

Aspects of civic education in Poland - then and now

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Abstract— An author shows how civic education was taught in the period of the Second Republic. The study characterises operations carried out by the Federation of Polish Unions of Country Defenders in the field of patriotic impact on the youth. There is also discussed the operation of the organisation the Polish White Cross in the field of teaching civic education during school clubs classes. The author carried out the examination on civic education among students. The students responded to actions taken in school about building of social bonds with school, region and country.

Keywords— civic education, the youth, students, the Second Republic, education, paramilitary organization, citizenship.

I. INTRODUCTION

CIVIC education has accompanied Polish education since the beginnings of the school system. For centuries, young Poles have been educated to become good citizens. Before the introduction of civic education into the curricula, some elements of educational activities had been complemented with the role models of particular eras. It was especially visible in the times of the Commission of National Education (KEN), when civic education was equal, or even above education, as the formation of righteous citizens became the basis for the functioning of contemporary society. As early as during the School of Chivalry, citizens were prepared for the so-called public service through proper moral education and by fostering patriotic mind-set. Thus, at the times of the Enlightenment, schools were the centres for the formation of open-minded citizens. Such actions were also pursued in the subsequent periods.

II. PROBLEM FORMULATION

It is worth considering how civic education is implemented nowadays and whether the modern school refers to the historical model.

A. Subsection

The spirit of civic education perpetrated the times of the Second Republic. Once Poland regained its independence, effort was made to prepare the whole society to assist the army for the main task was to provide security to the country.

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Therefore, both youth and adults were subject to civic education. The Federation of Polish Unions of Country Defenders held an important position in teaching adults [1]. The organisation originated in Poland and brought together veterans' organizations, whose main task - apart from military training - was to have patriotic impact on the youth. The "Instruction on educational and cultural work in the army" published in 1931 by the Ministry of Military Affairs was the document which conditioned educational activity in this environment [2]. According to its provisions, the so-called educational talks were to be held, the topics including knowledge of the Polish state, information about the war, national army and the rights and duties of the soldier and the citizen. People were encouraged to actively participate in celebrating national holidays, personality traits were formed and national traditions cultivated. Another step was creation, in 1934, of the Military Institute of Science and Education which was to coordinate the educational activity through improvement of education, general culture and civic awareness of the soldiers [3]. In its normative documents, the Federation clearly promoted civic education. The statute of 1929 read that the aim was to prepare "a citizen-soldier who is ready to make sacrifices, obedient and aware of their duties and well-trained, willing to sacrifice everything for the state, i.e. their time, work, property, health and life" [4]. This provision was repeated in subsequent statutes from 1936 and 1939. The Federation implemented the "Guidelines for Citizenship Education in organizations", according to which the civic education programme included active participation in national and state holidays; active participation in the manifestations of state life; raising awareness of the importance of individual participation in various forms of social work; participation in the work of a community centre and awakening local patriotism [5]. It conducted civic education classes in its federated unions, organised community centres, numerous public readings and talks, systematic lectures and courses, both professional and supplementary. Apart from that, it conducted trainings on civic and military education and participated in the celebrations of national holidays, as well as anniversaries. Moreover, the Federation launched specialist courses to train civic education instructors, the so-called civic education courses for the heads of training in the local, poviata and district structures. It also specified the rules for carrying out civic education and created appropriate regulations, as well as issued own press. The culmination of the Federation's activities in the field of civic education was the organisation of three-month Civic Education Leaders courses, the programme

comprising 110 hours of lectures and complemented by excursions to historical sites [6].

B. Sub-subsection

Apart from the Federation of Polish Unions of Country Defenders, the Polish White Cross held an important place in the field of civic education. The organisation, established in 1919, conducted educational activity and thus played a significant role in awakening patriotism and national and civic awareness (mainly among soldiers, but also among young people) [7]. Educational work consisted in, first and foremost, combating illiteracy and raising the level of education of the soldiers. In turn, the educational activities implemented by the Polish White Cross fostered the formation of a citizen-soldier. Moreover, the Polish White Cross held School Youth Associations, called the Polish White Cross School Associations, operating at general and secondary schools. As a part of their participation, schoolchildren gave artistic touch to the soldier's celebrations (choir singing, recitation of poems, dance and stage performances). There was mutual cooperation conducted between the youth and the army. The youth were invited to various army celebrations (e.g. regiment feasts) and soldiers visited schools and spoke to students about army life, organised concerts of military orchestras. Apart from that, the youth assisted in the organisation of lotteries or performances, prepared history and patriotism-themed albums, gave talks on patriotism and history in the army community centres, collected books, brochures and magazines for the soldiers [8]. The authorities of the Polish White Cross developed the regulations of the School Youth Associations, approved by the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment [9], and thus the educational authorities determined the tasks of the associations and their position in the school system. According to the regulations, the members of the associations were supposed to supply the community centres with educational resources (e.g., magazines, books, albums, social games), organize events and performances for soldiers, exchange correspondence with soldiers and give lectures and talks [10]. Moreover, the authorities of the Polish White Cross issued the programme guidelines entitled: "Aims and tasks of the Polish White Cross School Associations" [11], specifying the programme of their work in detail. It included: giving talks about the army, acquainting young people with history of the Polish army and its famous leaders, reading books and magazines related to the life of the army, learning soldiers' songs, recitations, preparation of stage performances; it also included the so-called external work, i.e. participation of young people in regiment holidays, organizing events for soldiers in barracks and providing care for the graves of the soldiers who died on the battlefield. Analysis of the source material shows that the activity of the School Associations expanded and their number grew quickly [12]. Such implementation of civic education was aimed at building a sense of belonging between young people and the military, forming patriotic senses and encouragement to strengthening the defence of the country, thus constituting an important link

in the consolidation of the whole society around the idea of protecting the independence and sovereignty of the state.

III. PROBLEM SOLUTION

The aim of civic education nowadays, just the way it used to be, is to shape civic virtues. Such a type of education has been present in the Polish system since the very early levels of education. The core curriculum approved by the Minister of National Education [13] contains educational objectives and content referring to civic education at all levels.

In kindergarten (preschool), shaping the social area of development, the child is prepared to function in a peer group (their kindergarten group), family or nation. At that time, a child is already able to name their country and its capital, recognize national symbols (emblem, flag, anthem), understand that Poland is one of the European Union member states. In primary school, the child gets to know the world of values, strengthens their identity and forms a sense of dignity and respect for other people and for traditions. It is the time when a child is prepared to take actions for the benefit of the local environment. In primary school, civic education is implemented primarily as part of social studies classes and supplemented during lessons of Polish language, history, geography and education for safety. It is similar on the higher levels of education. Stage I sectoral vocational school still shapes students' civic attitudes in order to ensure responsible functioning in the modern world, from family and school, through local and regional community, to national, state and international community [13].

In order to obtain information how young adults express their opinions on civic education, a survey was carried out on a group of 150 first-year undergraduate students of the Department of Humanities of Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. The results obtained are as follows:

116 positive answers to the question whether there were any activities building affiliation with the school during school education.

Table 1. Activities building affiliation with school

	Yes		No		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Respondents	116	78	19	12	15	10

Source: Developed based on individual research.

According to the findings, over 20% of students have no memories of such activities. The respondents who stated there were activities aimed at building affiliation with the school during their schooling, have indicated various forms of such activities.

Table 2. Type of activities building affiliation with school.

	Respondents	
	N	%
Learning the school anthem	21	18
Familiarization with history of the school	49	42
Learning about the school eponym	19	17
Familiarization with the school's	9	8

traditions		
Getting to know the school graduates	6	5
“School Day” celebrations	12	10

Source: Developed based on individual research.

As seen above, students most often indicate learning school history as the element of building association with school and they met graduates from their schools the least often. School anthem and eponym have similar number of indications.

Apart from that, the respondents mentioned representing their schools and stated that nearly half of them (73 persons) represented their schools at a number of competitions, contests and sport games.

The results for the question on cultivating school tradition were much less positive. In this respect, only 27 people gave positive indications, which constitutes 18% of the respondents; 36% were unable to express their opinion on the subject and 46% of students do not cultivate school traditions.

Another question referred to the aspects of civic education in terms of affiliation with the local region.

Table 3. Activities building the sense of affiliation with the local region

	Yes		No		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Respondents	101	67	31	21	18	12

Source: Developed based on individual research.

Identification with their local region was indicated by 11% less respondents compared with those who declared affiliation with their school. It is surprising that a third of the respondents did not notice any activities aimed at building the sense of affiliation with their region. The students affiliated with their region were to indicate all types of activities which resulted in establishing that bond.

Table 4. Type of activities building the sense of affiliation with the local region.

	respondents	
	N	%
Organizing themed competitions on the local region	11	11
Organizing educational excursions	64	63
Organizing themed classes on the local region	9	9
Preparation of themed works by the students	10	10
Meeting the representatives of the so-called “living history”	7	7

Source: Developed based on individual research.

The answers are very diverse, however organising excursions is clearly at the forefront. The respondents remember this form of activity best. The other methods of building the sense of affiliation with the region proved to be less effective.

Next, the students pointed out that these activities taught them to respect national memorial sites (63% of respondents), express their knowledge of the region and put this information into practice (14% of respondents), show respect to people meritorious to the region (12% of respondents), actively participate in patriotic celebrations (11% of respondents).

Further questions focused on the aspects of civic education nationwide. 128 persons gave positive answer to the question whether they had been subject to activities aimed at building a sense of affiliation with their homeland during school education.

Table 5. Activities building the sense of affiliation with homeland

	Yes		No		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
respondents	128	85	14	10	8	5

Source: Developed based on individual research.

85% of surveyed students had been subject to activities building a sense of affiliation with homeland, however as many as 15% of the students have not noticed any forms strengthening the affiliation with Poland. Subsequently, the persons declaring affiliation with homeland were asked to specify the category of such activities.

Table 6. Type of activities building the sense of affiliation with homeland

	respondents	
	N	%
Learning the national anthem and patriotic songs	82	64
Learning about the national symbols	10	8
Learning the historical literary works	7	5
organisation of national holidays (ceremonies, assemblies)	8	6
Learning about various regions of Poland (trips, themed classes)	15	12
Learning about renowned Poles	6	5

Source: Developed based on individual research.

The highest number of indications was definitely given to the national anthem and learning patriotic songs. The other types of activities building the sense of affiliation with homeland were not of such significance, according to the respondents.

In the summary question, respondents indicated that due to these activities they were able to maintain appropriate attitude towards national symbols (65% of respondents), benefit from cultural heritage (18% of respondents), show respect for tradition, history and national symbols (12% of respondents) and cultivate national traditions (5% of respondents).

IV. CONCLUSION

The survey results prove students have received civic education at school. Affiliation with both school, region and homeland was embedded within them. Various strategies have been used, aimed at formation of a citizen. It is due to these activities that they have been properly prepared to live in society and their civic attitudes have been developed. There are certain noticeable differences between the period of the Second Republic of Poland and the contemporary times. Perhaps they result from the social situation and the position of Poland in the united Europe. It is not necessary nowadays to build such a strong bond with an army, as there is no risk of a lurking war or constant concern for the country's

independence. The form of the conducted activities has also changed, as they must be constantly attractive for young people. It would be worth considering nowadays, what content, methods, forms and means can be used to undertake work on building greater social participation among the young generation of Poles.

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