

Political Education. The Global Education of Citizen through Active Citizenship

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Introduction

Educating in politics responds to a social necessity, with the society being thus composed by and taking advantages of citizens capable of asking for and exercising democracy in a critical and independent way, according to a precise draft of man and woman. “It is in this space of historicity that the educational processes are implemented, and with the ingredients that historicity offers us and imposes us” (Cambi 2004, p. 13).

A Project raising from the belief of man and woman being at the center, subject-object of political demand in a continuous, constructive relationship between the common good and the individual one, where the common good is also understood as a set of all legislative and instrumental equipment allowing everyone to achieve their individual goals.

I consider important the education in politics and legality, because it is necessary to develop among young people a sense of individual responsibility and awareness of the rights for the common good; teach them that the delegating process through citizens’ participating in elections constitutes a representative and not intellectual delegation, and that the effort at whatever explicative level must tend to research of organic solutions of problems (problem – thought – action).

It seems to me that we must finally recognize that it is time to bring forth with all forces and in all available educational settings a formative commitment with the political dimension being not only clearly and consciously present, but also considered to be one of its main features.

Our times call for urgent: the alternative is likely to be the defeat of the entire humanity and thus make it impossible for the person to be fulfilled in his higher significance and true value.

Politics and education have formed since the ancient world an almost inseparable binomial. It is well known that the state was the center of social and individual life in ancient Greece and Rome: ancient men (of course the free ones) were first and foremost citizens. Civic education and human global edu-

cation have always been intertwined. The idea of education is based on fundamental concepts, those of *paideia* and *humanitas* that, in large measure, are proportional to ethical-political reflection. The image of man was that of an individual whose existence made sense only within the community and whose activity was essentially political. The *polis* was a solid support and guide to life. Plato himself speaks of “inner city that every man carries within himself, destined to evolve and transcend itself” (Plato, IX, 591).

“Usually the concept of education has meant the transmission of knowledge with training purposes of adult generations to younger ones” (Piaget 1980, p. 129).

The perspective of a political education is actualized in family, school and out of school contexts. The sharing of project that promotes the person and the conviviality that is pursued in the relation are essential factors for success in educating. Cooperation is the other factor that favors the constitution of a sense of community.

The fact that education and politics may be recognized as primary and necessary dimensions to the life and development of man is founded on the epistemological assumption that the individual is in need of a duality for his own survival and development as a human being.

The man, in order to survive, needs what Ferrarotti calls “l’insieme sociale” (social together-being) which, as he himself says, “is not accidental, but it doesn’t even respond to the imperatives of meta-historical archetypes. [...] Man is in any case forced to choose not in absolute, but in the dated and lived situation, to make a gesture that saves him or leads toward getting lost in a horizon set in motion by historically variable needs identifiable in their profound essence: culture, values and citizenship”. (Ferrarotti, 1999, p. 13)

Educating in politics requires you to give space to the autonomy and solidarity of the person, to consolidate the sense of responsibility connected with freedom and a sense of duty related to the right. It becomes essential, “therefore, in the scholastic institution to get into political education and ban ideologies, and give rise to the development of routes and procedures that will educate into politics”. (Snyders 1986, p. 193)

“Through political education can be maximally highlighted the importance of the path leading to a personal choice rather than drawn attention to a specific content”. (Aa.Vv, 1999, p. 177)

On the other hand, the forms of citizen activism in public policy, emerged already all over the world in the last thirty years and aiming to protect rights and ensure the care of common goods in the reality of democracy’s everyday life of, represent a change of the same boundaries of democracy from which you can restart.

Educating in politics and active citizenship

Political education can be defined as the process of critical elaboration of the content of political socialization, which tends to promote an independent ability to develop an own attitude or political choice. It becomes a mature

expression of social education and civic education taking shape as an antidote not only against individual self-referentiality, but also against possible exclusiveness of political parties, social classes, and various localisms. “Educating at politics means developing an own vision of the world made up of projects and commitments, with a capacity to express the own presence in active and participatory terms”. (Santelli, 2001, p. 77)

To understand what education to citizenship is necessary today, I will outline briefly the historical passages of the concept of citizenship.

The concept of citizenship is complex and changing, whether it is considered in its transformation over time, whether it is analyzed in modern times from points of views that provide different interpretations and realizations.

Since the earliest days of civilization, the organized human groups tended to ensure their own safety and separating themselves from other groups by drawing boundaries between “citizens” and “foreigners”. Each group, internally tended to give themselves a hierarchy structure, differentiating the elective powers and responsibilities. The *polis* of ancient Greece is an example of this dual differentiation. The citizen is opposed to foreigners, although not all are the same: barbarians, women, servants, slaves, the poor, are not citizens.

Citizenship, says Aristotle in the third book of *Politics*, should be granted only to adult and free males; free also in the sense that freedom from servile work enables them to take part in the *ekklesia*, an assembly in which were taken the key political decisions and completed the highest public offices, such as those of judge, magistrate, and priest. Not much different is the conception of Roman citizenship in the Republican era.

Also in Rome, the citizen is identified with the adult male that is free and is also a “*pater familias*” exercising his power over the whole family group composed by his wife, his children, his freedmen, his *clientes*.

The Roman citizen is opposed not only to the non-resident alien, but also to foreign residents, women, children, slaves. The modern conception of citizenship emerges thanks to the theorists of absolute monarchy that operate between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes. The concept of citizenship loses its meaning of attendance at public functions and of honors associated with it: being citizens is equivalent to being faithful and obedient subjects of the sovereign, subject to the same laws and customs, regardless of differences in religion, language and ethnic origin.

With the great bourgeois revolutions between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the works of authors such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was affirmed the modern conception of citizenship as equal “legal status” of all citizens as subjects of law, holders of sovereignty and members of the nation. For long remain excluded women and non-owners.

The modern citizenship is stated as the container for a set of individual rights: men are rational beings, free, morally responsible, equal before the law and independent from the economic point of view. Citizens are involved in politics, but as pointed out by B. Constant, they are also jealous guardians of their privacy against the intrusion of public power.

Since the last decades of the 800s, the model of liberal state tends to result in forms that have been defined as “liberal democracy”. On this process, since the early decades of the last century, further institutional evolution was assumed, leading – after the fascist and nationalist parenthesis – to the “social state”. Thus, a new conception of citizenship was established; the “democratic-social one, attributing to all citizens beyond civil and political rights also social rights”, with everybody entitled to a degree of education, welfare and social security commensurate to standards prevailing within the political community.

Despite principal declarations, it is important to note that nowadays, at the beginning of the third millennium, social citizenship is living a rather deep crisis that doesn't allow it to cope with the radical changes imposed by the current globalized society.

The space for the exercise of rights has been greatly restricted, in a seemingly inexorable movement of estrangement between citizens, who can not find space for effective political participation. The same political institutions seem not to want to give areas of power able to support shared decision-making processes.

In addition, due to the increasing immigration and global conflicts that feed a narrowing of the community around an identity which is more visible from outside than inside, citizenship has shifted from an inclusive concept to a unique concept.

In order to properly educate for active citizenship, political education must ensure the necessary resources for global education and the best possible instruction (Izzo, 2003, p. 187).

There must be a refraining from dictating educational precepts and didactic prescriptions, and knowledge by itself must be encouraged. This constitutes a prerequisite for acquiring progressively “self-control” and then the ability to act and interact on awareness. The image of educational activity is thus that of delivery of a know-how, which constitutes itself knowledge and possession of reality and it has to be immediately operational.

Political education is operational not because it is marked on the complaint, but because it encourages a proactive and affirmative sensitivity, capable of planning, ready to comply the change, along the thread of events. It is not enough, therefore, the notionism of education. We need moments of true education, such as to encourage political judgment in the context of a healthy realism.

The four guiding values of this educational journey are linked to: the common good mentality, loyalty to people and to concrete reality, loyalty to the ethical dimension, and last but decisive, loyalty to the policy itself, with its own rules. Neither abstraction, since the global education without commitment is empty, nor activism, since commitment without training is blind.

“The education at politics is configured as a path to empowerment of the

own presence in the world and thus, it takes a particularly important role in stimulating cognitive, emotional, ethical, and social abilities and in finalizing this in a single act for the common good” (Santelli, 2001, p. 77).

The discourse on political education could really lead to a society of a higher moral. However, it is clear that whatever meaning you want to attribute to political activity, whether negative or positive, it is necessary to deal with it, also because political education is nothing more than the institutionalization and improvement of political “global education” that in each case, randomly or accidentally, badly or adequately, takes place in each individual. In short, it’s not about creating something new, but not leaving to chance what is the first task of the citizen.

The citizen’s global education through active citizenship

If education is an investment for the future, education for active citizenship is an investment for the democratic future of Europe. Democracy is neither something taken for granted, nor an abstract concept. It requires investment and responsible actions by the citizens in their daily life.

In an age of young people’s deserting the polling stations and the public and political life, it is urgent to address the question of education for democratic citizenship - a long-term investment for the promotion of human rights, tolerance and cultural pluralism¹.

In defining the “concept of responsible citizenship”, the majority of european states recognized three key objectives:

- Development of a political culture: study of social institutions, political and civic activities in which the individuals can live in harmony, and preparing young people for the exercise of rights and duties defined by national constitutions;
- Development of critical thinking and certain attitudes and values: skills necessary for active participation in public life as a responsible and critic citizen; development of respect for oneself and for others for greater mutual understanding and acquisition of social and moral responsibility; learning to listen and resolve conflicts peacefully, learning how to contribute to a secure environment, development of effective strategies to combat racism and xenophobia;
- The active participation of young people, that can be encouraged by allowing them to get more involved in the community and providing them with practical experience of democracy in school.

¹ These are some of the significant phrases of the foreword to Notebook No 24 of *Eurydice*, “Citizenship Education at School in Europe”, organized by the Ministry of Education, University and Research & INDIRE, with the objective of divulging in “European Year of Citizenship Through Education” (2005) programs of education for citizenship of the Council of Europe.

A concept of citizenship stands in contrast with that proposed by the models developed since a long time in civic education in our schools.

The rise of democratic states has placed for a long time the problem of educating citizens on the principles governing the community, the rules that must be followed in the public sphere of society, as well as raise awareness of the subject to the rights of their acquired status. It was therefore introduced in public schools (1877) the study of civic education “first notions of the duties of man and citizen”.

At the center of civic education, there is a strong emphasis on the laws and regulations of the state, as it is argued that a good citizen knows about and how to respect the order in which he lives; it is thus a transmission of knowledge acts to adjust the individual to correct the behavior sanctioned by the society.

The aim remains to instruct rather than to educate. In 1991, the year in which Italy rectified the Convention on the Rights of Child, civic education was transformed into citizenship education. It is about promoting a process of education that pays attention to the value of the law and to the significance that leads us to respect it.

“Education is interested in a behavior that is not only legal, but also and first of all moral, namely, inspired by the reasons that make the law worthy of respect”. (Corradini, 1999, p. 171)

Civic education can represent the passage through which subjects learn and understand the operation of the regulated community in which they live, but it can not stimulate the individual to become a co-builder of the society in which he lives.

It is thought, therefore, about a citizenship education including in itself the protagonist role that each person needs to earn, not only as a “citizen”, but above all as an “active” one.

Democracy must treat not only the representative forms of power, but also and above all encourage and facilitate participatory forms at every level that can influence and conduct decisions for the entire collectivity. Active citizenship is not something that is given once and for all, but it is an instance that needs to be built. In order to get implemented, it needs to be formed, educated.

An essential contribution stimulating the creation and growth of education for active citizenship is undoubtedly that of the American philosopher and educator J. Dewey.

What matters is not only that a democratic system put in place resources to eliminate, in fact, the effects of economic inequalities and to ensure to all members of the younger generation a chance to be educated and trained.

There is need above all of “modifications of the traditional ideals of culture, of traditional disciplines of study and traditional methods of teaching and discipline, in order to free the individual abilities of young people until they

are sufficiently equipped to become arbiters of their own economic and social career.” (Dewey, 2004, p. 107)

The subject has therefore a responsible and active role in the own education and in the definition of society that is modified with the changing generations.

It is necessary, therefore, to activate forms of participation that are not only meetings designed to inform citizens about what public bodies have already decided to do, but to draw a path through which the citizen not only learns to be present in the construction of the environment he lives in, but also to participate together with other citizens: “the common participation is the only dynamic that can transform a group of individuals into a social community” (Lorenzo, 1998, p. 97).

This model of citizenship education involves not only those concerned with education, but requires a synergy with those managing the city, with those working to design and implement interventions aimed at improving the conditions of life. A model that requires commitment and resources to be used where it will be carried out, provided that participation is radical because it “bridges the gap between those who govern and the governed ones, between who decides and who is affected by the decisions, presupposes a delegation of power and sovereignty, and therefore casts serious doubts on the consolidated power structures” (Tarozzi, 2008, p. 129).

This participation, therefore, emancipates and is subversive, because it requires the political and administrative spheres to be made in respect of its authenticity. Educating and being citizens brings with it a part of participatory instance that places each subject at the center of decision-making dynamics affecting the collectivity in which he lives, and on the other hand, it admits a concept of inter-subjective citizenship, or rather negotiated, discussed and reformulated by related subjects who pose themselves a goal and conceive the reality in which they live as necessitating to be built by those same relationships.

Concluding remarks

Given these premises, it is clear the value that has a possible educational process in the direction of active citizenship, as it does not arise extemporaneously by the course of events (or it can do it, but still needs to be supported), but it requires to be powered by paths that have a decidedly pedagogical value. If the concept of citizenship to which the society we live in has to do with politics, understood as a decision-making and illuminated process, with the authentic and effective participation of as many subjects as possible and in any age group, with the responsibility perceived by the subject as taking charge of the world where the social environment is built, then a set of participatory formal and informal processes, inside and outside the school, are necessary to prevent that the political culture becomes a prerogative of a few subjects living far away from the living world, from everyday experiences that the city, the community offers and demands to signify. The socio-political process of edu-

cation is required by that necessary selection, by that exchange, the crisis of which involves the sclerosis, with risks of notability and too easy co-optations within the political class.

The business intertwinements, advocacy groups – especially the occult ones – and transformativ opportunism seem to be three deadly risks of a political system with shortness of breath that could reduce us inadvertently to “shadow people”. This attitude must change. Our society looks tired, no more thoughtful of its european and planetary future; and of institutions, we tend to get served with a distracted selfishness: we use them without any complexes, to complain then without any shame. It’s not enough just show the necessity of politics, even at a world which is young in research; there is need of helping to move from politics as a destiny to politics as an ethical option, encouraging fidelity as the cardinal virtue of the commitment in the dimension of continuity and consistency.

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