

## Report - International conference

### International conference: 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2011, Faculty of Social Sciences

On Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 a one-day international conference, entitled “Towards a new age of citizenship education” had been held at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana. The conference had been organized as part of the project “Citizen(ship) in a new age”. It had been divided into two sessions; the objective of the first was to present potential institutional solutions in the field of citizenship education and depict the current state of affairs in the field in Slovenia, while the second session hosted a round table of representatives from formal and non-formal citizenship education in Slovenia and had sought to deliver a discussion on the future guidelines for the development of the field in Slovenia.

### Introductory addresses



*Prof. dr. Jernej Pikalo in his opening address*

*In his introductory address the head of the project prof. dr. Jernej Pikalo emphasized that the central aim of the conference was to reflect the institutional setting of citizenship education in Slovenia in the sense of accumulating the knowledge and outcomes of the research into the current institutional setting in Slovenia conducted through the project so far, and with reference to institutional solutions in practice in Germany and the Czech Republic.*

Prof. dr. Bojko Bučar, the vice-dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences followed with his welcome address, by characterising citizenship education as one of the most contemporary topics, not only for Slovenia, but for a wider European space. A reflection on the impact of citizenship education had been the central thought of the presentation delivered by prof. dr. Igor Lukšič, the Minister of Education and Sport of the Government of Slovenia. He highlighted the importance of citizenship education particularly for overcoming the status quo in Slovenia, characterized by a lack of politics or the prevalence of anti-politics. The latter, was seemingly apparent in the ubiquitous negative perception of politics and in attempts to obviate politics and political institutions.

*Prof. dr. Igor Lukšič,  
Minister of Education and Sport, Government of Slovenia*

*The Minister stressed that the existing status quo needs to be overcome through reaffirmation of politics and restoration of its relevance in connecting the people and reinstating the structures of knowledge. In this context citizenship education plays a central part in the modern world of global processes and the integration of local spaces in these processes. He concluded that it is through citizenship education that this knowledge needs to be delivered to the citizens.*



## **Institutional good practice cases**

### **The German Federal Agency for Civic Education**

Subsequent to the introductory addresses were the presentations of the institutional solutions in the field of citizenship education in Germany and the Czech Republic. The first had been presented as a good practice case with a relatively long tradition, while the second served as a new example of a possible institutional setting. In the first part of her presentation, Ms. Petra Grüne, representative of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) concentrated on the historical aspects of establishing the federal agency, giving particular emphasis to the motives, objectives and the process of achieving legitimacy. In her words denazification had been the central motive for establishing the federal agency.



*Ms. Petra Grüne, German Federal Agency for Civic Education*

*The Federal Agency presents an institutional framework where a conviction, that the process establishing democratic political structures needs to be fostered and supported by an educational system centred on teaching and learning democracy, prevails.*

Consequently, the federal agency had been established as a central institution, coordinating political education with the objective of developing a democratic citizenry. It also acts as a focal point, connecting institutions of political education established in individual German Federal States (*Bundesländer*). Ms. Grüne stressed that the establishment of the federal agency had been accompanied by activities of other actors in the field such as churches, unions and political parties, who cooperated in developing the system of political education in Germany and assisted in determining the central aim of citizenship education, which has remained the same to this day. The central aims and objectives of citizenship education in Germany are consolidating democratic thought, developing understanding on political topics,

issues and contemporary socio-political processes, increasing participation and limiting political extremism.



**Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung**

In the second part of her presentation, Ms. Petra Grüne focused on the institutional structure and the activities conducted by the federal agency. She explained the mission and tasks of the scientific and supervisory board. The former monitors the scientific adequacy of the work conducted and is composed of representatives from different scientific fields, whereby the scientific fields represented in the board change continuously in order to prevent appropriation of the citizenship education by an individual scientific field. The supervisory board also known as the board of parliamentarians is composed of members of the Federal Parliament. Its central role is to supervise and ensure political neutrality of activities conducted by the federal agency and prevent its potential public manipulation. Ms. Grüne also noted that due to high public exposure and its central position within the field of citizenship education, the federal agency is also non-formally monitored by other socio-political actors like political parties and civil society organisations.

In presenting the activities of the federal agency, Ms. Grüne focused on the two pillars of activities, explaining that the first is structured around activities of financial support provided to multiple institutions of citizenship education and as such in effect represents the indirect activities of the federal agency, while the second is exclusively composed of activities directly implemented by the federal agency. These include different projects, multimedia content, didactic tools and printed materials with a common characteristic of being specifically adapted for different target groups from pupils, students and young adults to migrants and the general population. Concluding her presentation, Ms. Grüne addressed the importance of the Federal Agency for Civic Education and its status as a state institution, which guarantees stability in the sense of human and financial resources. Nevertheless, she also stressed that principle of independence along with the scientific and political neutrality supervision, was significant and had generated wide public consensus in Germany. It is this public consensus that represents the fundamental prerequisite for the general approval of the federal agency among all socio-political actors and the general public in Germany.

## The Czech Civic Education Centre

Following the presentation of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, was the presentation delivered by Mr. Ondřej Matějka, director of the Civic Education Centre in the Czech Republic (*Centrum Občanského Vzdělávání*), who touched upon some of the reasons behind the establishment of a central institution for citizenship education in the Czech Republic, and outlined the process, mission, structure and activities of the centre.



*Mr. Matějka explained that the most significant motives behind the establishment of the centre were a growing frustration with political life in the Czech Republic, decreased participation, distrust in democratic political institutions and a resulting need to empower the voters through education and training with the general objective of securing conditions for better living.*

In his presentation of the process of establishing the centre (established in 2009), he noted that the formation of the institution had been a joint initiative of NGOs, the ministry of education and universities. In this context the ministry had been in charge of securing the start-up funds, which had been predominately utilized for activities of the international working group that had developed the central concepts and institutional framework of citizenship education and formulated the strategic plan for establishing the centre. In his view, the key principles of establishment were stable financing, independence and simultaneous political orientation in terms of addressing controversial socio-political topics, partnerships with NGOs, the state and the universities, and coordination of citizenship education in the Czech Republic as an integral institutional approach. One of the central missions of the centre is the development of citizenship education beyond the scope of formal education and in terms of lifelong learning for all citizens, which is, in his view, crucial for the appropriate functioning of democracy, stimulating citizens' participation and popularizing the impact of citizenship education.

Mr. Matějka continued by presenting the structural setting, where he emphasized the role of the council of the centre, which nominates the director, approves operational plans and monitors the operations of the centre. It is composed from representatives of the university, non-governmental institutions and political parties. By his account the issue of neutrality in forming the council is evident in the fact that the council still hadn't been formed in its entirety.



*Mr. Ondřej Matějka, director of the Czech Civic Education Centre*

*The Czech Civic Education centre implements training programmes for citizenship education' teachers, translates and adapts international educational materials, conducts expert analyses in the field of citizenship education and actively conducts networking on an international and European scale.*

In his concluding remarks Mr. Matějka presented the main activities of the centre and touched upon a number of challenges they faced. In his view of future developments, the centre could also act as a consulting partner to several ministries in developing and implementing public calls for proposals relating to citizenship education and could also consult different curricular development institutions. Mr. Matějka concluded by pointing out that the main challenges for the operations of the centre were the instability of the political environment, issues of uncertain and unstable financing and a public opinion unfavourable for citizenship education.

### **Institutional framework analysis presentation**

The presentations of the institutional solutions from Germany and the Czech Republic were followed by a presentation of the main results of analyses on the institutional framework in citizenship education in Slovenia, conducted as part of the project led by prof. dr. Jernej Pikalo. Prof. Pikalo noted the progress achieved in the field in Slovenia over the last years and added that the progress had also been documented by international comparative studies. Nevertheless, he pointed to a number of weaknesses and challenges of the existing system of citizenship education in Slovenia. Prof. dr. Pikalo viewed the issue of expertise in citizenship education materials and content, particularly content directly relating to political science, as one of the paramount weaknesses of the existing state, where the analyses conducted identified factual as well as substance related errors. An additional weakness, in his view, was the fact that there is no specialized subject for citizenship education at the high school (i.e. secondary) level of education and that little progress had been achieved in lifelong learning programmes on citizenship education. Prof. Pikalo stressed that it is the political capacity of the citizens which guarantees proper functioning of democratic institutions.

Assessing the institutional setting, he touched upon the issue of cooperation among a multitude of different actors working in the field of citizenship education in Slovenia (Ministry of Education and Sport, non-governmental organisations, research institutions, the National Education Institute) and identified a necessity for the formation of a coordinating platform, which would link the fragmented actors and monitor the general processes in the field, but allow room for individual projects to run uninhibited.



*Prof. dr. Jernej Pikalo, Head of the project  
Citizen(ship) in a new age*

*The joint platform for citizenship education would address the issues of dispersed projects, managing human and financial resources, stable interactions among different actors and ensuring synergies of results. Prof. Pikalo added that in this context one of the existing weaknesses is the loss and non-transferability of good practices in the field. He concluded by underlying the role of the joint platform as possible institutional solution for addressing the prevailing issue of an evident lack of cooperation in the fields of non-formal and lifelong learning citizenship education.*

### **Round table of citizenship education' stakeholders in Slovenia**

The second session of the conference hosted a round table of key stakeholders in the field of citizenship education. As the chair prof. dr. Jernej Pikalo noted in his introduction, that the purpose of the round table was to join different actors in the field of citizenship education and reflect on the possibilities of a joint conduct and cooperation in the field. The round table hosted 6 participants, namely Ms. Tanja Popit from the **National Educational Institute**, Mr. Mitja Sardoč from the **Educational Research Institute**, Mr. Tadej Beočanin, from the **National Youth Council of Slovenia**, Ms. Alenka Elena Begant from the **NGO - Centre for Civic Education**, Mr. Andrej Sotošek from the **Slovenian Institute of Adult Education** and Ms. Andreja Barle Lakota from the **Ministry of Education and Sport**. Prof. Pikalo explained to the participants that a joint statement on citizenship education had been drafted within the project and was based on the analyses previously conducted.



*Round table of citizenship  
education' stakeholders in  
Slovenia*

*The objective of the joint  
statement was to voice a  
common agreement and  
strive for the development  
and set up of a joint  
platform in the field of  
citizenship education.*

Subsequent to the introduction, Ms. Tanja Popit emphasized that currently the cooperation among different actors in the field was limited or practically non-existent. In her view most of the connections between different actors had been formed through non-formal channels, which need to be enhanced, intensified and formalised. That is why she supported the idea of connecting the actors through a joint platform in the form of an institution, which would facilitate continuous interaction among different actors and would represent a fundament for future developments in the field.

Mr. Mitja Sarđoč from the Educational Research Institute also supported the initiative to set up a joint platform as the current situation is unsatisfactory in terms of materials and teacher training. He noted that the platform represents a viable institutional solution for addressing these issues, but added that the initiative also carries with it a high level of responsibility.

Mr. Tadej Beočanin the representative of the National Youth Council of Slovenia began by presenting their activities in the field and noted that most of their activities focused on developing responsible and active citizenship. He continued by stressing that as part of the non-governmental sector the council supports development of activities by their members with a strong democratic value and that active citizenship is fostered mostly through cooperation with schools.

*Ms. Alenka Elena Begant,  
Mr. Adrej Sotošek and  
Ms. Andreja Barle Lakota at  
the stakeholders' roundtable  
(left to right)*

*Ms. Alenka Elena  
Begant from the  
Centre of Civic  
Education also began  
by introducing the  
activities of her  
organisation and  
stressed the  
importance of their  
cooperation with the  
Council of Europe.*



She added that the centre as a part of the non-governmental sector always had the ambition and vision of connecting different stakeholders in the field, but had faced issues relating to stable financing. She concluded by adding that recently they had been attempting to acquire more secure and stable state funding.

Mr. Adrej Sotošek, representing the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education agreed with the previous speakers on the lack of a coherent policy in the field of citizenship education and stressed that this lack is even more evident in adult education. In his opinion policies should take into account teachers' skills, competencies and motives and special attention should be given to vulnerable groups as participation in political as well as socio-political processes is weak. In respect to adult education and active citizenship Mr. Sotošek also drew attention to the intergenerational aspect of active citizenship. He supported the idea of establishing a joint

platform as it, in his view, represents an opportunity for formulating common strategic solutions for different issues in the field of citizenship education.

Ms. Andreja Barle Lakota from the Ministry of Education and Sport stressed that citizenship education had received funding in an amount which is not insignificant and that there was a large number of institutions and organisations active in the field in Slovenia. For her the key issue is, in light of the general consensus on the need to develop citizenship education, where are the main obstacles. In her opinion the answer lies in different conceptualizations and understanding of citizenship among different sets of governments and in the highly politicized approach to citizenship education, where the crucial “battle” on the issue unfortunately many times takes place in classrooms. Therefore, it should be the primary objective to differentiate among the functions of the ministries and other governmental agencies, such as expert councils, which occasionally paralyze the possibilities of establishing new practices, new measures and new policies.

*In the concluding round of comments the audience had also been invited to present their views on the issue at hand. Dr. Marina Hacin-Lukšič from the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and dr. Andrej Lukšič from the Faculty of Social Sciences joined the debate by pointing to some of the organizational and institutional possibilities for the establishment of a joint platform.*



Dr. Andrej Lukšič suggested that the joint platform should be based on the concept of democracy or democratic citizenship, which could serve as a base for preventing further politicization of the concept of citizenship. He added that such an approach would prevent allegations that the joint platform functions as a political tool in the hands of party politics.

Continuing this line of discussion, Ms. Alenka Elena Begant, expressed concerns that a particular field would assert increased influence over such a platform and in the long run entirely appropriate citizenship education. Prof. dr Jernej Pikalo responded by asserting that one of the motives behind the joint platform was to prevent such developments by providing a space for continuous cooperation of all the stakeholders. He added that the best synergetic results could be achieved in this manner.



*In conclusion to the round table all the participants agreed that the inputs of the discussion would be appropriately added to the drafted joint statement on citizenship education development in Slovenia.*