiently involved in school activities but only partially engaged in civic activities in their community, they still do not trust national institutions and tend to see equity as negotiable and dependent to other social circumstances and not as a universal human right.

At present, none of the national assessments of cross-curricular content are active, although there is a multilevel evaluation of new experimental curriculums (entered into a portion of schools in 2018/2019 and in cascades to all elementary and secondary schools from 2019/2020) and coordinated by the Ministry of Science and Education. In this overall situation of continuous reforms, but at the same time crystallized condition of the CCE as cross-curricular theme, the conducted ICCS 2016, as well as its next cycle in 2022, will impose itself as a strong instrument of gathering information on CCE. Neither the implementation of these contents, nor evaluations of its implementation should be the sole purpose. The real purpose should never be left out of sight and that is fulfilling all the modern states' promise to their citizens that young people can and will acquire state-of-the-art knowledge, develop a constructive approach to challenges around them, nurture democratic views on the most important political and social themes so they become engaged people who are positively contributing to their communities.

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