STUDENTS ON EXPERIENCING THEIR OWN CITIZENSHIP

Studenci o doświadczaniu własnej obywatelskości

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Abstract

The article attempts to present the ways in which the phenomenon of citizenship is experienced by male and female students at one of Warsaw's universities. Experiencing refers to the entire process of perceiving reality, to the acquisition of knowledge, cognition and to one's own feelings. In the study presented here, the category of citizenship that emerged in the students' experience, named in the language of the researchers, fulfils the function of the individual's legal status, social and political involvement, and romantic patriotism. Civic school education implements a minimal form of learning citizenship, especially in the face of social, economic and cultural globalisation. It proves to be not only inadequate, but downright undemocratic, due to its inability to engage in a critique of social inequalities and a dialogue over the acceptable scope of equality and freedom for the general public.

Keywords: democracy, citizen, citizenship, civil society, civic education.

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto próbę przedstawienia sposobów doświadczania fenomenu obywatelskości przez studentki i studentów jednego z warszawskich uniwersytetów. Doświadczanie odnosi się do całokształtu procesu postrzegania rzeczywistości, do zdobywania wiedzy, poznawania i własnych odczuć. W prezentowanym badaniu kategoria obywatelskości wyłoniona w doświadczeniu studentów, nazwana językiem badaczek, spełnia funkcję statusu prawnego jednostki, zaangażowania społecznego i politycznego oraz romantycznego patriotyzmu. Szkolna edukacja obywatelska realizuje minimalną i zarazem elitarną formę uczenia się obywatelstwa, zwłaszcza wobec społecznej, ekonomicznej i kulturowej globalizacji. Okazuje się ona nie tylko niewystarczająca, ale wręcz niedemokratyczna, ze względu na swoją niezdolność do podejmowania krytyki nierówności społecznych oraz dialogu nad możliwym do przyjęcia dla ogółu społeczeństwa zakresem równości i wolności.

Słowa kluczowe: demokracja, obywatel, obywatelskość, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, edukacja obywatelska.

Introduction

The phrase 'crisis of democracy' has appeared – it seems, for longer – in the language of politics, public discourse, journalism, and academia. It refers not only to 'young' democracies, but also to more mature, consolidated ones. "Is democracy facing a crisis? Is an epochal change coming?' – one can easily fall into panic, but it is worth keeping some perspective.

Our intention is to attempt to present the ways in which the phenomenon of citizenship is experienced by students at one of Warsaw's universities. We understand citizenship as an integral part of the political and cultural identity of individuals. It is indisputable that the process of shaping civic attitudes is complex, extends over successive phases of human life, and takes place in different areas of the social functionality of individuals. In our study, we analyse young adults' experience of citizenship through the prism of civic/political education in schools and young people's participation in the public sphere. Following in the footsteps of Henry A. Giroux (2010, p. 75), we position at the centre of our analysis the question of whether the education in which interviewees participated in, has the character of promoting and developing a diversity of public cultures. The point of reference here is in particular, the 'strong public sphere', which, in the author's understanding, "allows for the conjuncture of dialogue with the possibility of influencing policy change" (p. 75).

In the first part of our text, we recall some theoretical aspects related to the problematic of the article. The main part consists of a report on a phenomenographic study, reconstructing students' experience of the phenomenon of citizenship. In the final part, going consciously beyond the methodological framework of phenomenography, we attempt to summarize briefly the result of the study and point out, in connection with the selected categories of citizenship, the possibilities, but also the limitations of contemporary civic education.

Citizen – citizenship – civil society – theoretical determinations

The fundamental theoretical determinations concern the categories of citizen, citizenship, civil society and the relationship that exists between them. A citizen is a member of a political community (nowadays the state).

> Citizenship is the legal status of an individual and at the same time a social role. Citizenship is not a complete status. In the traditional language of sociology, it is only one of the social roles of the acting subject that is quite important, but not the most important. Similarly, civic identity appears alongside many other identities. The emphasis on the acting subject creating itself in the course of practice is a conscious reference to Antonio Gramsci's philosophy of practice. (Raciborski, 2010, p. 8)

Citizenship, on the other hand, is both the supreme category in political education and, a concept inseparably linked to the term 'citizenship'. Elżbieta Ozga (2011) points to their interchangeable use, although the terms are not entirely unambiguous, as citizenship most often refers to the political-legal status of an individual resulting from the nature of the socio-political order in which he or she lives, whilst the concept of citizenship includes a specific conception of 'being a citizen' in a given socio-political reality, one that honours specific characteristics, values, patterns of action and civic virtues approved and desired by the community. "It can be considered that the content brought by this category is treated as a postulated outcome of the civic education process in the young generation", the author concludes. Wojciech Misztal and Artur Kościański (2019, p. 13) assume that "citizenship is a form of culture", created through evolution in a specific frame of reference. Arkadiusz Peisert (2018), referring to the thought of Jerzy Szacki (1997), observes that "the notion of civility, from which civil society takes its name has lost its earlier connotations, and should be explained as simply the totality of characteristics of a citizen". Thus, according to Szacki, the equivalent of the word 'civility' would rather be *obywatelskość* (or rather *duch obywatelski* – civic spirit). This word, however, is related to the concept of civilisation, one that is understood as good manners, politeness, courtesy or 'gentleness of manners'. In yet another text, Peisert (2019) observes that the concept of civility, although willingly and frequently invoked in numerous political programmes, is only sporadically perceived as an attribute of a 'civilised way of life'. When in fact, according to the author, 'civilised civility' expressed in openness to dialogue and diversity, tolerance of other people's views, readiness to cooperate across differences, involvement in local social life, and, finally, the acquisition of knowledge that develops a person's ability to resist potential threats lurking in the community.

Civil society is a construct that emerges from the relationship between the citizen and the state. As a model, a distinction is made between 'two faces' of civil society. The first is "a political civil society constituted by citizens communicating and associating in order to get the state to allocate in their favour some goods that the state has at its disposal or that can only be produced at the level of the state, or the other way around, defending some of their freedoms or goods against the state." (Raciborski, 2010, p. 8) The second is "autonomous, civil society as a sphere of private interests that are by nature selfish and conflictual ... In this sphere, individuals voluntarily associate, co-operate in order to effectively meet their needs in collaboration with others" (Raciborski, 2010, pp. 8–9).[1] Using a definitional simplification, the first type of

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[1] It is worth mentioning that such a distinction has a long tradition in the history of ideas. In the reconstructions of Szacki (1994, pp. 90–145) or Walzer (1997, pp. 99–103), civil society was seen as an alternative or even opposing form of social order in relation with the state. The type of civil society which is listed as the first one draws on Locke for its source, while the

civil society is political society, while the second type is civil society. Sometimes the former is clearer, sometimes the latter, often showing up as Janus-faced.

Related to the determination made is the way in which civility is understood. It is sometimes regarded as an attribute of the group. However, in line with what has already been said, it is reasonable to see civility as an attitude of the individual towards the political community as a whole and at the same time, as an attitude towards fellow citizens (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2005). Researchers emphasise that a complete attitude combines a cognitive component (knowledge about the state, procedures), an axiological-affective component (values and emotions associated with the state, models of good citizenship) and a behavioural component (dispositions to act) (Raciborski, 2010). From the point of view of our study, all dimensions of citizenship proved interesting, although they were of a gradual nature. They were at times partial and at times redundant.

At the end of the theoretical determinations, it is still worth at least briefly mentioning the key concepts of citizenship in the liberal democratic system, which may prove useful in analysing the meanings given to them by interviewees. Researchers emphasise that these concepts are related to the characteristics and attitudes of a 'good citizen' acting in the public space not only for their own benefit, but also for the common good. Will Kymlicka (2001) recognises that these are: public spiritedness, also referred to as an activist attitude – this is nothing other than the willingness and ability to engage in public discourse, combined with an evaluation of the actions of those in power and, importantly, to question the validity of their decisions in the course of free and open discussion. A sense of justice, i.e. the ability to understand and respect the rights of others – it is the decentration and resignation of one's own point of view in respect of others, refraining from harming actions, it also implies a civic readiness to counteract injustice. Civility and tolerance, understood broadly as a legal and civic duty to refrain from discrimination of any kind – it is therefore not just "polite behaviour" and "good manners" in public spaces, but "this kind of politeness is a logical extension of non-discrimination, as it is necessary to ensure that all citizens have the same opportunity to participate in civil society" observes Kymlicka (2001, p. 298) and a shared sense of solidarity and loyalty.

The virtues of citizenship outlined above by Kymlicka, constitute a model and maximum conception of citizenship in a liberal democratic society. Its' essential components are being active and involved in public life and exercising one's political rights. The problem is still inactivity in the public sphere, and the apolitical nature of citizens, which, typically, is becoming a dominant feature of globalising societies. This concept, called minimal as opposed to maximal, "is generally defined negatively:

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second one draws on the tradition of Hobbes, Hegel, Marx and is close to what is most often understood as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Raciborski, 2010, p. 9).

as refraining from breaking the law, from harming other fellow citizens and from restricting their freedoms" (Hildebrandt-Wypych, p. 115). For our study of the meanings that interviewees give to the category of civility, basically all four are relevant, which is why they are characterised in the article. The first dimension is called identity dimension (minimum: citizenship as name and legal status, maximum: citizenship as identity content); the second dimension is the core virtues (minimum: focus on privacy and responsibility for local issues, maximum: civic responsibility and active action to improve social conditions). The third dimension is political engagement between (minimum: passivity, focus on privacy, maximum: activity, critical involvement in social and political life). The fourth dimension is social prerequisites, it concerns individual beliefs about existing social conditions (minimum: existing social relations are accepted uncritically and social inequalities are accepted and ignored or justified by the diversity of skills and abilities of individuals; maximum: a critical approach to the social structure and situation of disadvantaged groups, as well as actions taken to increase their participation in social, economic and political life) (McLaughlin, pp. 237–238, after Hildebrandt-Wypych, p. 116).

In McLaughlin's conception it is worth noting the interpretative nature of democratic citizenship. Society appears in this conception as being without a single, precisely defined and accepted version of citizenship. Different forms of it clash with each other in a pluralistic democratic society, and one side of the dispute over the dominant and valid concept is education, faced with the dilemma of a choice, often politically determined, between a minimum and maximum version of citizenship education.

Methodological note

The question of experiencing citizenship seems obvious in the context of lifelong learning processes, as these are recognised as an ordinary, everyday activity of human beings, their way of being in the world that almost defines them as subjects (Usher et al., 1997). In this sense, also methodologically, the knowledge produced by man is a kind of negotiation between him and the external world, and during the interview it takes the form of a text that contains ways of knowing the world and participating in it. Linguistic codes, which also include cultural codes, are an instrument for giving meanings to the surrounding reality and form a kind of medium constituting this subject. At the analysis level, therefore, the researcher needs to reconstruct what the interviewees say about their experience of civility, and to read the meanings they give to this experience. Reconstructing the ways in which civility is experienced as a derivative of biographical experiences, meant that the question of: "what is civility for you and how do you experience it" was the starting point in the semi-structured interview, which additionally included, according to the research procedure in phenomenography (Marton, 1988), clarifying questions such as: What does it mean to be

a citizen? How is civility formed? How does a person become an active citizen? How does civility manifest itself in a private, family, social, economic, political space? Is the learning experience a manifestation of civility? If so, why? What are your personal experiences with civility? We have adopted the fundamental epistemological assumption of phenomenography, that there is no other world than the one we experience. However, we are aware that the treatment of phenomenographic research in methodology is not straightforward (Malewski, 2010). Here we treat the understanding of experiences as a text that has emerged from constructivist practices, which means that even if our experience is individual and singular, it is still culturally mediated in a particular place, time and social environment. In this sense, the phenomena of experiencing citizenship, although individual and singular, become a collective intellect, defined as a supra-individual system of thought forms, spread through social processes of knowledge distribution, forming part of a social heritage (Marton, 1988). This is because an important role in phenomenographic research is played by the belief in the collective nature of subjective conceptions of phenomena discovered during the research process. This is in line with the main thesis of phenomenography, which assumes that people give different meanings to the world around them, and that the number of these meanings is limited. The resulting descriptions of the subject conceptions of the phenomena analysed show similarities that take the form of relatively fixed and quantitatively limited sets of meanings ascribed by the participants in the study (Marton, 1988). The interlocutors were male (6) and female students (18) of one of Warsaw's universities, full-time students in the fields of pedagogy and sociology, aged 20 to 22. The analyses presented below are the result of a transcription of the phenomenographic text.

About the ways in which students experience civility

Reaching the description requires the following procedure: Familiarisation of researchers with interview transcripts; Summarising; Comparison of excerpts from statements selected at the summary stage; Grouping the answers based on visible similarities and differences; Identifying the criterion (essence) of similarities and differences that emerge on initial examination; Labelling the categories in such a way that the name corresponds to the domain of the described phenomenon and the various ways of experiencing (understanding) it by participants; Contrasting the selected categories of description with meta-theory and perspectives concerning the analysed phenomenon (Marton et al., 1992). It made possible to identify categories for describing the experience of civility in the consciousness of students. It turns out that, in terms of meaning, they form a diverse quality, and it couldn't be otherwise given the multiplicity and diversity of human biographies, life and educational experiences, attitudes, interests and value hierarchies.

The specific conceptions of meaning given by the students, and named in the language of the researchers, are as follows:

A.   Citizenship as an individual's legal status

A significant proportion of our interviewees' considered citizenship to be an unambiguous, completely self-evident category, requiring no in-depth analysis or reflection in a broader context. In their statements, citizenship revealed itself as a pre-imposed, random category, and thus completely independent of the subject and hence not submitted to any discussion. This perception of citizenship was accompanied by a superficial, schematic, sloganeering interpretation of 'being a citizen'. Nevertheless, such a formal, narrow, one-dimensional understanding of citizenship is reflected in the literature on the subject, after all, representatives of legal sciences also define the concept of citizenship in different ways. Anyway, most national and international legislation does not contain a definition of this term (Bodnar, 2008). Below are examples of statements made by young adults:

W3.   Being a citizen means being linked by a permanent legal bond to a particular state. It entails the possession of rights and duties.

W1.   A citizen is a member of a particular state with certain rights and duties.

The authors of these statements clearly point to the legal nature of the bond between the individual and the state, as well as – arising from citizenship – both the guarantee of the enjoyment of a certain range of rights, and the imperative of fulfilling the obligations imposed on the individual. Characteristically, this understanding of citizenship in most cases correlates with a territorial reference. The belief emerges that the individual-state relationship (the state territory, i.e. the part of the earth's surface belonging to it) determines the individual's belonging to a particular state. Moreover, the fulfilment of the condition of living/staying within national borders appears several times as a criterion for citizenship. Interviewees underline:

W22.   To be a citizen is to legally be a resident of an area. It is a person who was born or one of their parents was born in a certain area and thus has the right to work, education, etc. in the country, as an able-bodied person.

W9.   To be a citizen is to inhabit a country, to live in it.

W14.   It means being part of a community, having the same rights, living in the same country with other citizens.

W2.   To be a citizen is to be a person who resides on the territory of a country, bound by its laws. To be a citizen is to live in a country and to feel as a person who belongs to it.

W5.   To be a member of a certain grouping of people. To live in a certain territory. Having citizenship entails performing different duties, depending on where you were born.

B. Civility as romantic patriotism

This conception of civility assumes that it is a community of people united by the same historical experience, customs and culture. The respondents' statements take on a somewhat pompous tone; they most often refer to national holidays and solemn anniversaries commemorating the heroism and martyrdom of the Polish nation. Their authors do not reflect on the meaning of the concept of everyday civility, on how it manifests itself on a daily basis, or what kind of civility we need in a globalised world. Example statements:

W13. To be born in one's country, to remember and know its history. Civility means taking care of one's roots, traditions and culture.

W15. Civility is the linking of one's individual identity with the historical and cultural identity of a country or region. Civility is shaped in the family and in one's immediate environment, through participation in culture, in customs, in the celebration of festivals, etc. The formation of citizenship is influenced by effective history education.

W24. Citizenship, in my opinion, is a sense of attachment, a bond with a community, a place, a culture and a tradition. It is an appreciation, an enjoyment of these assets. It is a readiness to stand up for them.

W10. Civility is about conscious belonging. It is when one knows the culture, customs, traditions, history of the country in which one lives or was born.

W11. A person becomes an active citizen by taking part in traditional rituals, the Independence March, celebrating special days such as the 3rd of May.

W23. The very reading of literature such as 'Pan Tadeusz' is a manifestation of civility, rooting tradition in us, awareness of it.

W16. I feel I am a citizen of Poland because of the fact that I grew up here, speak the language, celebrate national holidays and know Poland's history.

W12. Civility for me is a sense of pride in the country and identifying with it. It is shaped by celebrating national holidays.

This kind of experience of our interlocutors can, of course, carry strong educational potential, provided that behind the experience there is curiosity about history and culture, national characteristics and attitudes, those worthy of respect and nurturing, as well as those that do not bring us glory. It is not enough to know history, one has to understand it, one must have the ability to confront it with the dilemmas of the present. Reliable historical knowledge can open the way from nationalism and xenophobia to openness, tolerance, commitment to civic attitudes and values; it can help overcome established patterns of thought and provide arguments for reinterpreting our vision of reality. The results of an empirical study conducted among several hundred students at Warsaw's state universities point to a machinic, unreflective attitude of young people towards Poland and Poles: "Some of the opinions about ourselves have become so firmly anchored in our consciousness that they function as common truths,

stereotypes, rarely subject to (self-)reflection; at the same time, they are the object of extreme feelings: shame or pride" (Przybylski, 2022, p. 155). The study cited above also reveals an analogy between young students' attitudes towards patriotism and the phenomenon of experiencing civility that we are investigating. Przybylski (2022, p. 154) states: "Patriotism is mainly associated by my interviewees with a passive attitude (attachment, respect, celebration of anniversaries) rather than an active one (volunteering, caring for the environment or acting for the benefit of the environment)". It is no different with civility in our phenomenographic study: it is sometimes identified with the emotional sphere and takes on a 'festive' character.

C.   Civility as a social engagement

In this conception of meanings, citizenship/civility refers to the idea of civil society, especially informal, grassroots action for an important social cause. Remarkably, interviewees did not mention the experience of belonging to any social organisations or associations, focusing rather on their individual actions to improve the situation of others:

W7.   I welcomed a family from Ukraine into my home. I bought the girl clothes and gave her my own clothes that I didn't wear.

W17.   I always give something when there are fundraisers, for example for the GOCC or animals in shelters.

Contrary to the statements of our interviewees, it can be concluded from the Centre for Public Opinion Research [CBOS] data (2020), that involvement in social work in civic organisations shows an upward trend. The rate of social activity within organisations and associations has increased by 20% over two decades. CBOS data (2020) further shows that Poles' activity in organisations and social activities is favoured by such characteristics as above-average religious commitment, higher education, significant occupational position, relatively highest earnings and status as a schoolchild or student. The absenteeism of students in social organisations and associations can be seen as a deficit, given the psychosocial, educative and educational significance traditionally attributed to them. Aleksander Kamiński (1974, pp. 156–157) mentioned the affiliative function, "i.e. belonging to some social group, identifying with that group", the integrative function of associations ("for individuals, a bridge between the family and the local community on the one hand, and the nation and the all-humanity – community on the other"), and the expressive function (expression of experiences and tastes). Besides, the topic of organisations and associations, has also been frequently commented on by researchers in already democratic Poland in the context of the issue of shaping civil society (e.g. Przyszczypkowski, 1999; Urbanik, 2007), although in recent decades their attention seems to have been drawn more to small social groups and their educational potential (e.g. Kurantowicz, 2007). The inactivity of our

interviewees within social organisations and associations may be explained, at least in part, by living outside of their close local environment due to their studies in Warsaw, their commitment to studying and paid work, or by individualisation processes in modern society, processes that abolish the need for the individual to belong to traditional social structures and to have a clear identity (Beck, 1983). Nevertheless, none of our respondents "define themselves as a distinct individual whose identity is founded on a sharp distinction between self and others" (Reykowski, 1990, p. 17). It can be assumed, following Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska (2006, p. 235), that in postmodernity "the question of the relationship between the individual and the group framed in terms of superiority and inferiority does not exist. The rights and interests of individuals are aligned with the collective rights and collective good. This is accompanied by a balance between individual and societal interests".

Although the students participating in our study did not declare membership in social organisations (only one interviewee shared information on her activity in the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association [ZHP] during her high school years), in their consciousness social work, voluntary work and, in principle, any activity for the benefit of the social environment and the country belong to the category of civility and, in addition, are of central importance.

> W21. A person becomes an active citizen by being involved in local affairs, by doing good for society, by providing security, by looking after the community and the environment.
>
> W4. Civility manifests itself in commitment to the common good, in cooperation and support.
>
> W20. Civility is the ability to act in the community for the benefit of the state.
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> W2. An active citizen contributes to a variety of causes, participates in volunteering, collections, foundation activities.
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> W9. In my opinion, a person becomes an active citizen when they see an injustice being done somewhere and try to help as much as they can.

Civility means helping those in need, reacting to injustice, to discrimination, acting for the W13. benefit of future generations, caring for ecology and public space, respecting other people and oneself. An example is the fight for animal rights, which are very neglected in Poland.

> W7. I guess I don't have much personal experience; there have been times when I have participated in charity events, collected things for a Noble Gift for those in need. But I can share that my dad is an active citizen, he is an administrator of many housing estates, manages small communities, takes care of local issues, safety and other needs of people.

It can be inferred from the above statements that the interviewees, even if they are not currently involved in civil society activities, identify with its activities. Their

experience of civility in this area, however, is very poor, given the multitude of possible forms of civic activity, e.g. articulation of the interests of a given social group, control over the actions of the authorities, participation in the processes of preparation and decision-making at various levels of the authorities, participation in consultations, advisory bodies, development of social programmes and alternative projects, implementation of social campaigns and actions, educational events, etc.

   D.   Civility as a political engagement

This conception of the meanings given to civility centres around the basis of a democratic state, namely participation in elections. The (female) interviewees declare that, as citizens, they exercise this right, often emphasising that it is the most important right:

W13.   I am a citizen of my country, I exercise my rights, I go voting.

W1.   In the political sphere – voting and supporting groups etc. whose ideas are close to our views. It's also about active participation and not waiting for things to fix themselves.

W8.   My personal experience of civility is that I go to the polls and try to keep up to date with what is happening in the country.

W11.   I am interested in politics, I attend elections.

W5.   I am a citizen of Poland. I feel I am a full-fledged and active citizen. I take part in elections, voting and strikes because I want a better quality of life.

Several statements show that, alongside the active right to vote, an important element of civility as understood by young people is expressing their opposition to political projects or undesirable social phenomena that they do not endorse.

W6.   I have been attending protests, wanting to make a difference.

W14.   My important experiences with civility are the Women's Strike and the Equality Parade.

W3.   I participated in the Climate Strike and the Women's Strike. I know my rights.

W16.   I take part in Cleaning Up the World, a kind of protest against all those who destroy the environment.

W2.   I speak openly what I think about politics.

However, the participation of individuals in strikes, protests or demonstrations has not developed into long-term activity. Rather, it has the character of a single spurt, which may be renewed by new developments or further provocations from politics. Only one interviewee declared a continuation of her commitment to a cause that is important to her:

W18. I am aware of what kind of people are in the parties, how they lie, how they manipulate, how they hate women. That's how I feel – hated by this country and the parties. It's the men who are the best and the most important. I am going to fight for women's rights.

This is the only statement in which resistance, rebellion, contestation, civil disobedience, i.e. traits traditionally ascribed to the young generation as part of the community loudest in opposition to the inefficiency of the system and demanding social change, are voiced. The meanings ascribed to civility by the interviewees indicate the withdrawal of youth from the public sphere into privacy – a phenomenon observed already years ago (e.g. Szafrańska, 2010).

It is also worth noting the few statements emphasising the importance of the knowledge and information necessary to be an informed citizen. The conceptions of meanings given to civility in this area of interviewees' experiences are based on the belief that it involves a duty to make decisions whose consequences are not only borne by the individual but also by society as a whole:

W23. If we have to decide, we have to think about the consequences of our decisions, and for that we need knowledge.

W21. Informed citizenship requires knowledge, and you need to keep acquiring knowledge, because politics is constantly changing.

W18. I believe that civility is also about being aware of what is happening in the country, in politics. This is something that needs to be learned.

The above reflections take on particular significance in the era of post-truth: the distortion of truth, the destruction of its ethos, its over-interpretation, crude lies, falsifications, deliberate misleading of the addressee (especially of mass media information). The new (alleged) quality deprives truth of its objectivity, distorts reality, leads to indifference to the truth, to disappearance of the ability to distinguish fact from commentary and, ultimately, to dehumanisation of the world and human relations. The challenge for education is therefore increasing, and it is obviously a matter of developing the ability to perceive reality critically. "Critical thinking is a type of realistic thinking directed towards a specific goal of evaluation. The aim of critical thinking is a reliable and realistic evaluation of relevant aspects of human intellectual activity" (Nęcka et al. 2006, p. 428). Nevertheless, "if one wants to make knowledge critical, one must first make it meaningful at all" (Giroux, 2010, p. 71). Only if this condition is fulfilled can the bitter diagnosis posed at the beginning of the Third Republic by Stanisław Filipowicz (1992, after Śliwerski, 2018, p. 114) lose its relevance: "Voters are ignorant people who have no idea about the behind-the-scenes activities of party elites. They legitimise their power, but their participation is in fact unconscious. They don't really know what is going on; they resemble a victim who is unaware of the real intentions of the seducer".

We will conclude the analytical section with some more exemplary statements that may suggest a certain kind of sensitivity on the part of our respondents that goes beyond the world closest to them, albeit with the caveat that it is experienced as a result of the physical presence of war refugees from Ukraine in our country:

W9.   I help refugees.

W7.   I get involved in helping the Ukrainians because what happened to them is unjust.

W3.   I have participated in food collections for Ukrainian refugees.

The term 'European citizenship', together with the values it symbolises, enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, is not a category to which respondents would refer. Rather, they understand assistance to Ukrainians as an ad hoc response to a need they may have observed in their social environment or perceived due to media coverage. In general, there is no room for politicity in the meanings young people give to civility, apart from the issue of participation in elections. Even more so, global issues are outside the scope of their interests.

Summary

Researchers of Poles' political engagement unanimously point to the phenomenon of the facade of civic participation and the low rank and quality of education in this area, despite the consensus on the key nature of civic competences in democracy. Overly often cited examples include student councils (Przybylski, 2014; Ziółkowski, 2014) or the ossified, schematic school in general, objectifying and enslaving students before they even enter adult life (Śliwerski & Paluch, 2021). The diagnoses of Polish researchers harmonise with our findings in the presented phenomenographic study. Although the interviewees revealed all the concepts of civility outlined in the theoretical part, they place themselves at the pole of the minimalist dimension of democratic citizenship. Their statements range from declared 'pure' values, through verifiable civic knowledge and declared behaviour, to civility manifested in institutionalised practices and externalised, and only becoming meaningful as collective, practices, such as voting in elections. The debate on civic education therefore needs to constantly discuss topics concerning the quality of school education if we want to defend democracy. "Europeans are afraid for democracy", "Europe does not feel safe" according to polls (Szostkiewicz, 2019, November 4). The political and economic situation in Europe is becoming more complicated, opening up space for authoritarianism, populism, and radicalism. Citizens are trying to cope with the problems of their everyday life in difficult times, while they feel powerless in the face of 'big politics'. Their passivity and humility favours politicians who need their voices, and not their reflection, criticism or resistance. Thus, why change, why socialise school, why prepare for the role of a citizen? The answer is found, among other things, in the statements of the interviewees. It turns out that their civic education

was rather based on equipping them with basic information about the constitutional and legal forms of a citizen. This minimal version of civic education pays no attention to critical reflection. Rather, students have contented themselves with assimilating the desired values and attitudes associated with democracy and citizenship, without actively transferring them into the social space. Only a few statements point to an understanding of the ambiguity of political phenomena and processes, and to an active rebellion against government action made. There are also few statements concerning pro-social attitudes in the public space, such as helping the needy, or reacting to violations of basic principles of social morality. The interviewees also only marginally problematise and acknowledge processes related to inequalities in the social structure. The most serious accusation that can be raised against the interviewees' experience of civility concerns their focus – to use McLaughlin's language – on 'unreflective socialisation into the political and social status quo' (McLaughlin, 1992, after Hildebrandt-Wypych, 2012, p. 118). The interviewees did not question themselves about the surrounding social and political reality, they did not question it but, rather distance themselves from it. Citizenship education, meanwhile, would be more about its maximum critical version, in the sense given to it not only by McLaughlin, but also by Henry Giroux and Merry Merryfield, cited earlier. They promote a "critical view of discourse, knowledge and experience through the lens of power, decolonisation, and the oppositional and mutually exclusive perspectives and identities" (Hildebrandt-Wypych, 2012, p. 117). It is worth stressing at this point, that the extreme positions of citizenship education have their limitations. The minimalist version comes dangerously close to indoctrination, promoting unreflectiveness and tacit permission for existing social and political relations. The maximalist version of citizenship education, on the other hand, due to its preoccupation with socially controversial issues, may go beyond the set of 'public virtues' achieved by consensus in society and thus become unattainable. Therefore, researchers of the problem suggest that, in a pluralistic liberal democratic society, citizenship education should be based on a clearly formulated concept of citizenship, but accepted by different social groups through a joint debate within the framework of state education policy. In this way, it would become possible to address and resolve controversial social issues, including mainly ethnic, religious, nationality issues (McLaughlin, 1992; Starego, 2016). Learning democracy in the face of a highly divided and pluralistic society is obviously not a simple matter, so perhaps the solution for citizenship education is also to develop a loyalty shared by the majority/all members of the state community – loyalty to the political principles Kymlicka (2001) wrote about, i.e. fairness, tolerance, kindness. Then, society remains divided and pluralistic, although 'public agreement on issues of political and social justice promotes friendly civic relations and secures associational bonds' (Rawls, after Kymlicka, 2001, p. 311). But is the promotion and learning of the common virtues of a good citizen sufficient to build a strong, valuable civil society?

Conclusions

School, of course, is not the only place where citizenship and democracy are learned. Other institutions, such as family, church, local community, non-governmental organisations and, last but not least, the market, also play a significant role in this process. However, researchers point to a number of their limitations in the possibility of shaping civic virtues (these may include, for example, selfish motives, vested interests of narrow social groups, fuelling prejudice against competing groups, stigmatisation of marginalised groups, etc.) (Kopińska, 2019). It seems that the school "is the only institution that is able to develop in students an attitude of universal civic rationality and teach children and adolescents to reason critically and adopt a moral perspective in evaluating public affairs", Kymlicka (2001, p. 301) emphasises. However, the school cannot evade the ever-new definition of citizenship and civility, especially in the face of social, economic and cultural globalisation. A form of minimal and at the same time elitist citizenship is proving to be not only inadequate, but downright undemocratic, due to its inability to engage in a critique of social inequalities and a dialogue over the scope of equality and freedom that is acceptable for the general public. Let us stress again "Citizenship in a pluralistic society should be based on respect and a rational-critical attitude towards both one's own and other cultures, as well as an awareness of its negotiating nature. The key task of the school in the sphere of citizenship education seems to be to maintain a balance between the focus on the construction of national identity, and the recognition of diversity as a constitutive feature of modern societies. It presupposes the education of a citizen who has the maturity to understand the existing tension between unity (of the nation-state) and diversity (of a multicultural society)" (Hildebrandt-Wypych, 2012, pp. 121–122).

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