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Editorial

Mapping and exploring national landscapes of social science education: Country reports from Europe and beyond

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In Europe, social studies education and social science education in school take place in many different forms, as the country reports in this issue of the Journal of Social Science Education show. The differences can be easily recognised, for example, in the volume of teaching hours; the balance between the sociological, economic and political scientific themes in the curriculum; and the emphasis that is placed on education for democratic citizenship in comparison to teaching factual knowledge about society and economy. However, there are also less obvious but frequent similarities between the countries, for example a historically close connection between social science school subjects and the subject of history. The search for explanations for the differences and similarities offers interesting possibilities for comparative research in the history and sociology of social studies and social science education, in a broad European or a region-specific perspective, focusing for example the Scandinavian, Baltic or Balkan countries.

Like the subject of history, social studies and social science subjects are to a large extent national subjects so that the content and topics covered in class are very closely linked to the polity in which teaching takes place. Students are expected to know about the country they live in. However, this raises the interesting question how much policy papers, reports and survey results coming from international organisations like the OECD and the European Union are setting the agenda in developing social studies or social sciences teaching in individual countries. The main interest of these organisations was in issues related to the teaching of science and mathematics and basic reading skills, but civic education was by no


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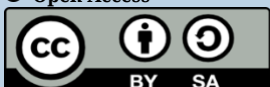
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means neglected. Organisations like Council of Europe and the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) are more closely related to these school subjects and citizenship education. Their impact may increase the degree of shared aims, objectives and contents in social studies teaching and education across countries. In the case of the IEA, for example, it can be argued that the results of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) surveys sometimes – but not always or not in the same way – seem to influence and guide national decision-makers and curriculum-developers (see Malak-Minkiewicz & Torney-Purta 2021). However, one must critically take into account that the institutions mentioned are predominantly weakly legitimised democratically and lean strongly towards the views and expectations of governments, much less towards those of citizens.

It is not necessarily always a negative development when country-specific solutions in social studies or/social science curricula become more and more similar. However, it is important to be aware of this development and to know what is driving it and why it could be something positive. Namely it is possible to criticise international tendencies towards similarity of school curriculum like other examples of increasing cultural uniformity and standardisation where one set of criteria for assessing well-developed civic skills and civic orientation may easily be assumed. Such criticism does not preclude adherence to the principles of human rights as they are stated in the United Nations charter and the covenant of economic, social and cultural rights. It is rather a matter of reminding ourselves of the importance of reflexivity when you look at different institutional solutions for the education of young citizens in the field of social sciences.

From an evolutionarily informed perspective, it can be argued that one should prefer a variety of approaches and concepts because it is not known which of them will best meet future challenges. Institutional diversity ensures a portfolio of viable options, a kind of biodiversity of educational philosophies and organisational forms of social studies/social science education from which to draw in continuously changing political and cultural environments.

SIX COUNTRY REPORTS – AN OVERVIEW

Country reports have been part of the core of the JSSE from the very beginning (see [1-2020](#) and the [overview of reports](#)). With this issue, we are continuing this long-standing tradition. The previous issue already kicked off the series with a report on [Sweden](#), followed by Greece in the next issue. In this issue we present papers on Ukraine, Romania, Estonia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Hong Kong.

The editors encouraged the authors to include illustrations from recent textbook covers in their country report. A comparative iconography of these illustrations can open interesting perspectives on social science education, it can be a good exercise when beginning an academic teacher education course, for example. The reports do not include charts or tables describing national educational systems in the reports. Such information is easily accessible in the web, see for example the [National Educational Systems](#) on the

Eurydice website of the European Commission and [comparative reports](#) with schematic diagrams.

The first country report comes from [Ukraine](#). It is remarkable that the authors have managed to write a very informative report despite the Russian war of aggression, the daily bombardments of civilian targets and the frequent power cuts.

Starting with an overview of the transformation of education policy in Ukraine after 1990, *Svetlana Poznyak, Olena Lokshyna* and *Iryna Zhadan* describe in detail the educational policy framework – which is also influenced by international actors and programmes –, the curricular situation, recommendations, goals and contents of social science education in schools. As in other countries, the learning area of history provides a particularly relevant curricular framework of social science and citizenship education. Already in primary school there is a separate subject for social science education called “I in the world” which deals with topics like society, family, state and citizens’ rights. Mandatory social science courses in secondary school include the areas of law, citizenship education and – in some educational profiles – economics. The guidelines for history as well as for social science education recommend a wide variety of methods, teaching-learning practices and forms of assessment inside and outside school. The everyday actions of teachers, however, remain very traditional; this gap between programme and practice is also well known in other countries. Some of the other challenges that the authors emphasise are also familiar: narrow focus on knowledge instead of competencies, missing ability to cope with difficult life situations outside school, uncertainty in distinguishing fact from fiction and in identifying trustworthy sources of information or persistence of traditional forms of testing.

However, the forms and consequences of the war of aggression that pupils and teachers, schools and researchers in Ukraine are confronted with are deeply frightening and very exceptional. This report provides the editors with another reason to invite scholars to share research findings on social science education under the conditions of war and civil war. Do the aims, topics, contents and practices of social science teaching in European countries change when war comes closer to one's own experience or even directly to the country's borders? Do they have to change? Submissions to these and similar questions are urgently needed and appreciated.

In their report, *Simona Lidia Sava, Ciprian Fartusnic* and *Nicoleta-Ancuta Iacobescu* describe how civic education and social education have been developed in [Romania](#) after the late years of the 1980s and the change of the political system. Like in many other European countries there have been reforms in the curriculum, teacher education and learning materials that aim to encourage more student-orientated approaches in civic and social education in school. Changes have been slow and among teachers traditional habits of teaching civics do not easily give way to new solutions; this can also be observed in other countries. Civics teachers may have civic education and social education as their secondary or tertiary teaching subject, and sometimes they do not have a special training in civic education at all. The situation is familiar in many countries and it may reflect a

more general problem of civics/social studies/social sciences not being among the most prestigious subjects in school. In Romania there are, however, interesting and promising emphases like the obligation to devote a considerable amount of time in civics and social education to project work. Also, it seems that experiences from student's councils' activities have been positive in how the students are now participating and willing to "live democracy" in schools. These examples are important reminders that civic education and social education often also take place outside the formal context of social studies and social science school subjects.

The country report on [Estonia](#), written by *Nikolai Kunitsõn, Leif Kalev* and *Triin Ulla* describes a situation that is familiar with many other countries: social studies and civics teaching focuses on the theory of democracy but does not provide much guidance on how to practice democracy (a previous paper can be found [here](#)). In the curriculum, conceptual knowledge is emphasised but developing pupils' democratic skills and attitudes are discussed much less. This is the situation as well in the classroom, according to how the Estonian teachers describe their teaching. The competences of educational leadership are discussed in teacher training but teachers' skills in educating pupils in democratic active citizenship get much less attention. The authors suggest that this problem in teacher training has to be addressed. The need to rethink the solutions to democratic citizenship education is particularly pronounced in Estonia, because there is a legacy of the Soviet era, a large Russian-speaking minority and one-fourth of the pupils go to Russian-speaking schools. In these schools the approach in civics teaching may not so well support pupils' growth in democratic citizenship. Coupled with the pupils' limited Estonian language skills this situation can reproduce harmful cleavages in the fabric of the society. The authors' analysis of this challenge has obviously got new topicality during year 2022.

The report on the [United Kingdom](#) presents a comparative case study of four nations within one state: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales ([here](#) is an early report on England). The different perspectives are represented by the authors who work and research in the respective national field. The study is characterised by the fact that readers can easily follow the approach practised by *Lee Jerome, Edda Sant, Alan Britton, Leslie Emerson, Sue James* and *Matthew Milliken*. In this respect, the article is a prime example of transparency. The authors explore the curriculum models and their practical enactment, describe major differences and contextualise their results with respect to national policies. This comparison reveals a common feature, curricula and policies are "highly permissive leading to a situation of asymmetric citizenship education practices". In consequence, the majority of children and the youth "have very little (and on occasions no) entitlement to citizenship education". This is attributed to cumulative education policies which result in a highly complex education policy framework confronting schools and teachers with "a range of simultaneous policy demands which often pull them towards different educational practices". Further observations include the ambivalence and incompatibility of political and administrative expectations on schools and teachers, tendencies of depoliticisation of citizenship education, a shift towards value education and

a hidden curriculum steered by standardised examination. Some of these are also typical for other countries. These topics, therefore, would be a relevant and interesting area for international comparative research.

Isolde de Groot, Remmert Daas and Hessel Nieuwelink characterise education for democratic citizenship in the [Netherlands](#) as “a bumpy road”. They provide an overview of developments in policies and practices of citizenship education at school which is mandatory for primary, secondary and vocational education, discuss relevant legislations, describe empirical knowledge of citizenship education practices and the state of the art of research on Dutch citizenship education. The article shows how academic and public criticism of the conditions of citizenship education in the first two decades of this century – unsatisfactory quality of the policy, vagueness of aims and values, inadequate instruments, insufficient implementation – contributed to a new legislation process. The new law defines values and norms, focusses more on cohesion than integration and strengthens school monitoring. They criticise, however, that the reform still ignores questions of power and favours the perspective of academic and political elites on citizenship education.

The article also reports on empirical research, which is numerous, diverse and vibrant in the Netherlands. Among other things, the research reveals the disadvantage of young people in vocational education compared to citizenship education in the academic track, the fairly positive citizenship attitudes and skills that students show on average and without much variation by school types and grades. The special political framework for citizenship education in the Netherlands may be of particular interest to readers from other countries: schools enjoy constitutional freedom in defining their ideological profile and pedagogical positions, and the government therefore acts cautiously in legislation, implementation and monitoring of citizenship education.

Regarding internationality, the JSSE aims to provide a forum for the dialogue across national borders. Focus and scope are related to a European perspective, the journal refers to research and practices in European countries in the broadest sense and their neighbours ([details here](#)). Nevertheless, it is useful to also include other perspectives from time to time which reflect topics *related* to discourses in Europe. It is not least these perspectives from outside that may contribute to forming an image of ‘the European’ in terms of civic, citizenship, social and economic education.

In this issue, the contribution comes “from outside” as a country report from [Hong Kong](#), written by *Bun Koon*. Hong Kong may be perceived as different from both authoritarian and democratic regions, with peculiar decision-making processes and as a contested post-colonial society and thus provides a fascinating case for the study of general structures of citizenship education. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government adopts a mode of executive-led and bureaucracy-based governance, also known as “semi-democracy” or “semi-authoritarianism”. These conditions are reflected in the history of the cross-curricular subject called “Liberal Studies”. Exemplary debates, that sound familiar to European discourses, are controversies about translation

and conceptual understanding of “critical thinking” or the effects of Liberal Studies on youth political activism.

However, this is not the first time that Hong Kong has been the subject of articles in JSSE; the topic of its citizenship education was already present in issues [1-2018](#), [4-2014](#) and [1-2012](#).

FURTHER COUNTRY REPORTS WELCOME: “MAPPING THE WHITE SPOTS”

Even though the JSSE has come a long way in mapping the national landscapes of social science education, there remain a number of territories for which we have not yet been able to provide our readership with “national guides to citizenship education” (see the [overview here](#)). White spots on the European map that urgently need to be described for an international audience include (in alphabetical order): Albania, Belgium, Belorussia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Kosovo, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Slovakia, Serbia and Switzerland.

In addition, some of the reports are rather outdated and may need to be updated: Austria (2002), Bulgaria (2011), Cyprus (2007), Macedonia (2003), Portugal (2003), Slovenia (2003) and Turkey (2011). Authors will find important advice in the [starter kit for transnational European research](#) presented by Tilman Grammes and Jan Löffström in issue [1-2019](#). For country reports, a special double-blind review procedure applies that considers the characteristics of this academic genre. The language policy of the JSSE prefers multi-lingual presentation, not global English only. Therefore, key terms should be given in active bilingualism, in English and in the local language(s).

OTHER PAPERS: ON VALUE

Economic education has also been the focus of the journal's interest from the beginning (seen the thematic issues of JSSE [2-2002](#), [2-2006](#) (in German), [1-2010](#), [2-2010](#), [3-2011](#), [2-2013](#), [4-2015](#), [3-2018](#), [2-2022](#), and many individual articles in other issue; recently published single papers in [3-2021](#), [1-2021](#), [3-2020](#), [1-2020](#)). This issue also presents a paper from this area of research.

Economic and financial education are often part of citizenship education in the social science domain of schools. For the case of [Sweden](#), *Mattias Björklund*, *Malin Tväråna*, *Ann-Sofie Jägerskog* and *Max Strandberg* explore the integration of economic and financial literacy into citizenship education by using the example of students' understandings of the concept of “value” in primary and secondary schools. They base their research on phenomenography and variation theory and present results from the analysis of group discussions and written answers to open-ended questions.

The authors identify four “qualitatively different ways of experiencing the concept of value”: intrinsic quality of a good, consumer's utility, utility related to resources, utility related to social, environmental and other non-financial factors. Regarding teaching, they highlight three aspects as particularly important: students should have the opportunity to

understand “value as being socially constructed“ and context-related, as a relation to the scarcity of goods and as including social and environmental costs. This includes that students deal with the concept of opportunity cost from economics. By emphasising that teaching needs to convey that the same concept takes on different meanings in different contexts, they identify an important desideratum for future research.

BOOK REVIEWS WELCOME: “MY FAVOURITE READ”

Book reviews are very welcome (for details [see the call](#)). The JSSE Book Editors would like to promote reviews of significant or influential publications on social science education in languages other than English. We invite you to present an outstanding publication to the JSSE audience that you consider a must-read for understanding civic, citizenship, economic, social or social science in your country, as well as relevant policies, debates and practices.