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**EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN ADULTS.
POLICIES AND STRATEGIES OF IMPLEMENTATION**

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Abstract

The purpose of education for democratic citizenship is to form the individual as a citizen, who thinks and acts in a democratic spirit, someone who has self-respect and respects others, at the same time. By the education of adults for democratic citizenship, we mean a whole range of learning experiences and processes whereby, mature individuals acquire new civic knowledge and skills or improve those they have already acquired and practised. Such experiences are generated by the citizen's need to keep up with the pace of changes occurring in the life of a democratic society. Encouraging citizens to participate actively and responsibly in the life of the society they are part of, has been a political priority over the past years at national and European levels. Regardless of the type and level of education, of their profession or age, in time, each individual should develop a citizenship-oriented and democratic-like behaviour. Civic competences are those that enable the individual to make sense of the existence for our peers, by accepting the responsibilities that come with the functioning in society and by conducting desirable actions.

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1. Introduction

The existence of democratic institutions and specific legal regulations is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the proper functioning of democracy. In addition to the proper legal framework, we also need the culture of democracy; we need the appropriate skills, attitudes and behaviours from the citizens, all being acquired through education. The need for educating people for democratic citizenship is justified by an easily notable fact: the better-informed citizens are and the more they participate with responsibility in the public life, the stronger the democracy. On the contrary, the more poorly informed and indifferent to public life citizens are, the more fragile the democracy. The mission that such an education undertakes is particularly complex and should be focused on the shaping of responsible and active citizens who keep themselves informed regarding democratic institutions, democratic values and norms, who are sensitive to the problems of their community, as well as of the global society overall. The education for democratic citizenship mainly focuses on the youth, because they are in the process of training, but also on adults who face new training needs. This is, in fact, a problem related to lifelong learning.

Educational institutions can no longer claim to provide complete, definitive and sufficient knowledge to individuals for the rest of their lives, nor to be able to build and enhance behavioural patterns that will no longer change. Educational institutions do not produce perfect personalities from an intellectual or moral perspective that would no longer require evolution and transformation in the context of family, professional or community life. On the contrary, they need to feed young people's desire to self-improve in a continuous learning effort, to develop their ability to independently acquire information from various sources and to critically evaluate them. Other skills and competences educational institutions should focus in the process of developing young people's personalities would be, for instance, the intellectual capacity to solve problems, the ability to be creative, the motivation to engage in intellectual activities, etc. By changing the paradigm and making the educational process more flexible, we could provide the conditions for creating and promoting attitudes and behaviours that are essential to getting involved and gaining lifelong learning, which requires, among others, renewing knowledge and skills already acquired, enlarging one's cultural horizon, as well as moral clarifications, secondary and tertiary socialization, etc. These steps would ideally lead any individual to surpass their own current achievements and continually improve the quality of their life.

2. The Principle of Permanence in Education

Extending education throughout the entire life is nowadays a commonly accepted need, since it is obvious that no level or form of institutional education can provide the individual with sufficient training for the rest of their life. Due to the rapid pace of changes in the overall living and human activity conditions, education can no longer be conceived as a distinct and limited stage in the life of a human being, but as a comprehensive and long-lasting process over a lifetime. The training a young person receives in formal educational institutions is, in many respects, insufficient to successfully meet the complex challenges they will have to face in adult life. Adult education is complementary to the formal education received during schooling years. Nonetheless, it extends and refines formal education, helping adults meet the new demands and challenges of the social and professional life and environment.

The permanent changes and transformations that occur at social level, especially as a result of the acceleration of the technical and scientific progress, of the economic changes and of the dynamics on the labour market, given the improvement of the democratic framework of social life, require an education that extends throughout the individual's life. When we talk about adult education, we are not referring just to meeting the individual's need to widen their cultural horizon, as an intellectual ambition, but also to their effort to meet the demands of social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological development that usually requires new knowledge and skills necessary for adults living in society to make responsible choices and take effective action. Given the evolution trends of contemporary society, the notion of "permanence" stands for an educational principle stating that education can no longer be limited to the years spent in educational institutions and to the developments taking place herein, but it must become an integral part of the system of values, needs and interests of a human being throughout their life. Nowadays, it is an inconceivable notion that the education of a person ends with the years spent in formal educational institutions.

In pedagogical literature, life-long learning is regarded as the individual's effort to adapt to new situations generated by the progress of human culture and civilization, since "... the principle of permanent education, a factor that must be taken into account along with the rapid development of adult education, will be interpreted functionally, as an adaptation to the rapid changes in technology and scientific knowledge, and to the increased cultural needs due to the increasing in leisure time and in the number of advantages offered by the multiplying of modern means of mass communication." (Dave, 1991, p. 160).

The purpose of life-long learning is to help the individual to cope successfully with changes and challenges presented to them in social life, through the acquisition of new knowledge, the formation of new skills or the development of existing skills and competences, as well as through taking new social roles. Adult education implies a permanent exchange between the individual and their social and professional life environments, and the integration of all existing educational factors into an inseparable, dynamic and functional unit, capable of increasing and enhancing self-training and self-orientation capabilities in each person. The idea of adult education is inseparable from the idea of change, metamorphosis or rebirth (Laugier, 2011). There are several extracurricular factors that contribute to the acquiring of adult education, such as family, cultural institutions, organizations, the media, and society as a whole who can engage in actions with certain formative valences. As far as they are converging, the influences of these factors complement and supplement one another. Adult education is based on the implementation of the strategy in the field of life-long learning. Over the last decade, life-long learning has been an important part of the agenda for European cooperation policy in the field of education and training.

Adult education has also been acknowledged as an important component of life-long learning, since opportunities related to continuing education and training of adults are essential for both individual development and accomplishment, as well as for social progress. Adult education is closely linked to the permanent need to increase civic participation and improve overall individual existence (Eurydice, 2011). The European Commission's Communication named *Adult Education: It is never too late to learn* (European Commission, 2006), highlighted the important contribution of adult education and training in terms of competitiveness, employment and social inclusion.

This Communication was followed by the Action Plan on Adult Education: It is always a good time to learn (European Commission, 2007). The basic idea of these documents is that education should be considered as an extension in time and space of all actions and informative-formative influences, beyond the institutional education system and beyond school age. It has been generally acknowledged that education is a constant in the life of any human being, since it is impacting and resonating constantly at each level of evolution and development of the personality of an individual, both in school and in any form of extracurricular and post-school continuing education. There is an educational potential in all the social and cultural activities in which a person engages throughout their life, regardless of the place they are carried out. The educational process, including aspects of democratic citizenship, goes beyond the boundaries of formal educational institutions, becoming an integral part of our life experiences and of the most diverse human activities. Formative influences are exerted in a wide variety of formal, non-formal and informal structures that integrate learning and development experiences happening throughout an individual's social existence at any moment and under numerous forms of expression.

3. Adult Education for Democratic Citizenship

The need to prepare individuals to live in a democratic society calls for a coherent strategy of life-long learning by providing access to education for broad categories of people. Such a strategy should provide for the educational system to serve different categories of citizens of all ages, educational and vocational levels they achieved, and at the same time, to associate with other participants in the educational process, such as local authorities, networks of associations, training centres, etc.

According to Rowe (1992), life-long learning for democratic citizenship implies the coexistence of five types of communities:

1) The family community, acting as a mini-society with a power structure, rules, a system of sanctions and rewards of its own, with an axiological framework (implicit or explicit) and very strong emotional ties.

2) The school community, which is an extremely complex one and a catalyst for the various partners involved in civic education: parents, teachers, the media and civil society. As a learning environment, school is an organizational framework that employs a set of rules and regulations, power relations, and a structure that evaluates individuals according to their degree of participation in the educational process.

3) The affiliate community, which is the community that the individual can choose from the need to identify with. This type of communities may comprise groups of friends, interest groups, religious communities, clubs and associations, cultural organizations, professional bodies, political organizations or parties, etc.

4) The state community, which is involved in the legislative system, which also assigns rights and responsibilities to citizens through educational policies, through implementing social development programs, through the providing of necessary resources, etc.

5) The international (global) community that promotes the awareness of the existence of a common humanity or "world citizenship". Threats to the safety and security of the entire world, such as military conflicts, global pollution, the progressive reduction of energy resources, migration, etc., can strengthen our feeling of belonging to a "global village".

The education for democratic citizenship employs many adult learning opportunities and a diversification of everyday learning environments that enable mature individuals to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and civic values, to become aware of the relationship with their environment and their peers and to harmonize their interests and aspirations with the ideals of social development.

In addition, education for democratic citizenship is also essential for the development of knowledge geared towards the values of democracy and human rights, such as human dignity, equality, solidarity, non-discrimination, pluralism, the spirit of justice, as well as for the advancing of action-based skills and of competences focused on the capacity to change and adapt to new environments and realities. Many positive principles can thus be promoted. Among them, we can mention the freedom of choice, the commitment to common values, respect for differences, constructive relations with others and the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, as well as a global perspective on events, experiences and challenges, all being important for the personal development of a citizen and for the democratic society they live in, as a whole. Developing the proper approaches needed to achieve such objectives is a major challenge for decision-makers and practitioners. Education for Democratic Citizenship involves a series of practices and activities designed to better prepare youth and adults to participate actively in democratic life by taking on and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society. Consequently, we can distinguish the following features of this form of education:

- 1) it is a formative experience that takes place throughout an individual's life;
- 2) its role is to prepare people and communities for active and responsible civic participation;
- 3) it implies promoting the culture of democracy and human rights;
- 4) it emphasizes and makes the most of social and cultural diversity.

The education for democratic citizenship cannot be reduced to a mere discipline of study in formal educational institutions or to a limited stage in the life of the individual. It requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that from the perspective of life-long learning includes a wide range of other formal and informal ways of carrying it out, such as programmes and initiatives focused on civic and political education, human rights education, intercultural education, peace education programmes, education for sustainable development, etc. Democratic citizenship must be at the heart of educational policy-making since it makes up the core in the developing of a free, tolerant and just society.

In this regard, it is desirable to use an approach that would imply any formal, non-formal or informal educational activity that prepares an individual to act throughout his or her life as an active and responsible citizen who respects the rights of others around them. Thus, education for democratic citizenship contributes to social cohesion and solidarity, to mutual understanding, to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

4. European Policies

Active citizenship has been an important objective of the European life-long learning strategies and European youth policy, through which new forms of European governance based on active citizenship were promoted (Eurydice, 2012). The White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, 2001) states that openness, participation, accountability, competence and coherence are key principles of good democratic governance. Education plays an essential role in promoting the Council of Europe's fundamental

values: democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as in the prevention of violence, racism, extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance.

A deep awareness of the role of education is reflected in the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Education for Human Rights (ECD / EDO) by the 47-member states of the Council, within the Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)7. The Charter is an important point of reference for all those concerned with the education for citizenship and for human rights (Council of Europe, 2010). It has a catalytic role for the action that are carried out in the member states. It is also a way of disseminating good practice and raising standards across Europe and beyond. The European Commission has launched several significant initiatives to support member states in the development of civic competences. In 2006, an expert group was created to provide advice on the research and development of indicators in the field of civic competences and active citizenship in education.

This group of experts validates the research work of the Centre for Research on Life-long Learning regarding the establishing of indicators on the civic competences acquired by the European youth. Another EU expert group on key competences and curriculum reforms is now focusing on the evaluation of the current situation, since the evaluation stage was considered one of the most important issues for the successful implementation of the competence-oriented educational approach in schools. There is a strong focus on adopting new assessment methods to measure progress in key areas for the implementation of key competences, the development of new skills and change of attitudes. To show commitment and civic participation, citizens must have the proper information, skills and attitudes. These aspects are at the forefront of the European cooperation in the field of education, being among the key competences identified by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament in 2006 as essential characteristics citizens living in a knowledge society should ideally have (European Council, 2006).

Some of the most important political documents that shaped the European cooperation in the field of education have already acknowledged the importance of promoting active citizenship and as a result, it has become one of the main objective for the European educational systems to achieve in the future (European Council, 2001, 2009(a)). In addition, the European Reference Framework on key competences for lifelong learning (European Council, 2006) provides that young people should be given support in developing their social and civic competences throughout their school education. One of the main objectives of the European Union Strategy regarding youth for the years 2010 to 2018 is to encourage active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity (European Council, 2009(b)). The strategy includes several courses of action regarding education for democratic citizenship in both formal and non-formal educational activities such as participation in civil society and representative democracy or volunteering as a means of social inclusion and growth. In addition, 2011 was designated the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship. The European Commission's commitment to promoting active citizenship is a long-lasting endeavour. The Europe for Citizens Programme (for the years of 2007 to 2013) aimed at bringing citizens closer to the European Union and involving them in discussions and debates on the future of Europe.

This programme also aimed at encouraging active citizenship and promoting mutual understanding, bringing together people from different parts of Europe through meetings, exchanges and debates.

Promoting the active participation of European citizens in the development of EU policies was one of the objectives of the European Year for Citizens for Europe 2013.

5. Conclusion

The education for democratic citizenship is directed towards all individuals, regardless of age and occupation, of their role and status in society. Numerous situations individuals may face throughout their lifetime can lead to a learning process that can be spontaneous and diffuse, incidental or informal learning. Therefore, such education involves life-long learning, in any conditions and any form of human activity, to ensure the acquisition, renewal and supplementing of a wide range of knowledge and skills that condition the success of the individual's commitment in public activities.

Education for democratic citizenship is achieved both through formal learning established at an institutional level, and through other forms of learning, in the context of everyday life. It implies a temporal and a spatial dimension, the latter involving a continuum of educational environments, social and citizenship-oriented initiatives, as well as the blending of formal and informal education with considerable impact on the individual and the society overall. There are, naturally, common elements and differences between these learning environments, such as the values they share and promote, the legal framework, the specifics of democratic decision-making procedures, etc. These common elements allow the transfer and use of already acquired knowledge and ensure continuity from one learning environment to another. Representations and beliefs about the nature and attributes of the status of citizen are influenced by the experiences people have within such learning environments.

If we consider the fact that after completing the formal education phase, many young people and adults have limited access to life-long learning programmes, the education for democratic citizenship must increasingly include practical and direct experience-oriented learning, exploration and research learning within the everyday life of a citizen (the communities they are part of, the workplace, the family, the groups they belong to, the civic activities they are involved in, etc.). This practical, experience-based and exploratory learning will help people understand and familiarize themselves with social challenges, competition and cooperation, with their rights and obligations, legal possibilities and restrictions, all being key issues in the strategy of overcoming civic apathy.

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