

# "Between a passive observer and a participant": contexts for a reflection on education towards being a citizen and towards civic engagement

## Key words

Democracy, civism, citizenship, civic engagement, passive observer, participant, civic education, learning citizenship.

## Abstract

In the article a reflection on contexts for education towards being a citizen and towards civic engagement was undertaken. The contexts are primarily categories of democracy, civism, citizenship and the citizen as well as civic engagement. All of them find their mediation in the area of what is called the modern world, whose problems and dilemmas affect both the perception of the aforementioned categories and education towards citizenship.

When reflecting on the categories, reference was made in part to terminological, semantic and extensional ambiguities that have arisen in the literature in the field. It is quite characteristic of this issue that the higher number of people deal with it, the more intricacies and ambiguities appear and the more new areas worth reflection are revealed. This all has its implications in reflections on civic education.

Education for being a citizen and for civic engagement is a rather complex intellectual construct. Although it does not belong to the discoveries of our times, as it has its own perennial tradition, yet only the period of transformation and development of democratic society gave it a new dimension and triggered a discussion on its role and significance. In the text, references to S. Ranson's concept of learning citizenship were made. Attention was drawn to its main assumptions as well as weaknesses, especially evident in view of disclosed unfavourable individual and social behaviour, which, according to analyses and reports, is still of relatively substantial dimensions despite posi-

tive changes being reported. The work also highlights the role of school as an institution towards which in the past years expectations were formulated, and they still are, in the field of educating children and adolescents towards citizenship and towards their transformation from a passive observer to a participant of civic communities.

## Introduction

Observing social reality and reading texts devoted to research on social (civic) engagement of different people and its insufficiencies inclined me to reflect on this subject. I was also inspired by discussions with students on their activity connected with their studies but, most of all, that going beyond their studies, activity for the benefit of another person, for building structures of a democratic state and for building social order.

The reflection on education for civic engagement in democracy systematically built in Poland for over 20 years should be made taking into account a varied context. On the one hand, it applies to a reflection on the condition of the modern world and its future and, on the other hand, a reflection on the nature of democracy, of being a citizen and on the state of civic engagement.

### 1. Context for reflection – the modern world

What can be said, then, about the first context? Certainly that the modern world is – to recall the thoughts of Pierre Bourdieu, Claus Offe, Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, Kubicki, Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2009) – a solid block which cannot be moved from its place and, moreover, it is opaque and "without windows, so it is impossible to look inside and check what makes it so heavy". It is a block inside which some people keep repeating that:

Whatever they do, 'they do because they have to', because 'there is no other option'..., because doing anything different would bring unimaginable disasters on the country and the nation. They do it together with the ones ... preaching that 'There Is No Alternative' (p. 214)<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, the world is an extremely dynamic "formation" characterised by facts, phenomena, processes, etc., which can be considered a success of our civilisation, but also its (our) failure. We benefit from them, but they also appear as a more or less serious evil. On the one hand, they remain within range of our possibilities; however, on the other hand, they are still ahead of us – inevitable, inscrutable and unpredictable.

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<sup>1</sup> See also J. Żakowski (2005, March 26). Obywatelu, gdzie jesteś?, *Polityka*, 12, pp. 11-14.

There are many examples for the above statements e.g., the extension of human life. We deem it a success, but higher life expectancy together with a decline in fertility rate, mainly in highly developed countries, means population ageing up to the level that, according to the Central European Forum for Migration Research (as cited in Sieńko, Formicki, 2010), the number of people of working age (15-64 years old) per one person of retirement age (65 years old and over) is going to drop from 5.5 in 2002 to 3.3 in 2022 and 1.7 in 2052. It is not difficult to predict its results.

We express our satisfaction with a noticeable growth of GDP in many countries in the world. This results in an improvement of societies' material welfare and in meeting the growing needs of mankind. At the same time, though, scientists in world reports alarm us arguing that Earth's resources are too small to provide us with a comfortable existence. Moreover, we consume them 40% faster than the pace of their regeneration. Due to that, the risk of conflicts over access to shrinking natural resources is rising.

We recognise the wonderful capabilities of our brain and we discover its potential to develop, as well as a new boom for "do it yourself", triggering a tendency for self-education perceived as an autotelic value. We realise the fact of being a multitasking being, controlling information, and the fact of living in the culture of "small elements", which makes us more and more productive and creative (Herma, 2010, pp. 42-43). At the same time, however, as opponents of that culture argue, we "dissolve ourselves" in it not being prepared for this peculiar game of jigsaw puzzles and chaotic jumping in the world of information glut (pp. 42-43).

We notice the triumph of individuality connected with the promotion of unlimited possibilities. We are willing to, as Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman et al., 2009) claims, "celebrate everyday ritual prayers at the altar of a free, and so by definition, omnipotent entity, yet in the quietness of spirit we do not really trust its (then also our) omnipotence". Paradoxically though:

Never before has the cult of personality fallen so low as right now in times of the cult of personality and its 'human rights'. Statistical tables, scrupulously noting the majority support for this or that party or this or that washing powder, a list of booksellers, most often watched films or most attended shows, deprived an individual of authority, which the pioneers of modernity predicted/promised to bestow on an individual. All the individual was left with was a bite too big to chew, a situation folk wisdom warns against (p. 214).

We also recognise a growing importance of women – their participation in the processes of education, in business and politics. We even apply for the preservation of parity in different spheres of life, not without controversy and

disputes. At the same time, we are also more and more aware of effects of the phenomenon. They result in changes of traditional parental and marital roles, the emergence of alternative forms of marital and family life and a move towards replacing marriage with an official parental contract, which is going to deal with combined financial obligations in relation to a minor child rather than a question of partner loyalty.

## 2. Context for reflection – democracy

The first outlined context is in a close relationship with the aforementioned context for reflection on the nature of democracy. Whenever it is quoted and whatever aspect it is considered in, every time different authors try to remind us that from the earliest times people thought about and looked for such a political system in which they would treat each other politically equally, they would be collectively sovereign, have opportunities, means and institutions to govern themselves. The search dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, as it was then that the Greeks, and especially the Athenians, succeeded in "the first democratic transformation: from the idea and practice of rule by the few to the idea and practice of rule by the many" (Dahl, 1989, p. 1).

Democracy is now regarded as one out of four trends in the contemporary world, next to globalism, terrorism and nationalism. It is often identified, especially in the public debate, with the so-called democratic minimum, which consists of free elections, parliamentarism, respecting fundamental civil rights and freedoms, most of all the right to associate, freedom of speech (the press) and equality of citizens. Such an understanding of democracy through formulating minimum criteria for state democracy was strengthened in practice also by the European Communities (the so-called Copenhagen criteria) as a condition for recognition or non-recognition of a given state as democratic (Gąciarz, 2008, p. 97).

Over the centuries, democratic ideas have undergone various changes of fortune. There were and still are different experiences of nations in which the ideas were implemented. Today, just like in the past, there is a large group of enthusiastic supporters of democracy but equally numerous is the group of opponents or rather critics. In our country, it is the critics who highlight a need to move from questions like: *whether democracy*, to questions like: *which democracy and what is there thanks to it?* More than once they have indicated that this minimum of democracy is already "implemented, established and, in fact, it functions as something obvious in the practice of the conduct of public authorities and in social awareness" (Gąciarz, p. 98), but we feel deficiencies in the public debate over the content of democratic processes. And it is the content or, in other words, the substance of democratic processes, that is most crucial in this case. Among the questions crucial for the issue are what democracy of-

fers citizens, whether it provides them with the quality of life adequate to their expectations, whether it guarantees citizens the right to access to information and to good governance, as well as the right to participate in public affairs and in an honest social dialogue. Also, whether democracy provides them with the right to ecological security and to freedom of cultural creativity as well as with conditions for effective participation in creating and implementing public policies at all levels of the organisation of society (Gąciarz, pp. 97-98). The aforementioned democratic minimum, deeply rooted in our consciousness, creates only a certain framework for a reflection on the content of democracy.

In the substance of democracy, one of the most crucial issues is the conditions of citizens' effective participation in creating and implementing public policies. Democracy, more than any other system, creates maximum opportunities for individuals to decide about their destiny, an opportunity to live in accordance with laws and principles they have chosen and to be morally responsible. It also offers opportunities for developing desirable features, which are commonly approved of such as honesty, courage or righteousness. These opportunities and conditions are confirmed and supported by, among others, the Treaty of Lisbon, through participative democracy, introducing new mechanisms of cooperation between citizens and institutions, such as the Citizens' Initiative<sup>2</sup>.

Democracy, however, is not a sufficient condition to develop these features and values. Moreover, as Robert Dahl (2000) claims, we pay the price for "living among other people" and submitting to collective decisions of the majority (pp. 45-59). Although some authors, willingly recalling Winston Churchill's famous saying from 1947<sup>3</sup>, state that even if democracy is not the best form of governance and even if we are not fully satisfied with it, then so far nobody has created anything better (Krasnodębski, 1994, p. 13). To support the statement, data from world reports can be quoted here, e.g., a report prepared in 2009 by Pew Research Center (*The Pulse of Europe 2009: 20 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall*), in which we can notice a certain decline in approval in 7 out of 9 states surveyed (Eastern Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Hungary, Russia and Bulgaria) for democratic changes in the countries. If in 1991 the approval rate ranged from 61% in Russia to 91% in Eastern Germany, in 2009 it amounted to between 30% in Ukraine, where the

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<sup>2</sup> Under this Initiative, a million citizens from several member states may call the Commission to present draft legislation in the areas falling within the competence of the Union. In the Treaty of Lisbon consultations were highlighted along with dialogue with associations, civic society, civic partners, representatives of different faiths and non-denominational organisations.

<sup>3</sup> "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time" (*The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*, 1996, p. 93).

drop in approval was by as much as 42%, and 85% in Eastern Germany. The only states where a slight increase was observed were Poland with a 4% rise up to 70% and Slovakia with 1% growth up to 71% (Pew Research Center, 2009).

The same source provides data on the acceptance of democratic values such as freedom of speech and the media, the right to free and fair elections, to an equitable justice system, civilian control over the army and to religious freedom, that is the values mentioned before as a democratic minimum. The approval ranges, on average, from 66% in Hungary to 39% in Russia. In our country the average acceptance amounts to 52%, with 64%, the highest approval rate, for a fair justice system and 29%, the lowest, for civilian control over the army (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Slightly different information (less optimistic due to the subject of the reflections) is found in a report *Diagnoza Społeczna 2009* [Social Diagnosis]. On the one hand, the percentage distribution of responses to a question concerning the attitude to democracy in 2005-2009 indicates a slight increase for the statement: "Democracy is superior to all other forms of governance" from 21.6% in 2005 to 24.2% in 2009, and a small drop in approval for the statement: "Democracy is a bad form of governance" from 3.9% in 2005 down to 3.3% in 2009. On the other hand, generally, as can easily be seen, approval rates for democracy in Poland provided by two (seemingly reliable) sources differ significantly in the number of respondents "satisfied" with democracy.

Not surprising in this situation are the emerging voices on the crisis of democracy and censorious statements stressing its "sins". This is reflected in the view of an Indian human rights advocate and anti-globalist, Arundhati Roy, expressed in May 2003:

Democracy, the modern world's holy cow, is in crisis. And the crisis is a profound one. Every kind of outrage is being committed in the name of democracy. It has become little more than a hollow word, a pretty shell, emptied of all content or meaning. It can be anything you want. Democracy is the Free World's whore, willing to dress up, dress down, willing to satisfy a whole range of tastes, available to be used and abused at will (Agence France Presse, 2003, para. 46).

A similar opinion was expressed by a young person (lastpatriot4America, 2009) on an Internet forum in 2009 when commenting on an animation by Łukasz Szozda, a winner in the competition *Democracy Video Challenge 2009*, organised by the US Department of State. The Internet user wrote:

Democracy means big businesses have all the rights as people. That is bad. Democracy is 51% [formally speaking it is 50%+1 – my clarification E. K-S.]

telling every one [*sic*] what to do. Democracy is socialism headed towards communism. America is a Republic. That means do what ever [*sic*] you want, just don't hurt anyone. And that is the truth. This cartoon looks like socialist propaganda. Made to brainwash the weak minded. No where [*sic*] in our Constitution does it say Democracy. Go look. Our forefathers knew what democracy is. They are lying to our children and it shows<sup>4</sup>.

On the basis of the few reflections and statements on the substance of democracy and on the acceptance of smaller or larger community groups for this form of governance, it could be worth asking the question whether, once we get, as mentioned before, "maximum opportunities to decide about..." and conditions for "effective participation in..." along with formal and legal support (as in the case of the Treaty of Lisbon), we are ready/willing/prepared to use them in our lives. And there appears a need to reflect on civism and being a citizen.

### **3. Context for reflection – civism and being a citizen**

What is then civism and what does it mean to be a citizen? Ralf Dahrendorf (1994) claims that civism is one of the fundamental principles determining rights, duties and obligations of membership in a social unit – of a nationality. It is a kind of social agreement, equally binding all citizens who are enrolled in the membership list of a given nationality, regardless of race, religion or culture. In a civil society it is a guiding principle "which must be implemented. In order to use it effectively, it must become a reality in minds and hearts and, most of all, in people's habits. It must become ... a norm, followed without external sanctions, because it has become a component of human social behaviour" (pp. 231-232).

Civism directs our thinking clearly towards people, who are in a way "carriers" of attitudes, behaviour, norms and values; they are carriers of civic virtues. Democracy, as Piotr Sztompka (2002) points out, needs democrats, i.e. citizens ready to participate in the democratic system and use its institutions; they will be ready to co-create that system. "Democracy without democrats is a bizarre state" (p. 401).

Civism also directs our attention to the category of "citizenship". In Polish legal doctrine it is most commonly used with a distinction between citizenship in the international meaning and in the internal sense, meaning not only belonging to a certain community, but also its consequences in the form of rights and obligations. In the discussion on this aspect, as well as on the integrative

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac1UV30jt\\_U&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac1UV30jt_U&feature=related) (retrieved July 12, 2011).

one, two main issues are highlighted: the ambiguity of the notion as well as a need for distinguishing between two terms *citizenship* (a term used by the European Union) and *nationality* (in the meaning of member state citizenship). Without going into specific issues arising from this, it is yet worth mentioning in this context the suggestion of distinguishing *multi-layered citizenship*, which is neither state citizenship nor cosmopolitan, but it has a multi-level dimension allowing the expression of various identities, rights and obligations through a configuration of institutional and non-institutional structures in the state, national and transnational dimension (Bodnar, 2008, pp. 32-35, pp. 292-298).

What is also difficult to specify is the category of "a citizen". The explicitness of the response is hindered by, among others, the fact that there is no single model of democracy and therefore there is no single concept of citizen and citizenship. To quote a few, for "liberals" a citizen is an autonomous individual, self-defining and making choices concerning his/her own life, free from interference of others, at the same time altruistic in the moral sense, a co-worker, a member of a certain social entity, a person taking responsibility for the common good and the public sphere. For market democracy advocates, it is a person who is a full member of a community and their rights and obligations are of individual character: they are not moral imperatives but ones constituting the reality people live in. A citizen in this sense acts in compliance with the rights of a free market economy and business. But for "social democrats" a citizen is a member of society, caring for his/her own development and understanding rights and obligations. The person also cares for becoming active in articulating these rights, making decisions and taking responsibility for the consequences of decisions and his/her activities. Being a good citizen means being a critical and active individual (Potulicka, 1993).

Still another approach in the analysis of citizenship and civic identity is proposed by Zbyszko Melosik (1994). On the one hand, he refers to antinomies such as "assigning" to... – a choice; the historical and social past of an individual – the present of an individual; exclusion from a normatively defined "centre" – inclusion and assimilation. On the other hand, he refers to the context of post-modern theory and culture (pp. 40-44).

We also perceive differently a citizen put in the perspective of, for instance, educational concepts which we analyse. And as such, in the perspective of global education, a citizen is a person perceiving the world as a global system in which he/she participates, understanding benefits, rights and obligations arising from participation in the global reality. In the perspective of peace pedagogy – a concept of education for peace – a citizen is someone characterised by: "a sense of self-respect and respect for other people, empathy, an ability to cooperate, a capacity for critical thinking and an 'open mind', respect for existing laws and



an ability to solve conflicts”, and moreover concern for the natural environment, “readiness for involvement in justice and in defence of a peaceful vision of the world” (Kubiak-Pokrzywniak, 1998, p. 250). In the perspective of education for the reconstruction of development, a citizen is an individual “‘equipped’ with knowledge which will help him/her understand the relationship between political, economic, demographic, social and cultural factors as well as mechanisms for applying international economic relations”. It is also a person who rejects ethnocentric attitudes and “encourages and whenever possible personally gets involved in actions for Third World Countries as well as minority groups and emigrants existing in highly-developed countries” (p. 256).

The “characteristics” quoted here indicate different, or seemingly different concepts of a citizen. On the one hand, they convince of a necessity to be active as a significant discriminant of “being a citizen”, and on the other hand, that “the birth of a citizen is not a single act ..., but a complex and long-lasting political and cultural process” (Baczko, 1999, p. 123). One needs to be prepared to become a citizen (no matter in what sense). Rules of democratic participation need to be acquired and deeply internalised in order for the person to act afterwards. “One needs to know how to take care of public issues, how to intervene in the defence of interests or values, how and why to vote, what the citizen’s commitments are towards the state, who to write petitions to, where to protest, etc.” (Sztompka, p. 401). As Jacek Żakowski (2005) claims:

Citizens need to be educated from as early as pre-school. Poland will not disappear if secondary school graduates are not on the best terms with paramecium or hydra, but it may disappear if they have no idea about social processes and democratic political culture (p. 14).

Whereas Potulicka (2002) argues that “Democracy can develop in a society in which citizens are well-educated and informed, capable of participating in public decision making and in political debates on equal terms (p. 300).

#### **4. Context for reflection – civic engagement**

Here arises a need for reflection on the present state of citizens’ commitment to society and democratic structures as well as reflection on educating a citizen. What do we know about the former – our civic commitment? Are we a (civil) society and if yes, then what are we like? Is there any space between family and state which we can utilise, going beyond the privacy of our own homes and our own matters and aiming to achieve common goals for a community? If yes, then how often does it occur? In what activities do we participate: organised or informal, aiming at long-term operations or rather at solving a single problem?

If we investigate again different kinds of research and reports on it, for instance those on a website devoted to research on civil society in Poland in its different aspects – Civicpedia<sup>5</sup> – then we observe a clear lack of agreement on the condition of this society. "According to some, we are a society of 'happy egoists' closed at home with our loved ones. In others' opinion, Poland is a leader in civic transformation among Eastern Bloc states" (Civicpedia, 2010, November 15). In Poland there is the lowest voter turnout rate in presidential elections, significantly deviating from European standards, and one of the lowest scores (0 on a 0-3 scale) in Europe for an indicator of membership in civil society organisations. Membership in non-obligatory organisations dropped from 15.1% in 2007 to 13.2% in 2009 (Civicpedia, 2010, November 17)<sup>6</sup>. There is still a very low level of social trust in Poland – the basis for joint actions. Despite the fact that the percentage of Poles generally trusting other people increased from 11.6% in 2007 to 13.4% in 2009, trust in some institutions, especially financial ones, declined (*Diagnoza społeczna*, 2009). On the other hand, though, our participation in work for the local community increased from 14.2% in 2007 to 15.6% in 2009. Moreover, every year over 4000 new associations and approximately 500 foundations are registered, and with the whole non-governmental sector approximately 700,000 volunteers cooperate (*Diagnoza społeczna*, 2009). In fact, the group is far more numerous, which will be discussed below.

We observe many kinds of behaviour which are manifestations of social activity such as neighbourhood assistance, collaborative management of the public spaces on housing estates, operation of housing estates' online forums or cybernauts grouping around a problem. These human activities are of a non-formalised character. They help create bonds crucial for developing a civil socie-

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<sup>5</sup> Here is presented the latest research and a systematically updated list of significant publications with information on new publications. Also, reports and data sheets are shared here, enabling independent analyses.

<sup>6</sup> See *Indeks Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego 2007*. **Indeks Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego (Civil Society Index) [CSI]** is an international research project conducted by the CIVICUS organisation. The project is based on both hard statistics and opinions of experts interpreting the data. It allows the comparison of the condition of non-governmental organisations [ngos] as well as civic engagement in different countries. In Poland, the project was carried out twice, in 2005 and in 2007. The CSI results are presented in the form of a diamond graph – **Civil Society Diamond**. Its shape indicates the structure and condition of the third sector, the legal and political environment in which it operates, values professed by its members and its impact on the surrounding reality. Cf. the Report (2008, January 25), prepared by **Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor [The Klon/Jawor Association]**, which is an independent, apolitical and non-profit organisation, whose main aim is the development of a tolerant, active, creative and self-organising society. Its activities are based on supporting ngos and other civic initiatives.

[http://civicpedia.ngo.pl/files/civicpedia.pl/public/raporty/INDEKS\\_SPOLECZENSTWA\\_OBYWATELSKIEGO\\_2007\\_LAST2.pdf](http://civicpedia.ngo.pl/files/civicpedia.pl/public/raporty/INDEKS_SPOLECZENSTWA_OBYWATELSKIEGO_2007_LAST2.pdf) (retrieved 2010, November 17).

ty (Civicpedia, 2010, June 17). We cannot ignore here what is called philanthropy in the sense of voluntary allocation of money or gifts to social organisations or groups (transferring 1% tax to public benefit organisations is not considered philanthropy) and, what is worth highlighting, since 2007 the number of donors systematically rose from 25.5% in 2007 to 28.6% in 2008 and 50.4% in 2009 (Civicpedia, 2010, November 19).

What is also worth noticing is the activity known as volunteerism, i.e., a voluntary and conscious activity for others, which goes beyond family, neighbourhood and friendship ties, although in this case the engagement level is much lower than within philanthropy. According to research conducted in November 2009 by Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor on a representative sample of 1002 Poles over 15 years old, the number of volunteers in 2007 reached 13.2% (approx. 3.96 m people), in the following year it was 11.3% and in 2009 12.9%, i.e. approx. 3.8 m Poles, who declared that over the last 12 months they devoted time to work in a social organisation or a non-formal group (Civicpedia 2009, December 3).

Another sign of civic engagement is participation in various organised forms of collective actions, usually taken outside the sphere of well-established institutions or organisations, most often aiming to reach a common target, making or supporting social changes (Olechnicki, Załęcki, 1998). Among the so-called "new social movements" it is worth mentioning ecological, feminist, pacifist and sexual minority movements as well as the alter-globalist movement, which in our country gain varied (generally lower than elsewhere) support for their actions. The involvement is also demonstrated by participating in legal demonstrations, signing petitions, collective letters, protests etc. According to research by the *European Social Survey*, Poland ranks by far below the European average in all categories of actions singled out in the research. Active participation is declared by less than 10% of adult citizens and yet signing a petition or a collective letter or taking part in meetings belong to basic civic activities (Civicpedia, 2010, October 20).

How is it, then, with our civic activity? Are we a society of individuals complaining about and criticising different spheres of state activities or are we active co-creators of our community? Should we refer to the thoughts of Zygmunt Bauman (2006), we might ask: Are we passive observers or participants? A feature distinguishing "a passive observer" is certainly not doing something directly, especially something wrong, which is criticised or complained about, but indifference towards that and those who do it, an attitude which is also wrong. It is also denying guilt or pretending innocence ("I didn't know", "I couldn't do anything", "I couldn't do anything else", "I'm not interested in it", "I've never thought about it") (pp. 231-241). Moreover, a passive observer is somebody indifferent to the observed reality and activities of other people, also the good

ones, who may, of course, be supported and enhanced. It is also somebody not ready to take obligations on him or herself arising from living together in civil society. Can we say he or she is a citizen?

Bearing in mind the above quoted indicators of civic engagement, it may be stated that there are many "passive observers" among us. Too many for a developing civic society, a society which aspires to be at the forefront of democratic states. Obviously, it is not so that Poles are the only passive observers or such people are on the margins of developed societies. Some authors even argue that the contemporary globalising world "has changed into a huge, extremely effective branch of modern production: an excellently operating factory of passive observers" (p. 242). It happens so, as Bauman indicates, due to a growing gap between "our moral self" and our capacity for "ethically inspired actions". It is caused by having our "moral self" daily engaged in talk, activated, pressurised and challenged to a reaction by the situation of another human being, one living nearby but also one from distant countries and continents (p. 246).

The problem, though, is that in the gap we forget that to be "an active participant" instead of a "passive observer" we should not only be encouraged/obliged by another person's position but also, or perhaps most of all, our own. It is hard not to agree with the statement that:

A citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. is an active co-creator of the community he/she lives in. Their task is to take **their fate** [my emphasis – E. K.-S.] in their own hands and the fate of their environment as very much depends on the activities of each of us, every day. It is not enough to complain until somebody does something for us. A proven rule says: *Givers gain*, i.e. the winners are those who give because, in return, they get more. It is a source of success for both companies and societies. Participation in making collective decisions is the most basic manifestation of the activity and of giving (civicpedia.ngo.pl).

## 5. Education towards being a citizen and towards civic engagement

The path to gaining awareness of "being active and giving" is education. The issues of educating towards being a citizen and towards civic engagement in our country benefited in importance with the beginning of political transformation, which does not mean these were the beginnings of the development of this idea. When in 1995, Zbigniew Kwieciński (1996) was opening the Second Congress of Pedagogues, held under the theme *Democracy and education, training and upbringing* he asked the following questions:

What democracy did we fight for, what have we got now and in what state are civic competences and activities? Shall we educate towards any ready-made

models of democracy and, if yes, then to which ones? Or perhaps towards a new formula of democracy and, again, which one? Or maybe in defiance of the 'democracy' of throwing insults and stones at each other, in defiance of the 'democracy' of legal deceptions? Or maybe against democracy? Aren't the existing models of democracy its 'masquerade'? (p. 21).

Now, when we look at the content of the questions from the perspective of those almost 15 years, not only do we confirm their legitimacy but also their relevance, especially in the part concerning the so-called dark sides of democracy, such as corruption, nepotism, etc. (Civicpedia, Corruption Perception Index, 2009)<sup>7</sup>. If that is the case, then it may mean that in education we did not properly exploit those years and we did not manage to change much, compared to the awakened expectations of various bodies, in the area of developing a civil society, civic competences and engagement. The sphere of social, moral and legal "disorder" is still extensive. The operations of democratic state structures, including educational structures and schools within them, are still unsatisfactory. And yet, there is no other, alternative way for developing democracy except education, and there are no better conditions for education than the ones which exist in democracy.

Perhaps we have not learnt well enough what it means to be a citizen and our knowledge of the specificity of democratic procedures is still poor. Zbigniew Kwieciński (1998) wrote on the deficit of civism, Kazimierz Przyszczypkowski (1998) on deficits of public consciousness and civic competences, Krzysztof Kiciński (2001) on teenagers' negative attitudes towards democracy, while Kazimierz Słomczyński and Krystyna Janicka (2008) wrote on the still very low position of Poland among 29 European countries as regards democracy. Or perhaps it is difficult to realise citizenship in the sense of the "ontology of being in society" expressing our dualistic identity: of an autonomic individual and a responsible member of a local, national and state community? (Ranson, 1997, p. 85)<sup>8</sup>.

Still another reason may be the ideals of a person which exist in democracy (in its different varieties) but which are difficult to achieve and are, in a sense, internally contradictory. Eugenia Potulicka (2009) writes:

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<sup>7</sup> In the *Corruption Perception Index 2009*, i.e., research on the perception of corruption, presented by the organisation Transparency International, Poland was in 49<sup>th</sup> place out of 180 states with a result of 5.0 points. This means it improved its position compared to the 2008 ranking, in which it gained 4.6 points and 56<sup>th</sup> place. [http://civicpedia.ngo.pl/x/328452#raport\\_1](http://civicpedia.ngo.pl/x/328452#raport_1).

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in the perspective of the multi-level partnership concept the dualistic identity remains in the sphere of discussion as still other references and dimensions, e.g. transnational, are pointed out here.

The vision of a person in a free market democracy is *homo oeconomicus*, a person deciding on his/her conduct by coldly calculating his/her own self-interest and being able to calculate the benefits each situation brings ... An ideal person is resourceful, adaptable, convinced that his/her own initiative will be awarded, acting in accordance with market rules and accepting them, ready to take a risk, dynamic, and skilfully presenting his/her own achievements (p. 102).

There is a slightly different perception of a person – a citizen – in ethic democracy. He/she may be characterised as a community member, taking into account the welfare of other people and the whole society, an autonomous individual who takes responsibility not only for himself/herself but for the common good. "A person of ethical liberals is at the same time altruistic" (p. 103). Due to this, education stands at a crossroads: on the one hand, it is involved in the free market and, as a market product, it should lean towards the idea of *homo oeconomicus*, yet, on the other hand, it remains in the sphere of continuous, ambitious and, in the axiological dimension, noble expectations to support the development of autonomous individuals who will not be at the same time egoists, oriented towards individual success and benefits, but community members taking care of its welfare.

When reflecting on what education towards being a citizen and towards civic engagement is and what it is like, or rather perhaps, what it should be like, it is worth remembering the involvement of education in general, our still existing extensive "weaknesses" and transcendent ideals put forward by different bodies.

Over the years (and even centuries), many concepts of civic education have appeared. Different authors write about them from different perspectives. Should we refer only to contemporary times, it would be worth noting the interesting reflections of, to quote a few, Kazimierz Przystczykowski (1998), presenting educational concepts of the political opposition in Poland in the years approaching the transformation turning point, ideas, whose character was not of a political system, Zbyszko Melosik (1998), who outlined a concept of civic education in postmodernism, and also, the previously quoted Eugenia Potulicka (2002).

In one of the concepts – **learning for citizenship** – created by Stewart Ranson, recalled by Eugenia Potulicka (2002) and, in her opinion, considered the best developed among civic education concepts, one can find many detailed indications for necessary actions in this area. The following deserve a special emphasis:

- putting emphasis on self-development, choice, autonomy and responsibility in all spheres

- aiming at harmony in the life of pupils and students and, in particular, developing the sense of security, self-esteem, self-respect and identity
- promoting learning in cooperation and collaboration with others with respect for other people and other cultures
- developing civic virtues which constitute standards allowing the evaluation of one's own attitudes and actions; the main idea is to develop basic social life skills, abilities to interpret social and interpersonal situations as well as abilities to identify problems and formulate options for their solutions
- forming skills of interpreting and practical thinking, i.e. skills which will be useful for making decisions, estimating, arguing, explaining reasons, choosing what is true and right; the pre-condition for the development of these skills is openness to differences and better options as well as willingness to accept them
- providing opportunities to experience one's own sense of agency in the public sphere, in defining conditions for the expansion of power and in sharing responsibility for the common good; active learning in the school classroom and in the local community should lead to active citizenship in participatory democracy (pp. 313-317).

The presented proposal, even if we find it interesting, displays certain weaknesses which should be indicated. It lacks, for instance, the category/characteristic of a person of trust towards oneself, others and institutions, which is a feature still in "deficit". This is a category we attribute various features and properties to and we place it in both the areas of everyday and scientific cognition. We try to popularise the category and we define it through a system of relations from those very intimate to the ones with a transnational dimension. There are not too many studies on interpersonal relations where, in different contexts, it is not stated that trust is a *sine qua non* condition of dialogue or partner relations, regardless of their point of reference e.g., family, school or business environment. At the same time, in the same publications we often encounter opinions on the increasingly widely perceived and experienced lack of trust or limited trust in both people and institutions, often called "people or institutions of public trust". Reasons for this are certainly complex, similarly to the complexity of structures of the social world, where the category of trust is anchored and it is subject to the processes of objectification and of making "the invisible visible" (Cezary Trutkowski, 2004, p. 342). However, can we be satisfied with the fact that last year, as mentioned above, the percentage of Poles generally trusting other people increased slightly from 11.6% in 2007 to 13.4% in 2009?

What is also missing in Stewart Ranson's proposal is the development of readiness and ability to express critical judgments against "dark sides of de-

mocracy" such as corruption, nepotism, unsatisfactory transparency of civil society organisations, including their financial transparency, and civil (dis)honesty. Based on the results of the *World Values Survey* from 1999 the public honesty index for Poland was "2" on a scale from 0 (the highest level of public honesty) to 10 (the lowest level of public honesty). From the surveys of *Diagnoza Społeczna 2007* we can learn that in the very same year 56% of respondents were not interested in the fact of others evading taxes, 58.6% were not interested in others fare dodging, for 46% it was unimportant that somebody illegally collects unemployment benefits or does not pay electricity bills (53%), does not pay rent (47%) or customs duty (59%). There is then considerable indifference ("passive observers") towards this type of reprehensible civic practices, and thus consent for their various manifestations or even participation in them from a young age (wrongful practice is, e.g., cheating in tests, plagiarism, "buying" 'A' level coursework and diploma projects, etc.).

Another element which is not very clearly articulated is developing consciousness and readiness to make changes starting from ourselves, i.e. building "moral order in ourselves". Zygmunt Bauman in his *Rozmyślenia u kresu drogi* [Reflections at the end of the road] quotes Józef Tischner's words: "'Let's stop putting the world to rights and start putting ourselves to rights'", but also Janusz Korczak's words: "'The world shouldn't be left as it is'" (Bauman et al., 2009, p. 219). In the author's opinion, the juxtaposition of the two thoughts gives a coherent and unambiguous message. He writes:

Let's put ourselves to rights and not the world because we do not often encounter free people in our lives. Let's put ourselves to rights because, clearly, freedom did not appear in their lives after they met us ... [I]f we do it, the world will not be the same anymore ... We will not leave the world the way it is if we do not stay the way we are. And we should not stay 'the way we are', because then the world would suffer – then again not much would come out of our putting ourselves to rights (p. 219).

Referring the words to, for instance, the previously pointed out practices of civil dishonesty, we recognise a direct relationship: our deeds and our omissions in this sphere influence the fate of other people, but others' deeds and omissions in the face of our practice, also often reprehensible, are part of our fate. Until we understand that, it will be difficult for us to talk about civic engagement.

The institution which is expected to fulfil the above goals is school. However, is contemporary school able to meet these expectations? Here certain doubts arise, since can it definitely be said about contemporary school that it is a fully democratic institution? And if not, then how is it supposed to teach de-



mocracy and educate towards it? Many years ago, John Dewey (1972) claimed that if school were supposed to support children's social sense and develop their democratic nature, then school itself should be organised as a cooperating community. In order to educate towards democracy, school should become "an institution in which a child should live for a given period of time to become a member of the community, where he/she feels that he/she participates and contributes to its life" (p. 32). A similar approach was expressed by a French educational reformer who lived a little later, Celestine Freinet (1976) who noted that: "An arbitrary system of education cannot educate future citizens-democrats ... In the era of democracy, when all the nations, one by one, gain independence, popular school must become democratic, preparing true democracy with its example and activity" (p. 65). The contemporary position is very well expressed by Lech Witkowski's (2000) words: "education is able to mobilise to participating in the public sphere provided it practises ... a principle of 'discursive openness' and of a high quality of communication, creating within its own framework the reality of the public sphere" (p. 166).

However, it should also be remembered that school is not the only institution on the shoulders of which the effort of educating towards being a citizen and towards civic engagement can and should be dumped. Moreover, what is essential and what Bogusław Śliwerski (1995) drew attention to many years ago:

School democratic quality cannot be considered in isolation from its institutional autonomy, the subjectivity of the teacher, learners and parents at school or from the citizen's political status in the society. If a hierarchical organisation system of individual, civic and institutional life as well as the model of flexible citizenship are applied in the society, then schools as state institutions are left merely with declarative education towards democracy as something not experienced either inside or outside them (para. 7).

It seems that despite many favourable changes we observe in, for example, school didactic professionalism, openness to new ideas and projects, an ability to create qualitatively new social structures in the school operating environment, attracting allies and partners for educational activities etc., educational entities still lack awareness of the need to strive for freedom, peace and democracy since nobody will give them to anybody in a pure and finished form. We will not become citizens either overnight or without putting a certain effort into that. We need effort to transform ourselves from "passive observers" to "participants" taking on ourselves permanent, long-term commitments as only such, as Zygmunt Bauman (2006) argues, can be effective (p. 51).

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