



# Conceptualizing Citizenship. Eastern European Inputs to the Contemporary Debates. Insights from Hungary<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Active citizenship, critical citizenship, digital citizenship, global citizenship: just a few from the concepts that have shaped the debate about citizenship in the past decades. While these concepts have dominated both the academic and the public discourse and had implications for citizenship education in mature democracies, they often seem to be far away from the lived realities of many Eastern European new democracies. In these countries, debates about citizenship have been burdened with the legacies of the non-democratic past, and even citizenship education has been marginalized for a long time. This paper introduces the Hungarian case and aims to contribute to the theoretical debates about the concept of the good citizen by reflecting on the peculiarities of a post-socialist new democracy.

**Keywords:** citizenship, democratization, education

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing scientific interest in citizenship as several political changes have made it necessary to re-examine the concept. The birth of new states and the dissolution of old ones, globalization, the growing influence of international bodies, migration, the increasing internal diversity of liberal democracies, and the crisis of representation are just a few of the factors which have affected citizenship (Moro 2016, Leydet 2017). As a result,

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discussions about citizenship have been intense, and the definitions have proliferated. There is a broad consensus that citizenship is way more than a legal status, it also extends to a set of values, norms, virtues, attitudes, and behaviours. It is a membership in a political community, characterized by rights and duties, manifesting in three dimensions: a legal, a political, and an identity dimension. But if we look at what these dimensions mean, what their relative importance is, and what normative standards they should meet, debates unfold (Leydet 2017) and a shared definition seems to be unachievable (Moro 2016).

While theoretical discussions on citizenship have flourished and resulted in several ‘hyphenated citizenships’ (Joppke 2008: 37 cited by Moro 2016), such as active, global, or digital citizenship, the empirical side of the issue has been less explored. As Lister (2008: 57 cited by Moro 2016: 22) put it, ‘the theoretical debate risks being conducted in an empirical void’. We find this especially worrisome, as such ‘hyphenated citizenships’ have defined what good citizenship is and guided the academic and policy debates about school-based citizenship education in many democracies. Furthermore, as the systematic literature review of Villalobos–Morel–Treviño (2021) showed, contemporary conceptualizations of citizenship in English-language academic literature are disproportionately anchored in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. These conceptualizations reflect citizenship as valued in Western countries with comparatively higher income levels.

Similarly to citizenship studies, citizenship education research received a new impetus in the 1990s. On the one hand, declining levels of civic knowledge, interest, and engagement of the youth in Western mature democracies led many various actors to call for (better) citizenship education (Galston 2001, Torney-Purta 2002). On the other hand, the need for democratic consolidation and the democratic (re)socialization of citizens in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe led to a growing attention to citizenship education also in this region (Torney-Purta 2002). Despite three decades of scholarly interest in the field, citizenship education does not have a comprehensive theory (Crittenden–Levine 2016). This might have three reasons. First, citizenship education is a subject of debate, as an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Gallie 1956), citizenship, lies at its heart. Secondly, it is also context-dependent, and its aims and means must be redefined from time to time (Kennedy 2019). Thirdly, it is an interdisciplinary research field although works that treat it as such are rather rare. As Keating argued, citizenship education is ‘a complex phenomenon that can be hard to pin down – conceptually, analytically, and empirically’ (Keating 2014: 14).

Nevertheless, there have been several valuable empirical studies on citizenship education. We believe that one of the most important results so far has been that school-based citizenship education can be an effective measure to develop the civic competences of the youth (Martens–Gainous 2013, Kawashima-Ginsberg–Levine 2014, Bruch–Soss 2018). Moreover, it matters the most for students who

come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have fewer resources at home, as it can compensate for missing parental political socialization (e.g. Langton–Jennings 1968, Metz–Youniss 2005, Gainous–Martens 2012, Neundorf–Niemi–Smets 2016). Among the various school practices, civic learning opportunities and open classroom discussion are effective ways to promote a comprehensive endorsement of citizenship norms (Treviño et al. 2021). Based on the empirical results, which mostly stem from mature Western democracies, citizenship education is a promising measure, advancing the democratic socialization of youngsters. But is it also the case in post-socialist countries?

Despite considerable interest in the 1990s and 2000s in the democratization of citizenship education in the post-socialist countries, little can be known of its success in the English-language scientific literature. According to Hippe (2008), this is so because the research focused on the institutional frame of citizenship education and not on its realization, on how the official goals and contents are constructed in textbooks and teaching practice. Besides, in post-socialist European Union countries, the Europeanization of citizenship education also led to a neglect of their peculiarities and the specific challenges and contradictions they face. European bodies, highly active in this field both as political actors and research commissioners, showed no interest in stressing the distinctive features of these countries (Hedtke–Zimenkova–Hippe 2007).

This study aims to help address this gap. We describe the Hungarian case and introduce the context in which citizenship education should work and emphasize the challenges it faces.<sup>2</sup> Based on these insights, we also propose a new citizenship concept. The paper proceeds as follows. The second section briefly introduces the Hungarian historical background in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The third section describes the developments of the political system after the regime change, reflecting on the theoretical debates around the Orbán regime. The fourth section presents the peculiarities of political socialization originating in the historical context. The fifth section shows citizenship patterns, while the sixth section describes how school-based citizenship education has functioned since the regime change. In conclusion, we suggest a research agenda for those interested in the development of citizenship education in the post-Soviet satellite countries.

## **2. The Hungarian Historical Context**

The history of Hungary in the short 20<sup>th</sup> century can be considered the history of regime changes. After World War I, there were nine historical turning points when the political regime changed, resulting in newer and newer resocializations

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2 Other scholars who dedicated work to this area are Szabó–Dancs (2018) and Dancs–Fülöp (2020).

of the whole society. The basic rules of society changed, the past was re-evaluated, and the strongholds of individual life strategies became unpredictable (Szabó 2013). Even though there were brief democratic periods, the regimes were overwhelmingly authoritarian in nature until the end of the 1980s. Despite their ideological differences, they shared a common desire to develop a commitment to an idea or an ideology in citizens. The Horthy (1920–1945), the Rákosi (1949–1956), and the Kádár (1956–1989) regimes alike used the education system to transmit the ideas they wished to convey to young people (Dévényi 2013). In the following, we describe these regimes, which spanned longer periods, in more detail from the viewpoint of their educational aspirations.

After the end of the First World War, a new political system was established in Hungary led by the Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, Miklós Horthy. The main features of the political system did not change in this period: the Parliament worked as a legislative body and governments served as an executive body. Miklós Horthy was elected as Regent only provisionally because of the debates within the political elite about the form of state. The Regent did not participate directly in the legislative and executive processes; however, Horthy exercised considerable political influence.

As part of the peace treaties around Paris that ended the First World War, the 1920 Treaty of Trianon largely reduced the territory of the defeated Hungary. The country lost 70 percent of its territory, and significant Hungarian-inhabited settlements were annexed to neighbouring countries, meaning both economic and cultural losses. This was considered unjust and a tragedy for the country and the nation. The trauma of Trianon was the defining historical event of the Horthy era and had an important social identity-forming function (Szabó 2009b). The national theme, organized around the politics of revisionism, played a decisive role in political socialization. The main political message was that the self-esteem of Hungarians – who had suffered a historical injustice – and their position in the Carpathian Basin must be strengthened. In the Horthy era, religion and education were closely intertwined, with education policy serving to strengthen the Christian national ideal. Politicians responsible for education considered this field as one of the most important tools for national renewal (Dévényi 2020). Both the formal and the hidden curriculum of schools served to educate moral Christians with national values. History, literature, and geography were the main subjects that conveyed these values. The curriculum served the politics of irredentism as early as the 1920s.

After 1949, the Marxist–Leninist ideology prevailed. In the Rákosi era, all aspects of life were affected by the transposition of Stalinist ideological considerations. The political system was under ideological pressure. The Communist Party and its leaders led the country, and other political alternatives could not appear in the political landscape. It was a dictatorship with a very strong leader, Mátyás Rákosi. The main intention of politics was to follow the Soviet one-party political system.

In the education system, the curricula were rewritten (Dévényi 2013), communist symbols were introduced in schools, and the key political messages were published in classrooms and textbooks. After the revolution of 1956, the Kádár era brought some moderations. Nevertheless, the role of the curriculum in transmitting ideology was maintained. The Education Law of 1961 declared that ‘Schools should teach students according to socialist worldview and ethics to be true patriots, virtuous and law-abiding citizens, who truly love our country and people, who serve socialism, peace and who are devoted to the brotherhood of nations, who build and defend the state of people’ (Education Law of 1961: 1 – transl. by Dancs–Fülöp 2020: 49). In 1965, a new subject called the foundations of our worldview was introduced with the goal to transmit the concept of the socialist citizen (Dancs–Fülöp 2020). Over time, the pedagogical and methodological directives of the party’s management were relaxed, and by the 1970s and 1980s they had lost their importance (Szabó 2000).

In the socialist period, political socialization had a dual nature, the influences were inconsistent (Szabó–Falus 2000). The formal agents of socialization, including school, conveyed the expectations of the state, while in the arenas of non-formal socialization people were confronted with actual, divergent social practices. E.g. in the Rákosi era, many people could not identify with the communist values imposed on them but did not voice this publicly. They retained their previous values and lifestyle within the family, but this did not manifest itself outside (Szabó 2000). After the revolution in 1956, the new party leader, János Kádár, made an apolitical compromise with the Hungarian society. Basically, the Kadar regime was also a one-party-based dictatorship following the Soviet political system, but people gradually got more personal freedom (mainly in the economy and culture), and their standard of living rose, in return for their silence in public issues. An exception was, naturally, if they spoke in favour of the system. As a result of the dual political socialization and the apolitical compromise of the Kádár regime, a pattern of turning away from public life and politics became increasingly strong.

### **3. Developments after the Regime Change**

After the collapse of the one-party political systems in Central Eastern Europe, democratic regimes were established in the region in the 1990s. It seemed – and perhaps it was expected by societies and scholars – that the democratization process will follow the Western European democratic patterns. New constitutions guaranteed human and political rights. The new political framework provided free elections, new democratic political institutions were established, and the separation of powers was one of the main principles of state building. In

Hungary, a chancellor democracy was introduced based on the German model with a powerful Prime Minister who can be resigned only by a constructive non-confidence vote and with a weak President with rather representative roles in the political system.

The reformulation of the political systems in Central Eastern European countries, including Hungary, was similar to that of the Southern European countries in the 1970s (Dawisha–Parrott 1997, Ágh 1998). However, the economic transformation of the region showed a different picture compared to Southern Europe. The differences in the transition to a market economy were caused by the changing geopolitical environment in Europe. The bipolar world order was no longer valid due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, so Western European countries had no primary geopolitical interest in the economic integration of the post-communist countries. Transition literature emphasized (Offe 1991) these circumstances already in the 1990s. It can be said that recent political changes in the post-communist countries of Central Eastern Europe are partly determined by these early problems of transition. In some societies, the difficulties of the market economy transition also created negative attitudes towards democratic transformation. This phenomenon was described in the literature in the early 1990s, and democratic consolidation studies underline that the democratic development process in Central Eastern European countries shows certain specificities compared to Western democracies: e.g. the lower level of commitment to democratic norms, the low trust in democratic institutions, and the weaknesses in civil society control.

However, the region's desire to join the European Union has strengthened its commitment to democratic standards and the political-institutional framework that guarantees them. The accession criteria adopted by the European Council in 1993 (the Copenhagen criteria) set out the minimum democratic conditions adopted by the European Union. Since the 1990s, the post-communist states of Central Eastern Europe have had a clear objective of joining the EU and, accordingly, of building their political institutions in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria (democratic political institutions, guarantees of human and political freedoms and minority rights, and stability of the rule of law). Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, guaranteeing the functioning of democratic institutions.

In the first decade after the regime change, the Hungarian political system was more of a consensual democracy based on Lijphart's model (Lijphart 1999), with a moderate multiparty system, political alternation possibility, and checks and balances built into the political system. The legislature typically functioned as a multiparty (4–6) parliament. Ruling parties typically served one term in office, and the selection of the highest public officials and the heads of the most important political institutions was the result of political compromise and consensus (Körösényi–Tóth–Török 2007). However, the single-chamber Parliament and

the disproportionality of the electoral system did not fit in with the theory of consensual democracy model.

In the early 2000s, a centralization process could be observed in the Hungarian political system: the blocking of the party system started (a quasi-two-party system of Fidesz and the Hungarian Socialist Party and their satellite parties), and for the first time the same coalition government was able to form a government twice in a row (in 2002 and 2006). Although these trends had not yet changed the nature of the Hungarian political system generally, there was a slight turn towards a centralized, majority system. The personalization of politics and the presidentialization tendencies (Körösényi 2001) also infiltrated Hungary in the 2000s. Consequently, the Prime Minister became even stronger within the government. At the beginning of his 2006 term in office, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány proclaimed political governance, as a new style of governance, including the importance of political rationality. Achieving political goals and policy programmes even faster was the most important aim of the Prime Minister in this framework. The Prime Minister was the main actor of political decision-making in the government. A new law in 2006<sup>3</sup> declared that the Prime Minister determines the general policy of the government.

This trend continued after 2010 with the Orbán governments. The role of the Prime Minister in determining government policy was included in the constitution. In the post-2010 period, new changes were introduced in the political system based on the 2/3 majority of the ruling parties in the Parliament. However, the new Fundamental Law in 2011 did not declare any significant changes in terms of human and political rights and regarding the main political institutions. The more significant (and most criticized) changes affecting political control were the narrowing of the powers of the Constitutional Court and the extension of the scope of laws requiring qualified majority voting. Later, the consolidation of state-affiliated media products into one company and the partisan composition of the media authority controlling the media market became the subject of criticism. Furthermore, changes in the electoral system strengthened the majoritarian nature of the Hungarian political system after 2010. Based on the new electoral law, only a relative majority of votes is enough to win a seat in the Parliament in the single-member districts. Moreover, cancelling the territory list and using the national party lists as a compensation list not only for nominees who lose the single-member district but also for winners increased the disproportionality of the electoral system.

Debates on the classification of the Hungarian political system started after Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech in 2014, in which he described the country as an illiberal state, meaning that political leaders did not deny liberalism as a value but did not see it as the essential element of state organization either (Orbán 2014). Scholars

3 Act LVII of 2006 on Central State Administration Bodies and the Status of Members of the Government and State Secretaries.

interpreted this speech as a new conception of the state, referring to Zakaria's (1997) thesis on the illiberal state, according to which there are well-functioning states that do not follow the model of mainstream Western, liberal democracies in their political values and conception of democracy. According to Prime Minister Orbán's interpretation of the illiberal state, the state and politics cannot be run solely based on Western models. There is an ongoing academic debate about the classification of the current Hungarian political system. The classification of a hybrid regime has appeared in the literature (Bozóki–Hegedűs 2018). According to scholars, the Hungarian political system can no longer be classified as a (liberal) democracy but rather as a hybrid regime in which the democratic rules of the game are functioning (free elections and the guarantee of fundamental rights), but the dominant parties – with a 2/3 majority – can change the political frameworks and limit the opposition's control function (Gyulai–Stein-Zalai 2016).

A specific interpretative framework of Orbán's governance is the plebiscitary leader democracy (Körösenyi–Illés–Gyulai 2020), which derives the characteristics of the Orbán regime from the idea of the Weberian charismatic leader. This approach does not claim that the current Hungarian political system is purely democratic, but it also rejects the concepts of the hybrid regime and illiberal democracy. According to this typology, the Orbán regime is a leader democracy, in which the leader can shape the system according to his own political vision and programme within a democratic framework. 'Plebiscitary' instruments (e.g. regular consultations with the people) are used, which also make decisions appear to be within the democratic framework (the will of the community is expressed in the consultation, and the government shapes its decisions on this basis).

## 4. The Peculiarities of Political Socialization

According to Szabó and Falus (2000), the historical turns and the multiple interruptions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a revolute development of the model of political socialization<sup>4</sup> in Hungary. The authors thought this to be characteristic of the entire Central Eastern European post-socialist region, even though there have been many differences between these countries. The defining features of this revolute development are the following (Szabó–Falus 2000: 383–385):

- Recurring changes in the basic framework of political socialization.
- Double socialization.

4 The *model of political socialization* describes how political power handles social and political conflicts (Szabó 2013: 26). The model consists of formal (e.g. schools and churches) and informal factors (e.g. family, cultural patterns, own experiences). The different types of the model can be described through institutional autonomy, the identity strategies used, and the possibilities they ensure citizens to think about or act regarding social and political issues (Szabó 2013).

- Citizens were forced into a subservient behaviour; it became their experience that they serve politics and not vice versa.
- Frequent political reversals forced people to develop adaptive life strategies and individual co-existence techniques, a central element of which was the circumvention of the institutional political world.
- The development of a socialist type of citizen was a direct political aim.
- The possibilities for the expression of different minority group identities were very limited, which weakened these identities.

According to Szabó (2009a, 2013), these experiences contrast with what happened in Western countries, where political socialization followed an evolutive path of development. The evolutive model of political socialization is characterized by conflict resolution. The diversity of interests is recognized, and tensions are handled through compromises. This model has a consistent structure: formal and informal socialization factors are interdependent. Political actors do not question the importance of democratic citizenship education. It is a fundamental principle that civic knowledge and social values can be taught, and decision-making skills can be developed (Szabó 2009a). Citizenship education lays down the foundations, based on which individuals can develop their own political identity autonomously (Szabó 2013).

Focusing on Hungary, Szabó (2013) identified three models of political socialization from 1949 until the 2010s: the conflict-denying model of the Rákosi regime, the conflict-avoiding model of the Kádár era, and the fragmented model that emerged after the regime change of 1989, the ninth major historical turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the institutional and legal framework for democratic socialization was created with the regime change, the democratic model of political socialization has not been established. This phenomenon is described by Bognár and Szabó (2017) as a mixed model, as it contains different features of both the democratic and the non-democratic socialization model. In the fragmented model, the relationship between socialization factors is weak and contingent, and conflicts easily escalate. The idea of citizenship education is of minor importance, and there is no consensus among political actors on its implementation in schools (Szabó 2013).

## **5. Citizenship Patterns**

Considering the specificities of political socialization, it is an interesting question how citizenship patterns have evolved after the regime change. In Hungary, the level of political interest is low, as is that of external and internal political efficacy (Szabó–Oross 2017). Moreover, based on the ESS (European Social Survey) data for the period of 2002–2015, political interest is on the decline. Those who have

neutral or positive associations with politics are more interested in it. Whether someone has positive associations is mostly determined by whether they identify themselves as right-wing (Szabó–Oross 2018). The level of political participation – especially that of non-conventional forms of participation – is low, even if compared with other post-socialist countries (Nový 2014). Although it is typical for Central Eastern Europe that the support for norms is less translated into action by citizens (Bolzendahl–Coffé 2013), in Hungary the support for duty-based citizenship is already more present at the level of norms than that for engaged citizenship (Coffé–van der Lippe 2010).

Susánszky et al. (2021) examined citizens' satisfaction with democracy in the context of the intense political debates around the Orbán regime. Using ESS data, the authors showed that Hungarians on average tend to be dissatisfied with the state of democracy, but their satisfaction has been increasing since 2010. At the same time, there is a strong polarization of satisfaction with democracy: government voters are satisfied, while opposition voters are dissatisfied. In this regard, Hungary is one of the most polarized countries in Europe, with the gap in perceptions between voters of different party preferences widening over time.

The picture of the various aspects of citizenship patterns among young Hungarians is more detailed. Three decades of research shows that young Hungarians are alienated, disillusioned, and suspicious towards politics (Szabó–Örkény 1998, Sik 2017, Csákó 2018, Kalocsai–Kaposi 2019). A significant proportion of them are not concerned with political or public affairs and feel that they have nothing to say regarding such issues (Kalocsai–Kaposi 2019). Even in comparison with other post-socialist states, the proportion of alienated young people is high (Szabó–Dancs 2018). There is also a significant group who share authoritarian, anti-democratic views (Csákó 2009a, Sik 2017, Csákó 2018). 57% of the youth support democracy, but nearly half of this group is not satisfied with its functioning (Domokos et al. 2021), meaning that scepticism towards democracy is still widespread (Szabó–Székely 2016).

The level of young people's political knowledge is low (Szabó–Örkény 1998; Csákó 2009a, 2018), but it is the highest within the authoritarian group (Csákó 2018). The level of citizenship engagement is also low, within which individualistic, self-interested forms of engagement dominate, while political and social activities are negligible (Szabó–Dancs 2018). The passivity of the Hungarian youth is striking even within the post-socialist country bloc (Kovacic–Dolenec 2018, Szabó–Dancs 2018). Moreover, those holding democratic attitudes are politically less engaged than those having authoritarian attitudes (Kovács–Oross–Szabó 2017). Also, political activism is associated with intolerance (Csákó 2009b). The low level of trust in public institutions is a further feature, which spans three decades (Torney–Purta 2002, Domokos et al. 2021).

The patterns of citizenship that can be seen in Hungary decades after the regime change are, according to many Hungarian social scientists (e.g. Sik 2017, Csákó 2018), the imprint of the fragmented political socialization. Based on these empirical studies, we assume that two patterns of citizenship may be present in Hungary, and probably also in other post-socialist countries. The first is the alienated citizen, whose fundamental attitude to public life is characterized by alienation. Alienated citizens think of themselves as citizens only at the level of their legal duties and do not believe that they themselves can shape the relationship between the state and the citizen in an active way. Their level of trust in institutions is low. Superficially, this description can be identified with the widely discussed image of the ‘disengaged’, ‘disconnected’, ‘disillusioned’, or ‘passive’ citizen, which is also found in mature democracies. However, the roots of the phenomenon are at most partially identical. We believe that the historical context cannot be ignored to understand the problem. In Hungary, the decades-old political culture of apoliticism is likely to play a role.

The other citizenship pattern that we believe should receive attention is that of fragmented citizenship, extending the adjective used by Ildikó Szabó to describe the specialties of political socialization. Inconsistent socialization influences have probably resulted in citizenship patterns that cannot be reduced to democratic or non-democratic categories but are a mixture of these. Unlike many ‘hyphenated citizenships’ (Joppke 2008: 37 cited by Moro 2016), neither alienated nor fragmented citizenship is an ideal to aspire to but empirical phenomena that citizenship education should address.

## **6. Citizenship Education in Hungary after the Regime Change**

The legal framework for democratic citizenship education in schools was established shortly after the regime change. Even though the institutional frames have undergone several changes since then, one thing has been constant. The education system has failed to meet the official expectations (Murray 2017). Even though educational acts and subordinate legislation made it clear that schools have responsibilities in this area, schools have tried to avoid the tasks (Szabó–Falus 2000, Gáti 2010). What is more, the political socialization of teachers themselves has been deficient (Veszprémi 2017), which has also been reflected in the taboo culture around social and political issues in schools. Teachers have not realized that reticence and silence also have a socializing effect (Csákó 2009a). In the following, we describe particular areas of school-based citizenship education.

## 6.1 The Role of the National Core Curriculum

### 6.1.1 Background

The National Core Curriculum (NCC) is an important regulatory tool that defines the value preferences of the public education system (Kalocsai–Kaposi 2019). There have been five NCCs since the regime change (1995, 2003, 2007, 2012, and 2020),<sup>5</sup> which differ in their regulatory paradigm (autonomous or normative), the values they represent in the field of citizenship education, and how they organize the teaching of civics. A detailed discussion of these differences is beyond the scope of this paper and will be the subject of a separate one. However, in the next few paragraphs, we highlight some important differences.

### 6.1.2 Changes in the Regulatory Paradigm

The first NCC after the regime change, in 1995, was born in the spirit of decentralization. There were two levels of content regulation (NCC and local curriculum), which gave schools considerable freedom. However, only a limited number of institutions could take advantage of this, and for the majority the pressure to innovate was more of a burden than an opportunity. The 1999 amendment to Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education introduced the framework curricula as an intermediate level of regulation, which sought to overcome this problem and facilitate the implementation of NCC by schools. This can be interpreted as a kind of recentralization step, but freedom was not curtailed, the choice of framework curricula was only an option for schools. This changed with the introduction of Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education when the framework curriculum became a compulsory element. At the same time, schools could not only choose from the ministry's framework curricula but also continued to have the possibility to choose alternative accredited framework curricula approved by the minister (Chrappán 2014, 2022).

The introduction of NCC 2012 was a further step in the centralizing turn of educational governance, as it shifted from an autonomous regulatory paradigm

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5 NCC 1995, 2003, and 2007 were accepted by left-wing while NCC 2012 and 2020 by right-wing governments. Related legislation:  
– Government Decree 130/1995 (X. 26) on the publication of the National Core Curriculum;  
– Government Decree 243/2003 (XII. 17) on the publication, introduction, and application of the National Core Curriculum;  
– Government Decree 202/2007 (VII. 31) on the amendment of Government Decree 243/2003 (XII. 17) on the publication, introduction, and application of the National Core Curriculum;  
– Government Decree 110/2012 (VI. 4) on the publication, introduction, and application of the National Core Curriculum;  
– Government Decree 5/2020 (I. 31) on the amendment of Government Decree 110/2012 (VI. 4) on the publication, introduction, and application of the National Core Curriculum.

towards a normative regulatory paradigm. The stated aim of this core curriculum was the creation of value-based school education accompanied by a more rigorous regulation of content and a redefinition of educational objectives. Since 2019, the choice of framework curricula has been further narrowed. Schools can only choose an alternative curriculum through an individual approval procedure, and the content of the alternative curriculum can deviate from the ministry's curriculum by up to 30 percent. This means that the latest NCC 2020 became a core element of a highly centralized curriculum regulation. In terms of content, it is a continuation of NCC 2012 but with a more modern and flexible approach to learning and teaching. However, these two opposing trends – strong centralization and flexible learning organization that considers individual needs – do not seem to be compatible (Chrappán 2022).

### *6.1.3 An Example of Changes in Value Preferences*

A review of the national core curricula reveals several changes in values related to citizenship education. It is not possible to describe these in detail in this study, but to illustrate the changes, we analyse the shift in one motif, i.e. changes in the relationship with Europe. This is of particular importance as students are not only Hungarian but also EU citizens.

For this brief analysis, three of the five NCCs were analysed: the first (1995), the last (2000), and the third NCC, which was introduced in 2007, three years after Hungary had joined the European Union. The documents were not analysed in their entirety. After familiarization with the whole dataset, the sections that can be considered data-rich from the point of view of the research question were selected and involved in the analysis.

The idea of belonging to Europe is already present in NCC 1995: It encourages a positive attitude towards European values – understood as humanist values –, underpinning a sense of European identity. It bases the emotional relationship on the appreciation of the achievements of European history and underlines Hungary's contribution to them. The document highlights the importance of openness, understanding, and respect for the people of Europe. Students are expected to be aware and have a critical view of the strengthening of European unity, as the document highlights its contradictions as well as its importance.

Compared to NCC 1995, the civic horizon is broadening in NCC 2007. This document sets higher expectations for students, who are now citizens of 'a wider social, political, economic, and cultural community', the European Union. It makes explicit that citizenship education has a twofold purpose: It should serve to educate not only national but also EU citizens. Accordingly, it calls for increased knowledge of the European Union, participation in decision-making from the local to the European level, and critical attitudes to the decisions taken.

In addition to national identity, it is equally important to address the deepening of European identity. Accordingly, the document repeatedly refers to students as EU citizens, and it refers to Europe as the wider home of Hungarians.

The image of Europe in NCC 2020 is changing significantly. First, compared to the 2007 document, the topic is driven into the background. Secondly, the reference to EU citizenship disappears, and no related knowledge elements, attitudes, or means of action are mentioned. Thirdly, ideas about Europe appear mostly in terms of identity. The aim is to create a ‘European civilization identity’ in a narrower sense, “based on the fundamental values of antiquity, Jewish-Christian culture, and civil law’.

In sum, there was a clear vision shift in the policy rhetoric on citizenship regarding the European orientations during the past quarter century in Hungary. A sense of belonging to Europe is present in all three documents analysed. In NCC 1995, it is loosely defined and reflects openness towards humanist values and other European nations. In NCC 2007, a strong European identity is present, which is as important as the national identity. Students are European citizens who must be prepared to be able to live up to the increased possibilities in many facets of life, including the political realm. Diversity and multiculturalism are part of being European. In NCC 2020, a clear shift appears, the European identity is understood in a narrower, more prescriptive sense: it should be based on Jewish-Christian norms.

This brief analysis illustrates that major changes have taken place in the value preferences conveyed by NCCs. Such changing expectations have required a constant adaptation from teachers (Dancs–Fülöp 2020). This task has also been fraught with contradictions. While the symbolic parts (e.g. the preamble) of the various NCCs adopted by different educational governments have expressed sharply contrasting values and various pedagogical paradigms, other parts of the NCCs have shown a surprising continuity, often containing textual repetition. This has resulted in textually incoherent, cluttered, and increasingly unclear national core curricula (Jakab 2019). This might explain why everyday practice in schools has diverged from the expectations of NCCs (Jakab 2019, Kalocsai–Kaposi 2019).

#### *6.1.4 Civics as Subject*

Since the regime change in Hungary, civics has not found its place in school education, and a kind of competitive relationship has developed with traditional history teaching. This process is described in detail by Jakab (2018). In the following, we will highlight some important findings based on his work.

Since the regime change, history has played a prominent role in school education. Although the changes to this subject in the various national core curricula have been accompanied by heated debates, the basic structure,

objectives, and requirements of the subject have remained relatively stable. By contrast, the status of civics has been constantly changing. In NCC 1995, the educational objectives of civics were emphasized, but the way in which they were implemented was left to schools. Thus, only in a few innovative institutions was this area given real attention. In most schools, it was relegated to the domain of history. In the 2000 framework curricula, there was an attempt to give more emphasis to civics. It was possible to teach it as a separate module subject or to integrate it into history, but with more emphasis. However, NCC 2003 and NCC 2007 made no further effort to strengthen this objective, which again led to uncertainty about the status of civics. NCC 2012 abolished the possibility of teaching civics as a separate subject, and it was integrated into history for a small number of hours (Jakab 2018).

The teaching of civics was therefore constantly present at the level of educational regulations, but always in a changing form. This may be one reason why its status at the school level has not been consolidated. In practice, it has often disappeared, replaced entirely by the teaching of history. However, the linking of the two areas does not preclude the inclusion of civics in the school curriculum. Yet the pedagogical culture required to teach history and civics is very different, and history teachers have not been equipped to harmonize the two in recent decades (Jakab 2018).

Most recently, NCC 2020 reintroduced civics as a separate subject, taught in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in primary school and in the 4<sup>th</sup> in general secondary school, for one teaching hour per week. The learning objectives of NCC 2020 cover the following themes:

1. The relationship between the individual and their various communities. The document raises the question of the individual's obligations to their smaller or larger communities (family, local community, nation) and of reconciling individual goals with community norms. There is a strong emphasis on different community identities, patriotism and defence being prominent themes.

2. Active social participation. The aim is to be familiar with fundamental human rights, the Fundamental Law of Hungary, state and local institutions and organizations. The importance of understanding the electoral system and the legislative process is also emphasized. The document also covers social responsibility, equal opportunities, and how to support those in need.

3. Everyday life. The aim is to equip students with the knowledge they need to organize their adult lives. They should be able to deal with formalities, employment and should have sufficient knowledge of the justice system and the care systems.

4. Economic, financial, and environmental sustainability. A number of objectives are set to promote economic empowerment and financial literacy such as increasing knowledge about credits, taxation, and starting a business.

Environmental sustainability is most pronounced through conscious consumer behaviour.

5. Cooperation, communication, and debating. The aim is to develop these skills, respect each other's values and opinions, develop a reflective and critical attitude, and consume media in an informed way.

Overall, making civics a separate subject is a step forward. The learning objectives of NCC 2020 also include elements that can help to overcome the patterns of alienated citizenship and fragmented citizenship. Mainly elements for active social participation and the development of debate culture can be considered as such, especially if they are not reduced to mere knowledge transfer. However, as we have seen, the development of citizenship knowledge and skills has been hampered in previous decades not by the objectives set at document level, but by their implementation at school level. It is questionable whether the teaching of the new subject is accompanied by the adequate preparation of teachers. Is there sufficient support for changes in pedagogical culture necessary for the teaching of civics? In its absence, this experiment will not yield results. In addition, given the small number of lessons in only two grades, it is worth examining to what extent other areas of school education are conducive to overcome the current dysfunctional citizenship patterns.

## **6.2 Further Areas of School-Based Citizenship Education**

### *6.2.1 Pedagogical Objectives*

The results of a recent survey (Kalocsai–Kaposi 2019) show that the pedagogical objectives of citizenship education are neglected by both headmasters and teachers. Goals like encouraging students to express their opinions or developing critical thinking skills are not sufficiently reflected in everyday practice. Frontal teaching methods continue to predominate, as the facilitator role of teachers is not yet widespread. The change in pedagogical culture long called for by experts has not taken place. This might be because the pedagogical skills required to develop an open classroom climate – which has the potential to be an effective form of citizenship education (Torney-Purta 2002, Campbell 2008, Gainous–Martens 2012, Martens–Gainous 2013) – do not come to the front in initial teacher education at all or they are presented – paradoxically – on the theoretical level (Gáti 2010). The results of Kalocsai and Kaposi also show that 40 percent of headmasters believe that students should not be given a greater say in school affairs. They are also reluctant to discuss institutional matters in meetings involving the whole school community.

### *6.2.2 Opportunities to Practise Democracy in School*

Studies suggest that the different opportunities provided by the law to practise democracy in schools (the student government and community service) have been misused (Bodó 2016, Bodó et al. 2017, Veszprémi 2017). In the case of student governments, neither teachers nor students seem to comprehend the democratic function or the political socializing role of the student council. Only 43% of students think that the student council is an important institution, and 70% reject the possibility of getting involved (Veszprémi 2017).

Community service was introduced in 2012. It is compulsory as only those students can sit for the school-leaving exam who have completed 50 hours of community service prior to it. It typically takes place outside of the school and can be fulfilled, among others, at the local government, in public institutions, at non-governmental organizations or churches. However, schools are responsible for the administration, and they must organize a preparatory and a final session (Ministerial Decree 20/2012 (VIII. 31), paragraph 133(1–5)). These sessions are crucial to realizing the pedagogical aims of community service. They provide the possibility to clarify the learning objectives with students and increase their motivation to share and reflect on the experiences within the school community. Despite this, the vast majority of students reported that they did not have the opportunity to process their experiences in such professional circumstances (Bodó et al. 2017). The results of a survey conducted in 2015 show that teachers responsible for coordinating community service typically do not have the knowledge of students and host organizations to support a good match between the two sides. In addition, they barely consider their tasks related to community service as primarily pedagogical (Bodó 2016). After completing the service, only half of the students thought that it had been definitely a positive experience and even less, only 2 out of 10 students, believed that they would surely take part in any voluntary activity after the final exam (Bodó et al. 2017).

### *6.2.3 Historical Legacies*

Finally, we would like to highlight two features relating to the historical context. During socialism, schools could not provide real-life opportunities for students to represent their interests and practise compromise seeking (Szabó 2000). As the above-mentioned examples show, such democratic socialization patterns could not develop even after the regime change. The Hungarian school system is still strongly hierarchically organized and mainly based on frontal teaching methods. This does not help children and young people to develop and practise their advocacy techniques in real power relations.

The development of democratic citizenship education in schools has also been hampered by a misinterpretation of a legal provision since the beginning of the 1990s, which aims to ban party politics from schools. Referring to this, however, all types of political and public activities have been banned from the institutions (Jakab 2019). Citizenship education is often identified by teachers and headmasters with the interpretation of party-political debates and relations, and they believe that this cannot be their task because of the above-mentioned regulation. In this sense, therefore, the Hungarian school system still carries the pre-transition pattern of thinking that citizenship education is a kind of reaction, an adaptation to the current political power. This narrow approach hinders the development of democratic civic competences.

## **7. Towards a Common Research Agenda**

The aim of this paper was to draw attention to, and partly respond to, two gaps in the English-language literature on the debates on the concept of citizenship and on research on citizenship education.

Our first point was the relative paucity of empirical research in the citizenship debate (Moro 2016) and the Anglo-Saxon dominance in the conceptualization of citizenship (Villalobos–Morel–Treviño 2021). We believe that further empirical research is certainly needed to explore and deepen our understanding of citizenship patterns in post-socialist countries. We hypothesise that two citizenship patterns may be significant in the region, posing specific challenges for citizenship education. One of these is alienated citizenship, and the other is fragmented citizenship. However, both citizenship patterns are only hypotheses for the time being, and an empirical investigation into these categories is necessary. A first step is to understand better the meanings mass publics attach to citizenship, how they describe the ‘good citizen’. As these personal conceptualizations might influence citizenship behaviour, it is also important to understand what kind of behaviours are connected to specific conceptualizations. How collective and individual socialization experiences and a particular context influence citizenship conceptualization is also of interest. As these questions focus on exploring individuals’ understandings and experiences from their own perspectives, using qualitative methods would be an adequate approach. Surveys with structured question format used to assess people’s ideas of what makes a good citizen bear the risk of failing to reflect the good citizen portfolio of the respondent (Jennings 2015). This might be particularly the case in the context of fragmented political socialization.

The other gap we wanted to address was the lack of English-language literature on how school-based citizenship education in post-socialist countries actually

works (Hippe 2008). In this paper, we have presented several specificities of the Hungarian case. Since the regime change, education policy has continuously addressed the issue of citizenship education in schools. However, the objectives set out in documents have not been translated into practice. Both the sharp changes in educational policy in this area and the historical legacies have led teachers to rather neglect these tasks. Thus, the current form of citizenship education can hardly contribute to overcoming either alienated or fragmented citizenship patterns. Furthermore, we believe that we have illustrated the claim of Hedtke et al. (2007: 8–9) that transition countries face specific challenges that make it impossible to simply implement the ‘prefabricated institutional or conceptual elements of citizenship education’. This is confirmed by the results of Jakab (2019). According to him, some Hungarian reform attempts to implement modern citizenship education were top-down and aimed at spreading American and British pedagogical traditions that were contrary to the Hungarian ones. These attempts were resisted, and the Anglo-Saxon models failed to take root in the Hungarian education system.

We believe that case studies from other post-socialist countries could help us identify whether there are similar barriers in the field of citizenship education. This could trigger a common reflection on what the main challenges in the field are and how they could be addressed. Moreover, any good examples from the region would be more likely to provide inspiration than the Anglo-Saxon tradition that is currently often cited as an example.

In our view, a better understanding of the two areas outlined above would allow for the development of citizenship education programmes that reflect the specific challenges of countries with a short democratic history. And while we believe that similarities are likely to be identifiable among the post-socialist countries, we do not wish to suggest a simplistic view that the challenges in the region are the same. We believe that cultural, social, economic, and political differences are important contextual factors that should also be considered. Nevertheless, we think that the exchange of information and knowledge transfer between these countries could play an important role in the development of local school-based citizenship education.

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