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The Attitudes of Adolescents in the Czech Republic towards Contemporary Civic Virtues in Adults and Their Demands for Changes

Abstract

The aim of the survey was to find out what attitudes young people aged twelve to seventeen maintain towards adult civic qualities and virtues as compared with their demands for changes in civic behaviour. The objective of the study was to find out whether, based on their perception of adult behaviour, the critical youth wish for changes in civic behaviour and which aspects of citizen life they should be linked to.

The survey tool used was a questionnaire investigating attitudes and behaviour in various situations of citizens' everyday life. There were 33 Likert-type question items in the questionnaire (e.g. They are proud of their country.). The questionnaire showed a high level of reliability. The survey sample consisted of 533 adolescent respondents (aged 12–17).

There were four factors generated through factor analysis from the collected results: 1. Respect for traditional social norms and roles; 2. Tolerance and respect for other people's rights; 3. Patriotism and trust in public institutions; 4. Application of constitutional civic rights. The adolescent respondents were asked to mark the statements which should be changed.

The outcome confirmed the hypothesis of high criticality in the respondents, which we consider a significant social challenge: adolescents demand a major change in civic behaviour described by the total of 14 items (42.7%) in all four factors. The highest number of proposed changes falls into the factor of "Respect for traditional social norms and roles", while the fewest proposed changes concern the factor of "Patriotism and trust in public institutions". According to the respondents, traditional social norms and roles and tolerance and respect for other

people´s rights should be strengthened as well. The attitude towards active civic virtues implies a need for better and more sophisticated civic virtues education, both within the family and in schools. The results obtained from this survey will be used in generating civic education programmes for primary and secondary schools.

Keywords: *citizenship, civic rights, civic virtues, civic education.*

Introduction

The process of socialization gives an individual a possibility to grow into an active participation in the life of the society they were born to and which they live in. He/she uses standard procedures to internalize cultural patterns (such as traditions, customs, modes of behaviour, rules, laws and taboos) as a way of life. Many of these socializing techniques are learnt consciously, many of them unconsciously and, as a rule, the learning process starts with imitating. The aim of every socializing process is to create an individual fully able to accept society's norms (standards regulating group behaviour), which they actively stand up or adjust to if the situation requires them to do so.

According to Vacek (2008), the initial socializing tendencies in children usually concern internalizing conventional norms, beginning with the simplest ones like saying hello or thank you and progressing towards the more complex ones which define contacts among people in essential matters. In this case, socializing individuals (usually parents) proceed traditionally, consciously, and with a concrete goal in mind. However, every individual in a functional society with democratic elements learns not only about conventional norms and he/she is praised for their active fulfillment and reprimanded for their abuse, but they learn about coexistence in a wider civic context as well. Although civic coexistence must inevitably contain a number of accepted conventional norms, it also represents a chance for an adult person to show their attitudes towards others, society and, finally, towards themselves. In other words, it is a chance for them to behave like citizens, to actively show their relations to the society they are living in and to make effort to sustain functioning of this society by their behaviour (cf., Ross, 2002). Apparently, imitation behaviour including subconscious elements yields better results than conscious and focused educational efforts.

In our country, education for citizenship in its modern democratic version lacks a long-term tradition due to the totalitarian years. There is no use describing in detail the demands of a totalitarian society on its citizens, as those who have experienced it know it and those who have not would find it very difficult to believe. However, an individual becomes a citizen and citizens are supposed to be active and educated in terms of their rights, duties and civic virtues (cf., Šil and Karolová, 2008). We placed stress on the initial socializing activity, which is imitation. Let us suppose that even an adolescent individual will use the process of imitation for internalizing civic virtues and implementing them into practice. What does the imitated role model look like? How does a contemporary citizen behave? Does his/her behaviour correspond with the time-proven democratic civic virtues? Do critical young people wish for a change in citizens' behaviour? We were interested in finding answers to all these questions and so they were included in our research.

Method

In order to learn about adolescent respondents' attitudes towards civic virtues, we created a questionnaire describing everyday life situations that occur in the lives of most adults and adolescents. The questionnaire contained 33 items complemented with a Likert-type scale (the items are listed further on); every question item was then supplemented with another similar scale questioning about possible item changes.

Survey sample

The survey sample consisted of 533 respondents aged 12–17. There were 287 girls and 246 boys and all of them were pupils or students of primary and secondary schools and of vocational schools in various places of the Czech Republic. (e.g., Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Brno, České Budějovice, Liberec, Hradec Králové, Pardubice). Also, in each respondent, we investigated variant variables, which were estimated to influence a variety of answers. These were: sex, age (M=15.0; SD=1.8), family structure (complete =397 and divorced=136, which represents 25.52% of the total).

Results

Questionnaire reliability was measured by Cronbach's α = 0.91. The obtained data were factor analyzed using the orthogonal Varimax calculation method (critical level |0.40|) and four factors were generated. We ranked all the statements within each factor according to their communality level, going from the highest one to the lowest supercritical one

F1. Tolerance towards Other People and Cultures
25. They make good neighbours in the place where they live.
27. They respect the right of other people to be different from them.
24. They reject corruption and bribery.
33. They consciously hold respect for other people.
28. They respect other people's opinions although they are different from their opinions.
14. They respect other nations.
30. They protect the right of other people to be what they are.
20. They respect minority rights.

F2. Application of Constitutional Civil Rights
1. They participate in public elections.
13. They make donations to charities.
26. They believe in God.
31. They actively participate in their community's social life.
16. They participate in demonstrations, write or sign public petitions if they do not agree with a particular important issue.
17. They take active part in public discussions concerning issues like motorway construction or green countryside.

F3. Patriotism and Trust in Public Institutions
2. They are fans of their national sport teams.
15. They like living in their country.
32. They actively keep their national and regional traditions alive.
18. They are proud of their country.
21. They rely on the police.
29. They are proud of the army.
23. They trust the legal system.
22. They believe the politicians they have elected.

6. If the national anthem is played, they join in singing and they are moved by it.

F4. Traditional Roles and Social Norms

11. They love their family members.
9. They regularly go to work.
4. They look after their children and families.
10. While at work, they spend their time working.
3. They have good manners.
7. They obey traffic rules.
8. They make a continuous and complex effort to maintain their good health (in terms of their diet, preventive check-ups and relaxation).
12. They help other people.
5. They protect the environment.

The following table shows basic results in the factors:

Table 1. Citizen – Current State

	F1: Tolerance towards Other People and Cultures	F2: Application of Constitutional Civil Rights	F3: Patriotism and Trust	F4: Traditional Roles and Norms
M	23.98	13.37	27.30	30.99
SD	6.29	3.11	6.12	6.67
Minimum and Maximum	min. 8; max. 40	min. 6; max. 30	min.10; max. 50	min.9; max. 45

The highest score was reached in the category of traditional roles and norms and trust in public institutions, whereas the lowest score was reached in the application of constitutional civic rights.

Table 2 . Factor Correlation

Factors/ r	F1:Tolerance towards Other People and Cultures	F2: Application of Constitutional Rights	F3:Patriotism and Trust	F4: Traditional Roles and Norms
F1: Tolerance	xxx	0.25**	0.54**	0.76**
F2: Application of Constitutional Rights		xxx	0.49**	0.22**
F3: Patriotism and Trust			xxx	0.49**

** $p < 0.01$;

The Table clearly shows a close correlation and influence among all the four factors. Positive correlations show that a rise in one factor makes other factors rise as well, and vice versa.

While assessing the **changes demanded by the respondents** within the framework of civic behaviour, we took into account all the answers allocated with three or four points, which means the statements : change "substantially" and change "very significantly". We calculated relative frequencies and ordered them into the following table. The change order is given by the sum of relative frequencies of the two possible answer options. The level considered is 40 % of the total; here we assume that the reference to civic behaviour changes is significant and not influenced by chance.

Table 3. Statements on Behaviour Change

Statement	% substan-tially	% very y sig-nificantly	Σ %
5. They protect the environment.	28.89	30.39	59.28
3. They have good manners.	30.58	22.70	53.28
12. They help other people.	30.77	20.08	50.85
8. They make a continuous and complex effort to maintain their good health (in terms of their diet, preventive check-ups and relaxation).	32.65	17.45	50.01
13. They make donation to charities.	32.83	13.70	46.53
7. They obey traffic rules.	27.95	18.39	46.34
33. They consciously hold respect for other people.	28.89	15.95	44.84
24. They reject corruption and bribing.	19.82	22.89	42.71
1. They participate in public elections.	25.70	16.07	41.77
31. They actively participate in their community's social life.	31.52	9.44	41.29
28. They respect other people's opinions although they are different from their opinions.	26.83	14.07	40.9
4. They look after their children and families.	21.95	19.01	40.96
18. They are proud of their country.	23.45	17.51	40.96
30.They protect the right of other people to be what they are.	28.33	12.20	40.53

The statements are ranked according to the percentage of change proposals. We noted that there was an urge to change the behaviour of Czech citizens in 14 statements, which represents 42.42%. If we include the statements about changes in the four factors, we obtain the following data:

- Tolerance and respect towards other people and cultures (F1): 4 statements;
- Application of constitutional civil rights (F2): 3 statements;
- Patriotism and trust in public institutions (F3): 1 statement;
- Traditional roles and social norms (F4): 6 statements.

The most change-accentuating statements fall into the factor of *Traditional Roles and Social Norms*, the fewest statements are in the factor of *Patriotism and Trust in Public Institutions*. **The respondents would strengthen the traditional roles and social norms and tolerance towards others.**

Table 4. Citizen – Behaviour Changes in the Citizen

	F1: Tolerance	F2: Application of Constitutional Civic rights	F3: Patriotism and Trust	F4: Traditional Roles and Norms
M	17.07	12.16	20.38	20.30
SD	6.38	4.02	6.96	7.18
Minimum and Maximum	min. 8; max. 32	min. 6; max. 24	min.10; max. 40	min. 9; max. 45

Most changes are demanded by the respondents in the factors *Patriotism and Trust in Public Institutions* and *Traditional Roles and Social Norms.*

Correlation between the current state level and behaviour changes:
F1 current : F1 change Tolerance: r = − 0.53**
F2 current : F2 change Application of Constitutional Civil Rights r = 0.40**
F3 current : F3 change Patriotism and Trust: r = − 0.13**
F4 current: F4 change Traditional Roles and Norms: r = − 0.57**.

According to the results, the F1, F2 and F4 factors are linked together very closely. Here we can see direct dependence: **the lower the current level, the more significant is the respondents' wish for a change and vice versa**.

In the independent variable **respondents' sex, no significant changes** in attitudes towards current citizen behaviour were discovered between the answers provided by the girls and by the answers provided by the boys as far as the demanded changes were concerned. However, three factors (without the F2 Factor) show that the girls demand statistically more significant changes than the boys. Speaking about the correlation between the **respondents' age** and answers in both categories, the older the respondents are, the lesser fullfilment of all the four factors they observe. The

older respondents tend to be more critical and probably also more experienced than the younger ones. The older the respondents are, the more they wish for changes in citizen behaviour in all the four factors. The variable **family structure** did not show any significant differences among the respondents with different family structure backgrounds; the divorced family respondents wished for a rise in Factor 3: Patriotism and Trust in Public Institutions significantly more often.

Conclusion

Building a modern civic society in our country cannot be based upon a long-term tradition, on the contrary, it is marked by the previous stage when the paternalistic state solved everything for its citizens in exchange for their devotion solely to work and family life and avoiding major civic involvement in forms other than the one demanded and permitted by the state. So, citizens concentrated only on the seclusion of their own lives and families and avoided (also for existencial reasons) any more visible civic involvement and activities.

The respondents from our research sample live within families as well, and most of them still depend on their psychological, economic and social support. They usually feel aided by the family and they also have most personal experience with living in this environment, as opposed to the other three factors. Their sense of criticism in this area would make them carry out numerous changes (we cannot exclude that especially the older respondents project the vision of their future families here). In other words, they would strengthen *family basis*, which, consequently, could generate the changes needed for tolerating others and application of their constitutional rights in a better way.

They usually have no broader experience with the activities from other factors, particularly in the area of civic rights. This is also reflected in the fact that the older they are, the less they depend on their family ties and start to perceive their citizen role more palpably and, thus, they tend to suggest more changes even in the remaining factors. They would also like to change citizen behaviour concerning tolerance towards other people and their cultures. Their substantially richer experience of contacts with other cultures gained either by personal travel experience or exploiting easily accessible global electronic information resources may show here, undisputedly aided by the process of globalization itself (Giddens, 2000). The higher age of the respondents inevitably prompts them to investigate their future citizen role in greater depth, and they wish to be much more active in it than can be seen in contemporary adult citizens. The higher involvement of the girls in the area

of changes illustrates a higher level of emancipation in them nad their more critical view of adult behaviour. In addition, and this is very important, today's school system plays a totally different educational role in developing citizen involvement, thanks not only to new school educational programmes and curriculum changes (Hrachovcová, 2007), but to new teaching methods as well – activation teaching techniques have been implemented on quite a large scale and schools teach their pupils how to hold a discussion, deal with problems, make decisions, search and select information, work with written texts and have one's own opinions and be able to formulate them (Staněk, 2009). Not being passive and stating one's opinion is more natural than it used to be in the past.

Education for democracy and active citizenship can be only carried out in a safe school environment, which offers the option of democratic negotiation. However, it cannot be guranteed that pupils will be able to fulfill the required civic attitudes in an unprotected real life environment, especially if the schools involved are not in living contact with local communities (Schulz, 2001). If education for citizenship in schools is to contribute to developing pupils' value orientation, school teachers must protect the elementary common values of coexistence. At the same time, they must enable children to maintain culturally specific personal values, help them do so and unite these values in one concrete whole (Strike, 1998). Schools are facing the task of standing up to common civilization values (Scheffler, 1989) and initiating the process of harmonization of individual and common values (Knoflic, 2003). Both theoretical and practical citizenship education models strive to cope with the plurality of various scientific branches and approaches at different levels, which should serve as theoretical grounds for common professional standards. This goal can only be reached by observing arguments brought by various branches of knowledge (law, ethics, philosophical anthropology, pedagogy, social theory, etc.) in detail and finding the same language not only for heterogeneous theoretical orientation, but especially for the practical training of civic virtues and their implementation in everyday life.

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