

**Participation Now!**  
**Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change**

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**Report**

**Forum 2**  
**Teaching Citizenship Education in Schools**

**by Dina El-Wakil**  
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**Egypt**

**Conception & Realisation, Inputs/ Moderation by:**

Tahany Shemis, Misr Elkheir Foundation (Egypt)

Anu Toots, Institute of Politics and Governance Tallinn University (Estonia)

Marinko Banjac, Faculty of Social Science University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

**Moderator:**

Petr Cáp, Civic Education Centre Masaryk University Brno (Czech Republic)

**Summary:**

There was a significant change in the debating atmosphere between the first and the second sessions. During the first session, because of the large number of those who attended, had to be a lot more organized and focused primarily on giving the presenters their allocated time to present and then following with the collection of 10 questions from the audience, having the presenters respond, and then collecting 10 more questions. It was more Q&A based and left little room for debate but it was the best that could be done given the amount of time allocated and the number of those in the audience. During the second session, however, with only two people in the audience, the session became more personal and more discussion/debate oriented. The presenters Tahany Shemis from the Misr Elkheir Foundation from Egypt; Anu Toots from the Institute of Politics and Governance from Tallinn University from Estonia and Marinko Banjac from the Faculty of Social Science University of Ljubljana from Slovenia joined the moderator Petr Cáp from the Civic Education Centre Masaryk from the University Brno in Czech Republic, the rapporteur Dina El-Wakil from The Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute, and the audience on a round table and were given guiding questions by the moderator Petr Cáp as a help to lead the discussion. As such, the presenters discussed relevant aspects of their presentations and the floor was open for discussion.

Whereas the first session was run in a more academic way in which presenters gave a talk and then answered questions of the audience, the second session was more discussion-based and allowed for more of an exchange of ideas. However, there was a sense that both sessions completed each other nonetheless.

## **First Session**

### **Part I:**

#### **Introduction:**

The moderator Petr Cáp from the Civic Education Centre Masaryk from the University Brno in Czech Republic began the session by stressing the importance of focusing our discussions on the questions that have been the central guiding questions of the conference:

1. What can we learn from each other? What are common concerns and differences?
2. Which narratives/images determine mutual perceptions?
3. What are the consequences of citizenship and human rights education in the face of recent changes?
4. Where does exchange and cooperation make sense?

The targets that were indicated to the forum were based on the results from the forum sessions on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November. A few findings from these results were posted on the board and the audience was asked to keep these issues in mind when listening to the presenters and in the discussions that are to follow. These findings were the following quotes: “manipulation of the masses is easy”; “the masses are poor and uneducated”; “teach children how to use web 2.0”; “teach teachers how to use web 2.0.”

The moderator Petr Cáp also asked the audience to consider the following questions: What are the current challenges for civic education in this day and age? ; What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values are to be taught? ; What should the role of teachers be?

Following the Petr Cáp’s introduction and efforts to frame the debate, the presenters were then asked to provide their input on the issue through their presentations.

### **Part II:**

Tahany Shemis from the Misr Elkheir Foundation in Egypt introduced herself as a practitioner in education who has been working as a teacher and in the training of teachers for many years. She began by sharing her definition of citizenship education (CE) and explaining why CE is important in and for Egypt. According to Tahany Shemis, CE is about enabling people to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for their own lives and it develops responsible citizens. She then posed a few rhetorical questions in relation to CE in Egypt: Are students in Egypt taught what it means to be a citizen? Do they know that there is more than one side to any issue and recognize the need to seek information? Are they taught to question, inquire, participate, work in teams and uphold values such as freedom, equality, and respect of human rights? In order to answer these questions, Tahany Shemis began to give an overview of the problems with the Egyptian educational system. According to her, in Egypt, knowledge is spoon-fed to students and they are not encouraged to question, analyse, or think. The education system in Egypt was highly centralized, lacked vision,

strategic planning was authoritarian, had inefficient supervision and incompetent human capital. The Egyptian curriculum was knowledge-based, wouldn't promote key competencies for learning, and was disintegrated. School textbooks contained superficial knowledge and continued to be the main source of knowledge for students. Teachers lacked adequate qualifications, academic preparation, their salaries were low, lacked professional development, the teachers were overwhelmed with duties unrelated to teaching such as administrative activities, and they were not trained to promote citizenship values such as equality, open discourse, etc.

Teaching was teacher-centred, lecture-based, unplanned ineffective group activities, and focused on the assessment of definitions, facts, and concepts rather than on the ability to think. Tahany Shemis argued that in the actual social context in Egypt, loyalty to one's religious or ethnic groups is fierce, authoritarian values dominate, freedom of speech is contained, corruption prevails, there is no public accountability, liberal freedoms are outlawed, and public workers do not protest policies. Overall, she concluded that basic concepts of CE are non-existent in the Egyptian educational system. Tahany Shemis then proposed the question of 'What do we do?' and answered it by stating that we need to develop active citizens in the community through CE for citizenship and that both teaching and learning for active 21<sup>st</sup> century learner citizens should be a process that is co-managed by both teachers and students.

### Part III:

The floor was then handed over to Anu Toots from the Institute of Politics and Governance from Tallinn University from Estonia who focused her presentation on the question of whether or not schools are coping with the participatory challenge.

Anu Toots introduced herself by explaining that although from Estonia, her profile is based on comparative research and so she will not focus on Estonia but will compare countries around 2 seas: the Baltics and the Mediterranean. Toots explained that by doing so she is addressing the tension between North and South while also touching on similarities. She also added that despite the level of development of these countries and their CE traditions and systems, they still suffer from some fundamental problems that were touched on in Tahany Shemis' presentation. Anu Toots then proceeded to go through the slides on her power point presentation highlighting the following points using data collected from the largest global survey IEA ICCS 2009 in which 10,000 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and teachers were surveyed. According to Toots, CCE as a political priority is currently low due to the European fiscal crises and right-wing governments who value economic education more than CCE. Using the 'curriculum priorities table', she showed that overall the level of emphasis in European countries is still strongly focused on the simple provision of knowledge and facts. Teachers, however, prioritized critical and independent thinking; yet, participation in local communities wouldn't be a matter of formal schooling and, thus, had very low priority. Furthermore, although teachers might prioritize certain issues that are not in the curriculum, they wouldn't feel competent enough to teach them. There was a gap among teachers between priorities and competences.

Anu Toots then moved on to the issue of students' active participation in classes to make classes interactive, valuable, and interesting. In Italy, Spain, and Cyprus the students were more engaged in leading class activities whereas in other European countries listed on the table, that wouldn't be the case. Furthermore, student engagement and teacher competencies were not directly related, so the question arose whether we should push for active participation in making CE lessons.

There was more participation in school governance among teachers than among students. Teachers were cooperating, discussing development plan of schools, dealing with social issues of students, etc. For students, governance meant electing class representatives, a strong student union, supporting each other, etc. Teachers were not working on making the school a model of democracy; instead, they saw it as a class that provides knowledge. The only country that has actively engaged students and teachers was Poland.

Anu Toots then posed the following questions for discussion: Do we need to change policy framework for CCE? How can we enhance teacher competencies in key areas? Is the low citizenship participation among teachers and students in schools a problem?

#### **Part IV:**

Following Anu Toots' input, Marinko Banjac from the University of Ljubljana from Slovenia presented his project on supporting the EU concept for young students by engaging youth building through teaching European democratic citizenship ([www.aktivna.mladina.si](http://www.aktivna.mladina.si)). Marinko Banjac began with a brief introduction of the education system in Slovenia, highlighting that CE is compulsory for students in years seven, eight and nine. Marinko Banjac's one-year project, which is scheduled to end in January 2013, fosters and develops new approaches to providing EU content both to teachers and students. The project has three key phases:

1. Research and analysis and theoretical reflection on non-formal/formal teaching material.
2. Development of 4 teacher manuals focusing on 4 themes: EU in everyday life; European identity/citizenship; EU youth; and EU democratic participation.
3. Workshops and a final conference.

He then highlighted some of the faced problems such as the discrepancy between the needs and possibilities of inclusion of the EU content into the curriculum and responding to the new socio-political realities.

Marinko Banjac then concluded that although we are all focusing on empowerment and introduction of new values for students, the EU seemed to be avoiding participatory ideas and instead focusing more on encouraging entrepreneurship/competitiveness. Thus, the EU would encourage more individualism in societies. Neoliberal ideas of this nature were dangerous and should be replaced with more participatory ideas.

To wrap up the presentations, moderator Petr Cáp concluded that now we can see that we have more in common than we think. A new social contract was being constructed and the existing one-in-place-Europe seemed somehow broken. Pupils were going to schools with underpaid teachers who were not critical and the school system as a whole was generally more focused on knowledge and skills than attitude. It got clear that what both regions have in common is that schools are not prepared for the turbulent times we are living in.

## Part V:

### Question & Answer / Open Discussion:

The participants posed the following questions to the three speakers:

1. Education in Egypt now developed radical Islamists and under the current Muslim Brotherhood regime, this is very dangerous. After portraying the miserable situation of the Egyptian education system, you didn't mention any solutions or how the system can be changed.
2. What experiences do you have in the inclusion of schools as a whole in the building of the curriculum?
3. We need more qualitative research on topic of CE because this ICSS data is not accurate. The teachers' opinions contradict all qualitative data and researches on the topic. In Poland there is no involvement in the decision-making process contrary to what was presented in Toots data. My proposal is to create a common project to translate the qualitative reports of many countries to allow us to access reports of other countries and find out more about each other's systems before comparing them. A survey on opinions of students and teachers is not sufficient.

The speakers' responses were as follows:

Anu Toots (Institute of Politics and Governance from Tallinn University from Estonia):

In response to question number three, quantitative comparative surveys can compare a large enough sample to reduce risk of discrepancy. As for qualitative data, schools are hard to be studied and especially teachers; so if you go to schools to do a research, it can be a political show-off about how democratic and how participatory they are if they know that there will be a visit. If they just translate the info then they can't compare them. Although I agree that there is some value in qualitative and quantitative data. And as a short comment on question number two: students are interested in participating but active participation is lower than interest. There is data that demonstrates that.

Marinko Banjac (Faculty of Social Science University of Ljubljana from Slovenia):

We collected some data and found it hard to motivate students to contribute in schools/community and be active citizens; so it's easier to write a manual than to have motivated pupils who will actually be interested in those topics. It's not easy to stimulate them and we need to ask ourselves what the best practices are in order to have their attention.

Tahany Shemis (Misr Elkheir Foundation from Egypt):

Although in Egypt the situation is bleak we still have examples of schools/teachers who were able to involve students in activities where the teachers worked in collaboration with students and made them feel they had ownership of projects, which made the students more interested in engaging. We need civil society to push the Ministry of Education to make changes. Civil society needs to push for policy change. I know the word critical thinker is repeated often but we need to practice critical thinking and analyse all of it while also making teachers reflect on their practices and feel that they are respectable citizens. The teachers need to be heard too.

Then, there came up three more questions from the audience, while there were only five minutes remaining:

1. Would love to know your values because the values of CE practitioners are not clear. Do you believe kids are active citizens based on rights or do we need to train them to become citizens?
2. The Netherlands MOE, there is a participation law that gives students in secondary schools the right to give consent on finances of schools, how much time they spend on certain subjects, etc. Are schools in your countries bound by laws to give students room to participate?
3. Can we create a platform that allows us to cooperate together and exchange methods/techniques/experiences?

The speakers' responses were as follows:

Anu Toots: The students should be regarded as citizens here and now but not just in the future.

Tahani Shemis: My value is it's a child's right to be an active citizen.

Marinko Banjac: In response to question number two, we have school councils, classes who can participate at those councils, so, yes, in some ways children can participate/ learn this culture in schools.

## **Second session**

### **Part I:**

#### **Introduction:**

Now the setting changed; the speakers moved from the panel to roundtables in order to turn the discussion into a more casual, relaxed one. The participants were asked to introduce themselves. The two participants were Alessandra Pedagna Leccese from the International Federation of Educative Communities (F.I.C.E.) from Italy and Elizabeth Turek from polis - Centre for Citizenship Education from Austria.

The moderator Petr Cáp focused the discussion on the issue of "authority": We are living in the crisis of authority in the modern state, or lack of authority. How can we promote critical thinking in authoritarian regimes?

The speakers were interested in having a roundtable discussion that touches on points raised in their presentations instead of going through the presentations a second time. They re-focused their presentations around the issue of authority to help in the discussion.

Tahany Shemis claimed that "authority" prevails over the term "citizen": We are an authoritarian society where students are given unplanned tasks to complete. Student performance was assessed through tests alone.

Alessandra Pedagna Leccese (F.I.C.E., Italy): If teachers don't learn the necessary skills, what can they do? Governments should realize that teachers should be at the pull position in society because of their difficult task. When we say "young people you are the future" then we are denying the present. Society should realize the importance of teachers and teachers should update their knowledge continuously. If we don't have the right tools to do that, we are talking about nothing.



Elizabeth Turek (polis - Centre for Citizenship Education, Austria): It is important to prepare teachers and to give them freedom; it's not only up to the teachers. In Austria we have very engaged teachers and they work in their free time. After 30 years they get burnt out.

Petr Cáp: You are now promoting citizenship education but if elites are against it and if it's not in the line of their own interests then it may be difficult.

There followed a discussion about human right education, the issue of values of human rights and about how much freedom can be given to teachers in transitional societies that don't have clear identified values.

The resulting questions were:

1. Is it a policy issue or is it role of civil society or is government?
2. How do you include human rights in curricula?

Anu Toots: In Estonia, authority used to be like Egypt. 25 years after the fall of the communist regime, we are somewhere in the middle of the road; so in some aspects we still have the autocratic mode of authority and in other instances there is no authority at all. Curricula for post-communist schools contain authority because whatever is written in curricula should be taught. Are values that we regard as important included in curricula? What do we include? Teachers are those who lack authority. The poor teacher stands in class, receives demands from the banking sector, minority groups, authority groups, etc. and has to manage all the different topics and at the same time. Right after the fall of communism, teachers became positivists telling the facts only without an opinion. There was no critical thinking, due to the fear of expressing views, teachers are seen as mere teachers, not as citizens. The double perception of role of teacher is harmful because the teacher becomes a split between the two and this hinders critical thinking.

Alessandra Pedagna Lecce: We have society vs. school. The problem or questions is what is the right position for the school? Should they be a step ahead, at the same level or just behind? In democracies, schools should stand a lot of steps ahead in order to be able to point ideals/values; also in opposition with the government and the society if necessary. In this view, teachers should be farsighted people and not just depend on supervisors. They should be mental leaders and open-minded.

Anu Toots: There is a difference between an individual and a citizen. Civic education has been depoliticized, we don't speak about power or politics, we talk about everyday skills and this is the wrong way to go because citizens are about the way to power. The conception of citizen is relation to authority. How are power relations in schools, which are basically prototypes of government? Participation in schools is important. We still see civic education as a classroom subject. Political issues are the key in civic education.

One more issue arose about whether or not politics should be brought into schools because of the paradox in society of de-politicization vs. active citizenry. It's a double-sided discourse.

**The conclusions of second session were formulated as follows:**

We are all global citizens. We face similar problems in promoting citizen education in schools and we need further ideas for cooperation. We need to engage with the policy makers and make the change from above as well and explain importance of citizenship education to the policymakers. Teachers and students are easy to engage but what is the point of making them active and then not giving them room to use what they learn. The governments and the top need to be less centralized. It's important to engage all levels of the involved students, besides teachers, parents, and policy makers. More exchanges and more organizations that bridge the gap between east and west are important, too.