Frontiers of Democracy
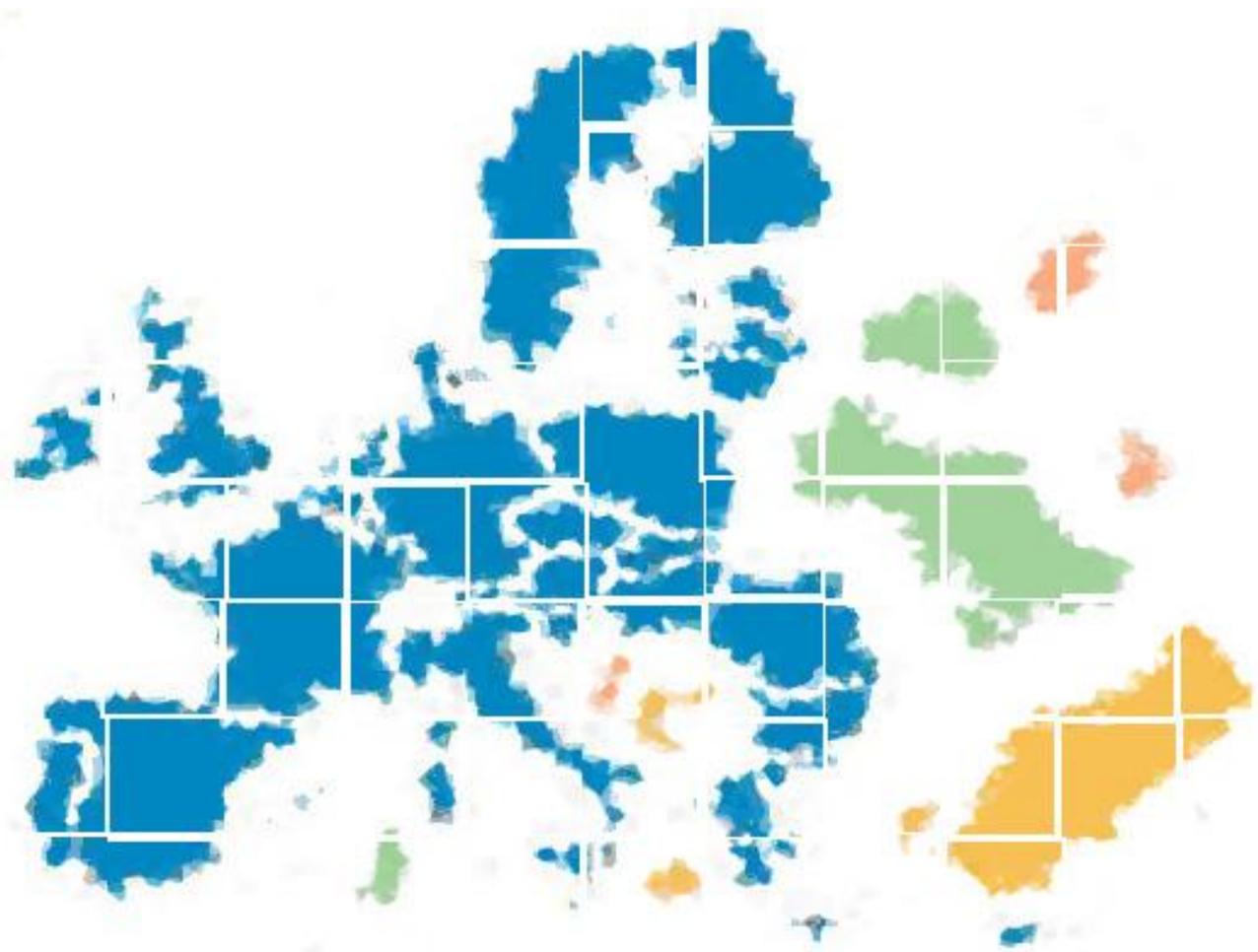
Is Structural Support for Democratic Participation and Socialization Feasible in Central and Eastern Europe?

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The Center for European Neighborhood Studies (CENS) is an independent research center of the Central European University (CEU) located in Budapest, Hungary. Its main goal is to contribute to an informed international dialogue about the future of the European Union in the world, while capitalizing on its Central European perspective and regional embeddedness.

The strategic focus of the center is academic and policy-oriented research on the place and role of the European Union in its rapidly changing and increasingly volatile neighborhood. Through its research, CENS seeks to contribute to the understanding of the environment where the EU, its member states and partners need to (co)operate, and it aims at supporting the constructive development of these relations by providing opportunities for discussion and exchange. The center's geographic focus areas are Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Russia.

Frontiers of Democracy
Embedding Democratic Values in Moldova and Ukraine

Moldova and Ukraine, countries of the European Union's Eastern Partnership program, are undergoing complex processes of democratic transformation, but with weak embeddedness of democratic values and principles drawbacks can occur. It is embeddedness that helps to overcome the challenges of transformation and pushes countries beyond mere frontiers of democracy towards becoming strongly committed democratic communities. The goal of the "Frontiers of Democracy: Embedding Democratic Values in Moldova and Ukraine" project of the CEU Center for European Neighborhood Studies is to facilitate embedding democratic values in the societal ethos in Moldova and Ukraine by providing a forum for discussion of the difficulties of such a complex process and by drawing on the transition experience of the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Visegrad Fund

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Jan Husák is elected Board Member of the Czech Council of Children and Youth since 2009. At the Youth Council, he initiated the successful and Europe-wide youth project "Have Your Say - Structured Dialogue of Youth". He is currently Coordinator of the National Working Group for the Structured Dialogue with Youth in the Czech Republic, and is also dealing with youth policy and participation research activities. For 2016-2017, he is elected as a member of the Advisory Council on Youth by the Council of Europe. He publishes regularly about civic and political participation and youth policy issues in the Czech Republic and abroad, and contributes to Czech and international conferences. He is a co-author of the books *Youth Policy Review in the Czech Republic* as well as *Political Parties and Nationalism in Visegrad Countries*. Within his Ph.D. study in political science at University of Economics in Prague, he researches the phenomenon of co-management and its impact on democratization of sectoral policies.

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When speaking about embedding democratic values, there is an essential need to consider more arenas and aspects which may be responsible for such a process. At a social level, we need to speak about societies becoming participatory (Almond and Verba, 1963) and also about democratic institutions as such. Concepts such as trust towards various political institutions and processes are critically important as they can enhance one's belief in a functional political system. We also need to bear in mind the necessity to constantly reflect upon the core values of a democracy.

Bearing in mind that the field of political socialization studies developmental processes by which people of all ages acquire political cognition, attitudes and behaviors (Powell – Cowart 2003), we need to focus as well on the individual level and understand the psychological processes and learning environments through which people acquire political sensitivity, accumulate experience, and gather information that allow them to arrive at positive attitudes about politics and social principles. Psychological concepts such as self-efficacy and political efficacy (Bandura 1997) are also relevant in this respect.

In this paper, we are not going to discuss democratic values as such. We understand them in the European context as fundamental principles of our societies, formulated in constitutions, as well as in EU Treaties and Charters on Human Rights and Freedoms. We emphasize learning environments where people, especially young people, can acquire political sensitivity, cognition, attitudes and experiences and where democratic values can be transmitted toward individuals.

Our basic question to discuss is if there is or could be any strategy to support the transmission of democratic value in the CEE region. What are the political processes already in place, and how could different parts of the "system" work better together toward achieving this goal? The obvious starting point is in the field of education, as far as education is a process of acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes. Therefore, education for democracy could be defined as processes of political socialization and transmission of democratic values and their embedding in the society. There are many different studies about values transmission (e.g. Jenning – Niemi 1968), and, in the next part of the paper, we will focus on the different agents of political socialization and their connections to various forms of education.

Forms of education

Educational theory differentiates between three forms of education – formal, non-formal and informal learning (e.g. Colardny – Bjornavold 2004). Formal education is the best known form for the wide public since it refers to the formal schooling system. Individuals follow a given curricula and have educational goals and pathways to choose from, all provided by the system which is also in charge of evaluating their performance. Usually, at least at the basic level, we consider formal education as compulsory in modern and CEE societies. In the context of this form of education, a formal evaluation and certification about one's achievements is given, producing effects in terms of employability as well as social status. However, acquired knowledge is getting old in time and could become obsolete. Therefore, in the last decades, the concept of life-long learning gained importance. It emphasizes the need of continuous learning, during the whole life of the individual.

Forms of non-formal education and informal learning conceptualize factors and agents beyond formal schooling and therefore widen our perspective about education in a more systematic manner. A voluntary approach characterizes non-formal education; it has planned goals and outcomes and is based on self-reflection of the participant. It is therefore more suited for acquiring skills, building attitudes, while it is more individualized than traditional forms of education, which widely survives especially in the CEE region focusing much more on transmitting knowledge than skills. Informal learning is a process happening more unsystematically throughout an individual's life, and can thus easily be referred to as a "life experience".

Agents of political socialization and values transmission

There is practically unlimited number of factors which influence political socialization. Different researchers emphasize the family, the schools, peer-groups, the mass media, religion, political parties and ideologies, the work place, or particular historical moments and their interpretation. There is no grand theory in the field, but various studies discuss a variety of patterns based on e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, social environment. Identifying such patterns can be useful when planning macro-systems in the support of political socialization, but these still only address statistical categories. To reach tangible impact on individuals, particular approaches are necessary that take into account the individual context and social roles in each case. In this regard, there are many opportunities for supporting political socialization in the framework of formal and even non-formal education, but the highly individual cases of informal learning provide little to no systematic possibilities to work with.

Possible strategies concerning supporting the most important agents of political socialization

In this section, we will list possible macro-strategies to support political socialization by specific agents from the educational perspective.

Formal education, the schooling system and educational policies

The formal introduction of democratic and civic education subjects and their goals in the formal school education system, with pre-approved curricula, is a precondition for the development of proper educational policies within the political system. Otherwise, such endeavors could become subject to political manipulation and may not benefit from continuous financial support.

Another opportunity is to enhance the role of democratic and civic education including democratic values and processes as part of the formal curricula and in school environments by incorporating time for such activities, interlinking them with other subjects, but also by introducing participatory activities of pupils and students, such as schools youth councils, youth board, pupils senates, school magazines, petition right for students.

Supporting the development of structures within the schooling system that allow the possibility for pupils and teachers to work on and discuss current and sensitive political and social issues in an environment that is objective and free from indoctrination is also advisable. This could be a problematic issue especially in the Central and Eastern European region where such processes are lacking, as opposed to countries like Germany, where there is even a specific institution, the *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*, which is in charge of this process. One of the main goals of such independent structures within the educational system is to work on methodological approaches and to reach teachers, pupils and students with objective information, who can afterwards critically work with them within the context of democratic values in educational environments.

The role of the teacher is crucial, and, in this regard, could be helpful to look at teachers as one of the most important agents of political socialization. They have direct contact with students during a long period of time and need to be fully aware of their own influence, and have appropriate space and support for such work. Teachers need to be qualified to teach within the field of civic education, and they also need to constantly update their teaching materials in order to reflect current issues. It is also critically important for public schools to be free of political pressures, a situation which is not always possible in the CEE countries, because of politicized leadership of schools and clientelistic political behavior.

In the Czech Republic, teachers of social sciences and civic education from primary and secondary schools established a new association where they aim to change the rigid old style of teaching civic education that was not in line

with the concept of citizenship education based on the principles of the Council of Europe. Also, in 2016, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports initiated a new pilot project that creates a new position of "citizenship education coordinators" in schools from various backgrounds. These coordinators should be educated, share their experiences and work on the "democratization" of schools and educational processes within schools as well as support pupils' self-government in order to increase their potential.

Non-Formal Education

There are many agents of non-formal education such as non-governmental organizations (NGO), private companies, workers unions, public libraries, leisure time/community centres, public institutions (e.g. employment services and their programs of re-qualifications and active employment policies, public political institutions). It is not in the scope of this paper to analyze all of them, and, therefore, we will only mention the main principles and agents. It should be noted, however, that the youth sphere has a specific space in non-formal education as there are generally concrete strategies targeting this group's political socialization via e.g. youth work or democratic education. Furthermore, political socialization of the youth is very important in creating a core value system, which, as developmental psychology argues, may be changed during the course of one's life time.

Within the context of the European and CEE region, we can stress as an important player in non-formal education the Council of Europe. In this field, the organization enjoys political support[1] and directly works with this problem not only through its Division on Democracy and Directorates on Youth and Education but generally through all of its structures and field of work.[2] Such institutional back-up enables the Council of Europe to support and coordinate political socialization strategies in the region, based on the free and voluntary will of the states or their groups to participate in such projects.

To support cooperation in non-formal education in the wider CEE region, the Visegrad countries and the Eastern Partnership countries (without Azerbaijan) have also signed a common memorandum on cooperation in the youth field,[3] in June 2015, to support cross-border cooperation and exchange, sharing good policy and projects practices, and to support youth participation. Such political processes show willingness and readiness from the part of

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[1] All countries of CEE are members of this intergovernmental political institution; however, the level of involvement is up to the individual member state which makes it in some cases very complicated to fully implement existing policy and structural recommendations. Nevertheless, the Council of Europe is one of the strong political agents focusing on democratic values transmission in all aspects of public governance and education.

[2] There are related political documents e.g. from the Local and Regional Authority Congress, Parliamentarian Assembly, INGO Conference but also very practical methodical materials and manuals for educators as well as researchers (e.g. Compass and various T-Kits).

[3] *Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministries of the Visegrad Group Countries responsible for Youth and the Ministries of the Eastern Partnership Countries responsible for Youth in Youth Field*

states to work on common activities and strengthen the policy framework for such activities which are also supporting political socialization by the means of non-formal education and informal learning.

Important Agents of Non-Formal Education

NGOs could play both positive as well as negative roles within political socialization. The negative side could be illustrated by identifying organizations that are not democratic in their operation, management or activities (e.g. anti-democratic NGOs). However, at least in theory, most NGOs are grounded in democratic principles. Therefore, the engagement in NGO work could create experience in strengthening democratic values and many NGOs, especially those targeting the youth, are developing and running various non-formal educational programs and projects. The same example could be followed by private companies. Such activities could be also supported at the macro-level, while also providing resources and imposing requirements in terms of quality. Finally, it is also important to be able to guarantee civil society independence from political pressure, in order to be effective in running non-formal education projects, especially those focusing on democratic values.

Public institutions could also employ various non-formal educational programs for the wider public in order to enable them to get to know and better experience the kind of work and democratic procedures, principles and values at the core of their mission. For example, at the local level, municipal authorities could organize activities aiming to explain the principles and functionality of democratic processes, to inter-connect with other public institutions or encourage voluntary work. Of course, this kind of involvement requires a high level of democratic political culture within such institutions to exist. Projects focusing on teaching civic education to people of all ages and run by public institutions have the advantage of setting high quality standards, while also running the risk of being politicized.

In the Czech Republic, for example, there are projects implemented by local authorities that focus on participatory policy making, especially in the field of strategic planning. There are several such programs, and one of the oldest and most successful one is the network of so-called "Healthy cities", which focuses on carefully implementing the UN Agenda 21 that offers concrete steps and plans in most of the municipalities' tasks. Another important initiative, realized with the support of EU funding, is the network of Local Action Groups which bring together representatives of all sectors at the local level – public, non-governmental and business – in order to plan common visions for the region.

Public libraries often help to organize different educational meetings, debates and other kinds of activities to support public discussions and political socialization embracing the role of a moderator in local public discussions.

Informal learning strategies to support political socialization

Although there are many learning strategies supporting political socialization, in this section, we only focus on those implemented by two important socialization agents – the media and the family.

Media outlets are usually publicly available and individuals get in touch with them intentionally or unintentionally. In this way, people can be confronted with social and political content. According to their attitudes, skills and level of critical thinking or media literacy in general, they can develop political analytical skills. However, since the media can also be either politicized or be influenced by monopolistic media ownership structures, ensuring media freedom and a high standard of objectivity and investigation practices is critical.

Discussions about politics and social issues within families are one of the most important factors influencing the political socialization of individuals. However, it is each family's decision on how and to what extent these topics are included in discussions. It is widely acknowledged that some families are very politically divided and therefore political and social topics could also become nearly taboo. Many socio-economic factors, such as the level of education, influence a family's propensity to discuss politics, as well as the particular ideological side embraced (see e.g. Schoon and Cheng 2011, Zukin at al. 2006, Duke, Skay, Pettingell, & Borowsky, 2005). It is not without importance to mention that the idea according to which young people adopt the beliefs and positions of their parents is not really working as far as many young people, especially during adolescence, oppose the opinions of their parents and could thus create very different and even opposite beliefs and attitudes toward politics. When the family is politically divided, young persons can alter their own point of view in order to avoid any political discussions or potential conflicts and negative feelings.

In the Czech Republic, since 2016, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has started preparing a new governmental strategy on Citizenship Education for the whole society which should bring a systematic approach and better coordination for the formal, non-formal and informal activities focused on citizenship education.

Conclusion

There are many barriers for people to become active citizens. An active citizen could be normatively described as the desired outcome of effective political socialization. However, research shows that only a rather small part of the population is politically engaged. Generally, only about 7-10 percent of the population is very active, around 20 percent are sometimes active and around 20 to 30 percent are potentially active. The rest of the society seems

to be rather inactive and a small part is not willing to participate at all. These proportions are similar across the western world, and the tendencies are true for the Czech Republic, as well (COV 2015). Therefore, it seems that the strategies to support political socialization and involvement need to be targeted especially on the sector of the population which is willing to participate. When designing such precise strategies and offering external incentives for individuals to participate, it is important to consider the overall situation ranging from the individual settings and beliefs, including the target groups' perception of their political and social efficacy, the macro political situation and the groups' conceptions of trust toward processes, institutions and the system as a whole.

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