Democrat
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Conceptual Framework and Vision: Responsible Democratic Citizenship and Education for Democracy

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Abbreviations

CE	Council of the European Union
CoE	Council of Europe
DRC	Democratically Responsible Citizens
EfD	Education for Democracy
EDC/HRE	Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education
EC	European Commission
EC-GA	Grant Agreement between the Coordinator and the Commission
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
LOMLOE	Organic Law 3/2020 of 29 December amending Organic Law 2/2006 of 3 May on Education (Spain)
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
RDC	Responsible Democratic Citizenship
CSPE	Social and Political Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Executive Summary

Introduction

The DEMOCRAT project aims to address society's democratic deficits by maximising opportunities for mutual positive reinforcement between education and democratic participation through transformative learning for young people. DEMOCRAT builds on the premise that education plays a fundamental role in the development of democratic societies by equipping citizens with the values, knowledge and skills necessary for active participation, critical thinking and informed decision-making.

DEMOCRAT was conceived in response to the plethora of ongoing crises affecting Europe and the world. These crises test the effectiveness of democratic institutions and practices, as well as the resilience of individuals and societies. A review of civic education in Europe has shown that, despite the importance given to democratic education in public discourse, it is generally not considered a major topic for education itself. The project's core objective is to reinforce the sustainability and resilience of democracy in Europe by updating and strengthening Education for Democracy (EfD), through participatory redesign and implementation of context-specific curricula and learning methods in a framework of rapid digitalisation.

The novelty of DEMOCRAT lies in the dual nature of its educational objectives: alongside exploring the conceptual or historical frameworks concerning the development of the signifier 'democracy', the project aims to operationalise it in various fields of social tension (inclusion, environmental awareness, gender issues) by encouraging civic behaviour, active participation and engagement, communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving through education for democracy.

DEMOCRAT's action goes in three main directions that are the key aspects of its methodological approach:

- Firstly, a conceptual research concerned with definitions, concepts and historical debates on the basis of the values agreed by the EU and Agenda 2030, making sense of the structural challenges that threaten democracy. This preliminary conceptual effort identifies research gaps and includes an outline of a framework of competences for responsible democratic citizenship. It serves as a basis for the design of the practical aspect of the project, the pilot laboratories for the implementation of democracy education.
- Secondly, the so-called living labs where the community of education (schools, parents and students' associations, policy makers) is engaged in debate and the co-creation of transformative learning approaches in national and transnational settings. Adding to these activities the digital platform AGORA, it could become like a one-stop-shop for educational community in Europe to find inspiration. These living labs will also be outstanding sources for the evaluation of trends, continuous assessment as well as recommendations for best practices and policy making.
- Finally, and beyond the classroom environment, DEMOCRAT aims at intervening into the educational environment (schools, informal training) through the elaboration of a European Curriculum for EfD. This involves introducing dynamic and innovative didactic-practical units (methods, approaches or tools) into the existing curriculum or classroom practice in which students and educators actively participate in or prepare for real-world democratic processes and civic activities.

Policy context

Along with the rise of the far right in Europe, the wave of disinformation and the threat of geopolitical imbalance in Eurasia (with the war in Ukraine as one of its closest manifestations), fragmentation, technocracy and increasing social inequalities take hold and democracy withers.

European liberal representative democracies need to find solutions for complex problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, migration flows, increasing poverty and social inequalities. While some global strategies have emerged – notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change – these complex problems require urgent practical solutions that satisfy social, environmental, economic and political/governance parameters in a balanced way.

Future prospects are also shaped by the rapid pace of digital innovation and its increasing pervasiveness in all social and economic spheres. Moreover, the socio-economic decay that started with the global financial crisis in 2008 has deepened since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While European liberal representative democracies are under pressure to respond to the challenges of the current "polycrisis", part of the European population is being lured authoritarian political options.

Normative framework

Democracy is a core principle of the European Union and of the European identity, which complements the national and regional identities of the European citizens. It is the foundation of the European Union's social economy model and of its just transition strategies for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss based on democratic principles.

Democracy is not only a political but also a social order that ensures ideally "*the equal right of all citizens to participate equally in the collective shaping of the social living conditions that affect them*." (Lessenich 2022:14). Such an ideal democracy does not exist and is unlikely to ever exist in practice, because actual democracies are imbued with social inequalities and mechanisms of social exclusion, for example through the restrictive definition of national citizenship, the concentrated ownership or disposal of production means and income, or gender, ethnicity, age and religion biases. Democracy is a contested terrain for permanent dispute over fundamental principles, rights of participation, deliberation and democratic procedures, , but moderated through broadly accepted norms and rules.

Participation in the deliberations about binding collective decisions is therefore the core of any liberal representative democracy. How exactly this is done, however, varies greatly, not only over time but also from country to country. Participation in public life and in the community is not limited to formal processes but also refers to informal and non-formal practices. Without the active participation of a large proportion of citizens in the deliberation of political decisions, democratic institutions become hollow and ossified. Conversely, democratic institutions are needed to make democratic participation and deliberation effective.

Democracy needs to be confirmed continuously through citizens' actions. Democratic behaviour is not an innate virtue but must be learned, applied and relearned in practice. It requires policies, including policies that promote EfD, to strengthen the responsible democratic agency of the people.

Key findings

The traditional concept of citizenship, linked to the nation state, is being increasingly challenged by international regulations, such human rights conventions agreed globally, under the United Nations, or regionally, under organizations like the Council of Europe or the Organization of American States., EU Member States are bound by regulations adopted by the supranational bodies of the Union and by decisions of European judicial bodies, such as the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights.

The traditional concept of citizenship is also under pressure by changes in global society, such as the increasing migration flows and digitalization that creates virtual social relationships. In this context, new concepts have emerged, like global citizenship or digital citizenship. For these reasons, DEMOCRAT defines citizenship as an 'institution' that mediates rights and duties between the subjects of politics and the polities to which these subjects belong.

The concept of citizenship is not linked to any particular political system. Therefore, it is necessary to define what democratic citizenship means. Democratic citizenship is characterized by the fact that the members of the polity are (formally) equal regardless of their income, education, gender, origin, or any other kind of socio-economic difference, All citizens are thus formally granted equal rights, including participation in binding collective decisions through established mechanisms.

Democratic citizenship confers rights to freedom, equality and solidarity, but also implies a {minimum} degree of commitment to democratic values and participation in the deliberation of political decisions from all citizens. Democracy comprises an ideal of good citizenship and a catalogue of good practices for the preservation of a system that is not perfect but can adapt and improve to serve the common good.

There are several well-funded competence frameworks for citizenship competences in democratic societies, but they do not place enough emphasis on the nature of democratic agency, which is a priority for DEMOCRAT.

The analysis of models of democracy, together with current frameworks for citizenship competences defines four competences for responsible democratic citizenship: solidary participation, deliberation, judgment, and democratic resilience. Three transversal axes are identified: globalization, digitalization and sustainability.

EfD, even more than other education subjects, is based on human interaction, and therefore it cannot be developed rigidly and top-down. The frontline implementers, i.e. schools and especially teachers but also civil society actors have a key role in how it is enacted, what messages are actually conveyed and how effectively.

EfD should not only include a transmission of common and identity values but must also articulate and reinforce the agency and attitudes that maintain and justify such a system.

EfD needs a holistic approach to enable mature citizens actively imbued with democratic values and principles, while recognising the children's agency to help shaping their learning processes.

Policy pointers: practices and benchmarks

To safeguard democracy within the European Union, transformative education for democracy must be reinforced, taking also into account fast-moving digitalisation and fast-breached planetary boundaries.

The shift to transformative education for democracy should be based on a coherent competence framework defined in complementarity with the frameworks of citizenship competences proposed by the EU (Key Competences for Lifelong Learning) and the Council of Europe (Competences for Democratic Culture).

Schools have to be laboratories of democratic practice on a daily basis and across subjects, not just for a few hours of civic education or education for democracy per week, and need to connect with the local, global and digital environment. Moreover, local communities and society at large need to be conducive to learning and practising responsible democratic agency, through the actions of citizens, authorities and other relevant actors.

In formal education, pupils need to be aware of both their rights and responsibilities and be guided to act on both of them, within their peer group and in connection to their teachers, parents, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

A crucial aspect of any approach to education for democracy is the competence of the teacher to create an environment in which the pupils can learn democracy and to steer the process in that direction.

Democracy is at the core of European identity, which complements the national identities of EU member states. In the age of digitalisation, citizenship should not only be thought of in local contexts, but also globally, as global democratic citizenship.

EU Member States and EU institutions should acknowledge the importance of EfD as an overall objective of the education systems, and devote more resources and efforts to embed EfD effectively in school curricula.

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1. Introduction

The entry 'Crisis of Democracy' currently yields around 198,000,000 results on the internet. Most worryingly, beyond being a trend on the web, perception and reality seem to coincide in the awareness of an exhaustion of the political capacities of our democratic societies, of their tools for repair and consensus when addressing the series of socio-economic and environmental transformations facing our time.

Having become 'master of the planet', humanity is now called upon to confront the major challenges of the so-called 'Anthropocene' (an era in which human activity is the dominant force that shapes the face of the planet). Along with the rest of the world, the EU needs to find solutions for complex problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, political polarization, migration flows and increasing poverty and social inequalities. While some global strategies have emerged – notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement on climate change – these problems pose high degrees of actual and even more potential damage to economic, social and environmental realms, and demand urgent, yet equitable solutions. Governance mechanisms are called upon to deal with the strain caused on all aspects of life and find themselves under severe strain, too. The cost of wrong or ineffective action or non-action is very high in terms of legitimacy, especially in open, democratic societies, where both the decision-making and accountability processes are visible to the public.

Future prospects are also shaped by the rapid pace of digital innovation and its increasing pervasiveness in all social and economic spheres. Moreover, the socio-economic decay that started with the global financial crisis in 2008 has deepened since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the continuing military confrontation intensifies a perception of uncertainty and has broader repercussions at all levels – social, economic, environmental and political, including the possibility of nuclear conflict and global war. These developments put at increasing risk the EU model of pluralistic and liberal democracy, which has been eroded over the last two decades, as shown by the emergence of populist far-right movements, increased mistrust in democratic institutions and science, conspiracy theories, with a parallel rise in technocratic approaches, bureaucratic disengagement, securitisation of socio-economic and environmental issues, and political disengagement. The question now, for some societal groups, is whether liberal democracy is the best model to tackle today's complex challenges that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

DEMOCRAT takes as its starting point the normative position that democracy is essential to the European identity and that the European model is under pressure to respond to the challenges of the current 'polycrisis', which seems to be driving part of the European population towards authoritarian political options. However, DEMOCRAT is not about political systems as such. Rather, it advocates for democratic agency as the foundation of any kind of well-functioning democracy and explores ways of ensuring that agency is bequeathed to future generations of democratically responsible citizens (DRC) through the fostering of innovative and effective Education for Democracy (EfD), as discussed in the second chapter.

Ideally, democracy is summarised as "*the equal right of all citizens to participate equally in the collective shaping of the social living conditions that affect them*." (Lessenich 2022:14). As explained in the third chapter, this ideal version is strongly constrained by multiple mechanisms of social and political exclusion, which effectively limit the right of many people to participate on an equal footing in the collective shaping of the social living conditions.

One mechanism of social exclusion is linked to the fact that democracies are generally constituted as nation-states. Therefore, the formal recognition of belonging to the national community is the horizontal mechanism of social exclusion of part of the population living within the territory of the nation-state. This has its expression in the formal definition of 'citizenship', which we discuss in the fourth chapter below.

In the fifth chapter, we argue that democracy needs to be learnt continuously and that public policies of education for democracy should go beyond a purely technical, rigid, and top-down education. They should be linked to democratic practices within schools, working with other organisations and initiatives that promote democracy. Our approach addresses policy development and enactment combining top-down and bottom-up perspectives, and the positions of different actors, institutions and their respective discourses.

The outline of DEMOCRAT's vision of EfD, presented in the sixth chapter, refers to democracy as the core of the European identity, which complements the national identities of the EU member states, reiterating that we are not talking about the political systems as such but of the citizens' agency in democracy. It emphasises that in the age of digitalisation, citizenship should not only be thought of in local contexts, but also globally, as global democratic citizenship. Our vision of EfD does not focus only on schools, which are, however, one of the most important settings to learn democracy. EfD at school needs to connect to the local, global and digital environment to teach democracy in practice. The realised overview of teaching and learning methods in civic education and education for democracy, together with the review of the results of the recent International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, has led DEMOCRAT to advocate for a holistic approach to education for democracy and for the use of interactive and participatory teaching and learning methods in order to support children and young people's learning of democracy.

The seventh chapter elaborates on our framework of responsible democratic citizenship (RDC) through a comparison of RDC competence frameworks, democratic culture and critical citizenship. It also refers to the Ted Dam & Volman (2007) and Ten Dam et al. (2011) proposal of democratic competences. Integrating it with the core elements of democracy defined by the Council of Europe (2016), we propose a competence framework consisting of participation, deliberation, judgement/recognition of trustworthy information and democratic resilience.

In the eighth chapter we provide a snapshot of existing EfD practices across EU countries represented in the project consortium. Together with our earlier Vision of EfD and the Competence Framework for Responsible Democratic Citizenship, these served as the basis for informed discussions in national workshops. These discussions in turn informed the final elaboration of DEMOCRAT's vision of EfD and the Competence Framework presented here, as well as the curricula and pedagogical tools that can be used for their implementation in each of the project countries.

2. DEMOCRATic aspirations

DEMOCRAT's ultimate aim is to contribute to responding to the challenges of our time through an analysis of and experimentation with the definitions and dimensions of participatory praxis that democracy implies, in order to prepare new generations to understand and intervene in the social and environmental conditions and political-economic processes that they face. DEMOCRAT is committed to a plurality of approaches and aspires to stimulate ground-breaking and interdisciplinary work on the social mediation of contemporary socio-economic, environmental and governance transformations.

The planetary crisis calls for a rethinking of inherited knowledge frameworks, as well as educational responses (what we designated in this context as education for democracy, or EfD) that support the rootedness, resilience and sustainability of responsible democratic citizenship (RDC). To this end, DEMOCRAT aims at the participatory redesign and implementation of curricula and learning methods, from which the following areas of intervention will ultimately emerge:

- A review of existing curricula and pedagogies on EfD, as well as of teachers training programmes.
- A toolbox to support the development of transformative EfD practices and competences for the EU and beyond.
- Enabled pro-active networks among the various actors surrounding the educational institutions and processes, in line with the above.
- Briefing of and advocacy with decision-makers and policy development to advance the above.

The conceptual framework for RDC/EfD that is presented in this paper is part of the DEMOCRAT project deliverables, and includes a vision for the future of EfD, RDC competences, and related policy briefs. A shared framework for all this consists of the EU values, which are common to the EU countries and include: adherence to universal human rights, fundamental freedoms, inclusiveness, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination, dignity, equality, and the rule of law. A key challenge addressed by DEMOCRAT is how to ensure the continuing relevance of these values and their application by the European youth in the context of today's series of interconnected global crises, among which the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, pandemics and mounting inequalities in an increasingly digital life and work environment figure prominently.

3. Democracy

3.1. Child of another era?

A primary marker of a political system that prides itself on being democratic, and therefore accounts for the quality of its democracy, is the level of participation of the social body. Political participation, though, is determined to a large extent by socio-economic conditions. Merkel (2016 and 2016), Streeck (2015) and Crouch (2015) argue that post-World War II capitalism was compatible with democracy and the construction of the welfare state. However, the transition to financial capitalism, accompanied by a rollback of the welfare state, led to a market-driven democracy. This undermines democratic-constitutional procedures and the principle of political equality and produces an ever more asymmetrical distribution of socio-economic resources among citizens. Increasing socio-economic inequality and poverty go together with increasing political inequality and asymmetrical political participation, but also a higher degree of mistrust in the democratic system on the part of the socially and economically marginalized. Such constellations undermine the quality of democracies and their capacity to innovate and adapt in the face of challenges such as globalisation, digitalisation, individualisation, the climate crisis and biodiversity loss.

There is a long academic debate on the quality of democracy, especially in measuring the transformation of non-democratic countries to democracies. In this context, Merkel et al. (2003) speak of "embedded democracies" to systematise different institutionalised dimensions of liberal democracies, with an effective electoral regime, a range of political freedoms, as well as civil rights. Similarly, the executive, legislature and judiciary must check each other through democratic processes of accountability. Democratic willingness therefore comprises a commitment to these principles in ways that constitute, as will be explained later, what the Council of Europe calls ‘culture of democracy’. According to Ravitch (2008) this comprises the behaviours, practices, and norms that define the ability of people to govern themselves, and as such it is something to be encouraged and learned. While democratic institutions are relevant, they are sterile without the democratic engagement of citizens. Democracy is therefore something that can and must be learned, so that any definition of the state in democratic terms is not an apriorism but emanates from the political agency of citizens.

New social trends have added to the erosive process described above: the fragmentation of society, mediatisation and promotional democracy, as well as technocratisation and judicialization. This leads to a decline in the representative circuit (Papadopoulos 2013) and challenges political communication and knowledge democracy (Louw 2010). These and other factors contribute to citizens' disenchantment with politics (e.g. Hay 2007), increasing a sense of apathy and disappointment within pluralistic democracies. It is accompanied by an increase in bottom-up mobilisation and civic and political participation, which is not always positive and can often manifest itself as intolerance, disrespect for minorities and bigotry. Also, the need to combat various crises, often simultaneously, has fostered securitisation and opened new spaces for top-down technocratic management.

These developments have been facilitated by the increasing digitalisation and automatisation that significantly increase the governing capacity of a limited number of key actors (see e.g. Susskind 2018, Bigo et al 2019). Not surprisingly, this impacts on democracy: its quality and mechanisms have been criticised for not being able to respond adequately to current political, economic, social and environmental challenges (e.g. Hammond, Dryzek, Pickering 2019). Moreover, distrust of scientific evidence (e.g. flat earth believers or climate change deniers) has increased, following esoteric and conspiratorial views, as demonstrated most recently by the pandemic crisis (e.g. Bobba & Hubé 2021, Frommeld 2023). This is amplified by the tendency of the media to

seek news value via short and colourful coverage, facilitating polarisation and weakening political debate. The technical opportunities for producing vast quantities of false or misleading information have proliferated with further digitalisation, opening up windows of opportunity to achieve significant mass media coverage and distorting the public information space (Schulz et al., Bos et al. 2023).

At the same time, there is a revitalised interest in the democratic regulation of key social sectors and areas. From these, there is a growing demand for inclusion, equality and redistributive justice, suggesting that democratic norms have not passed their 'sell-by date' for everyone (Regelmann, 2022). This concerns, albeit very cautiously, schools as democratic institutions where students are seen as school citizens (Solhaug, 2018: 2) and points to the question of how democratic education is possible when it cannot be practised in everyday life at school, at work, etc.

Education, especially education for democracy, can mitigate these effects by reinforcing the role of citizens as agents of change improving the quality of democracy in the EU member states. The described developments create additional challenges when it comes to ideas and procedures for educating young people in school, indicating the need to go beyond the formal education settings.

3.2. What does democracy mean?

Before proceeding to develop our education for democracy framework and toolbox, it is necessary to agree upon the core concept of democracy itself; its conceptual and practical features. This is important because any approach to education entails an ideal image of the world we aspire to bring about. In the sections that follow we will elaborate our concept of democracy first referring to various political models of democracy, and then considering democracy as a way of living or a social order. Both approaches will help us to distil the essence of democratic agency, which stands at the very centre of enabling responsible democratic citizenship through EfD, as earlier alluded to.

3.2.1. Democracy as a political order

A basic idea of what democracy means from a political perspective was expressed by US President Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address (1863) as the '*government of the people by the people for the people*'.[1] Political power emanates from the people and is exercised by the people in the interest of the people. Democracy means that the citizens themselves are responsible for regulating their coexistence, and that this regulation is not a matter for one or few citizens alone. Democracy requires the active participation of as many as possible in order to merit general approval. In this crucial respect of shared responsibility for coexistence, even the remaining differences between people do not matter: everyone must be able to participate in the shaping of their community. Democratic institutions must give everyone the opportunity to participate in at least one relevant stage of the political process (Ladwig 2020: 23).

How exactly to do that, though, varies greatly not only over time but also between countries. There are several models of democracy (see Table 1), that vary in terms of their participation modes or electoral regimes. All models consider democracy as a contested terrain of diverse opinions and interests. The key difference among them consists in the different way they regulate political decision-making.

[1] https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gettysburg-address/ext/trans-nicolay-copy.html

This is not the place to discuss in depth the different models that exist, as our goal is not to make a contribution to democracy theory. We want to distil the essence of democratic action to define a framework for responsible democratic citizenship and a curriculum; and to develop and test innovative pedagogical approaches to implement them. The underlying aim is to strengthen European democracy in the long term and offer it as a model to tackle today's major global crises. Our starting point and concrete reference for the EfD package we want to deliver is the representative liberal democratic model of the European Union.

This, however, already includes two contested terms. First, 'representative democracy' implies that the participation of citizens in political processes is channelled through parliaments and other representative bodies, whose members are elected by the citizens, who have the right to vote, and their performance is assessed by the next elections. Participation in public life and the community is not limited, though, to such formal processes but refers also to informal and non-formal participation. Informal participation includes the public expression of political positions, as for example through demonstrations, by signing petitions, creating citizens' initiatives, among others. Non-formal participation is defined as private political expressions, as for example boycotts of commercial products for political reasons (Mata et al. 2023). Overall, informal and non-formal participation (in addition to formal participation) is an essential part of high-quality liberal democracy. Also, the degree to which participation is proactive or political varies widely among citizens, and even the decision not to participate can be political (Hay 2007).

The second contested term is 'liberal' and what it implies in relation to democracy. A first step for the definition of a liberal democratic system could be the underlying principles. The fundamental texts of the European Union refer to the following general principles: inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination. Moreover, the EU is based on human dignity, individual freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities (see Treaty on European Union (2016) and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2016)). This covers overall civil rights but also political liberties such as freedom of expression and information, and freedom of assembly and association. Despite the anchorage of these principles in the fundamental EU documents, the EU central institutions and the institutions of the EU member states do not always respect them in practice. This again calls to attention the tension between state policies and citizenship and also the evolving nature of public opinion and social movements, some of which advocate for limiting the application of some core principles, as the example of the recent rise of extreme movements in several EU countries shows.

There is no democracy without participation. It ensures the legitimacy of the electoral system and at the same time provides the vertical accountability of representative democracy. As we will discuss in the section about citizenship, it is also the battleground for who is recognised as a full citizen and allowed to participate with full rights and duties in the political system. There are also the questions of the scope and the practical valuation and enactment of these rights and duties among the citizens.

With the exception of the models of electoral and majoritarian democracy (see Table 1), all other models foresee the active participation of the citizens in the political decision-making process through the expression of opinions, beyond the mere election of a representative government. In other words, deliberation based on a broad participation is a basic element of these models. Making one's own voice heard and listening to the voices of others is also closely linked to respect for others, which means respect for civil rights.

Here we add, with reference to Ladwig (2020), the shared responsibility for coexistence, which implies the mutual respect between human beings, but also for other living beings ensuring not only the survival of one's own community, but of all humanity and planet Earth.

In short, while they may differ in some of their characteristics, or in the emphasis they put on one or the other dimensions of democracy, in addition to the separation of powers the common feature of the different models of democracy is the responsible participation of all citizens with diverse interests in a deliberation on political decisions that respects the rights of the other citizens and the ecological environment.

Models of modern democracy			
Model	**Description**	**Principal Value**	**Features**
Electoral democracy	Where the electoral process of democracy embodies the core value of making rulers responsive to citizens, achieved through electoral competition for the electorate's approval; where political and civil society organisations can operate freely; where elections are clean and not marred by fraud or systematic irregularities; and where elections affect the composition of the chief executive of the country.	Popular sovereignty achieved through contested elections filling legislative and (directly or indirectly) executive offices.	Free and frequent elections, government responsible to the electorate (universal adult suffrage, freedom of expression, freedom of association).
Liberal democracy	The liberal model has a double face: It states that political institutions and governments are necessary to safeguard individual liberties, but it also takes a 'negative' view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power.	Guaranteed individual liberty understood as freedom from state repression.	Civil rights and liberties, checks and balances, rule of law.
Egalitarian democracy	The egalitarian model considers the electoral process as insufficient, as long as resources are unequally distributed among the citizens. For a full democracy, the citizens must have at their disposal equal resources.	Equal political empowerment.	Equal distribution of resources, no discrimination, equal access to agenda setting and decision-making.
Participatory democracy	The participatory version of democracy emphasises active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral. It is motivated by uneasiness about a grounding practice of electoral democracy: delegating authority to representatives. Thus, direct rule by citizens is preferred, wherever practicable.	Direct, active participation of all in every stage and level of political decision-making.	Civil society engagement, high turnout, strong local democracy, opportunities of political involvement, including direct decision-making.
Deliberative democracy	A deliberative process is one in which public reasoning focused on the common good motivates political decisions—as contrasted with emotional appeals,	Political agenda-setting and decision-making based on well-informed and reasoned justification.	Public and respectful deliberations and consultative bodies; focus on facts and the broader societal

Models of modern democracy			
Model	**Description**	**Principal Value**	**Features**
	solidarity attachments, parochial interests, or coercion.		implications of policies in deliberations and decision-making
Direct popular democracy	Direct popular democracy refers here to an institutionalised process by which citizens of a region or country register their choice or opinion on specific issues through a ballot. The term does not encompass recall elections, deliberative assemblies, or settings in which the vote is not secret, or the purview is restricted.	Inclusive decision-making involving and responding to a broad range of interests.	Power-dispersing institutions.
Majoritarian democracy	The model of majoritarian democracy is based on the idea that the voice of the majority prevails over the voice of the minority. Therefore, an electoral democracy should centralise power to achieve efficient procedures of decision-making and implementation.	Efficient decision-making reflecting the will of the majority.	Power-concentrating institutions.
Consensual democracy	The model of consensual democracy advocates that political decision-making and implementation should involve the participation of a wide range of actors, so that all actors affected are heard and their voice has influence on the decision.	Inclusive decision-making involving and responding to a broad range of opinions.	Consensus-building processes and institutions.

Table 1. Concepts of modern democracy. Source: Own elaboration partially based on Skaaning (2021: 28)

3.2.2. Democracy as a social order

The perspective on democracy as a political system must be complemented with democracy as a social order, as proposed by e.g. Tocqueville (1835 and 1840), Dewey (2016 [1916]), Negt (1971 and 2008) and others.[2] The concept of social order emphasises the processes and forces that sustain but also limit democracy. There are several definitions of what democracy means as social order, which vary according to ideological attitudes. Here we refer to an approximate definition by Lessenich, according to which 'democracy' means: the equal right of all citizens to participate equally in the collective shaping of the social living conditions that affect them. Or more briefly: equal participation in the political shaping of one's own living conditions (Lessenich 2022:14).

This definition describes an ideal situation that does not and probably never will exist in social reality. A multitude of different processes of social exclusion prevent this ideal from being even remotely achieved. The opportunities to participate in the political shaping are unequally distributed. Norms establish who can

[2] There are differences in how political science treats this central topic and how sociology analyses the condition and limits of democracy (Turner 2021: 3).

participate in decision-making and how. They condition the participation in the deliberation processes. But norms can also be subject to social negotiations and can be changed.

There are two main mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion at the socio-political level[3]:

a) Nationalism or the membership of a national or regional community establishes a horizontal insider-outsider differentiation between people. Brubaker (1990: 3) states that nationhood is the main criterion to decide about citizenship. This exclusive reference became questionable, on one side, by the migration flows and settlement of people from other countries in the territories of nation-states, as for instance, the massive influx of Turks into the Western European countries since the 1960s, or the influx of Algerians into France. Several generations of them now live in EU countries with rights to national citizenship and also to the citizenship of the countries in which their ancestors lived. The constitution of transnational political spaces, such as the European Union, has also questioned the exclusive reference to national borders, as well as the transnational communication flows that allow people to create transnational social communities.
b) Ownership or the disposition of production means and income imply a vertical differentiation of political rights and opportunities. It is worth noting that the focus on property has led early prominent liberal thinkers such as Bentham or J. S. Mills to limit democracy (Mackert 2021:4). Although the nation-states formally recognise equal rights of participation in political processes, people with a higher economic status have better opportunities to participate at all levels of society. Social inequality has a negative impact on both conventional and unconventional political participation (Schäfer 2010: 132). German Studies by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Petersen at al. 2013 and Schäfer et al. 2013) found that the more precarious the living conditions are, the fewer people participate in elections. European studies point in the same direction. Solt et al. (2008: 23) comparing data from 24 countries show that "*increasing income inequality strongly depresses political engagement*". Dacombe & Parvin (2021: 146) note that the empirical work in the area of social inequality and political participation suggests that the socio-economic status is the clearest factor negatively influencing political participation such as voting, political party membership or civic activism.

The inequality of access to socio-political rights becomes more complex when different mechanisms of social exclusion/inclusion must be considered such as gender, ethnic group, age group, religion, creating complex participation in diverse political processes. It affects electoral participation, but other forms of political participation are even more affected (Elsässer & Schäfer 2023), including representation in parliament (ibidem: 470). The polycrisis seems to reinforce such mechanisms of social exclusion. Nationalism has especially been gaining ground in the political debate, reinforcing the exclusion of social groups which are not considered part of the national community, even though they may be recognised as citizens in the nation-state.

[3] We are talking exclusively about North American and European democracies. Although the population in these democracies is mostly disengaged, Mackert (2021) calls to attention that outside these geo-political areas the idea of democracy is more alive than ever but it does not take Western democracies as the reference model.

3.2.3. Democratic agency

Most relevant for the DEMOCRAT Project and its focus on Education for Democracy is how the individuals internalize the above processes and express them through their personal behaviour, group membership and actions. Therefore, DEMOCRAT does not focus on the participation in the formal political system. It assumes that democracy as a political system requires democratic action in everyday life.

Political theory is usually concerned with the procedural rules of the formal political system, neglecting the fact that similar rules are also applied in everyday life. In rule-based democratic societies, people have a clear understanding of spaces of freedom and claims to equality and solidarity. When these are not respected, without accountability for why, people feel violated. The social movement that opposed governmental measures in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in some EU member states shows how sensitive parts of the population may react to measures limiting their democratic rights (Bobba & Hubé 2021; Ganderson et al. 2023). Democratic principles are not just abstract formal political principles but part of everyday life even in hierarchically structured environments, such as public administration or business. However, these principles and their implementation in binding collective decision-making procedures necessarily remain indeterminate and are implicitly subject to social negotiation processes (see Marchart 2020: 24). Against this background, DEMOCRAT does not focus on the formal political system and the corresponding processes of political participation, but on how democracy is experienced, implemented and learned in everyday life, especially by children and young people at the local level.

The subject of DEMOCRAT are young citizens and their democratic action competence or agency, which is required to sustain democracy as a political system. According to Weber, '*action*' is to be understood as human behaviour (whether external or internal doing, omitting or tolerating), if and insofar as the person or persons acting associate a subjective meaning to it. Action thus entails the notion of intent. In social and education science, this is also addressed by the notion of agency, thus underscoring the interplay of structure and action in social processes, which is a well-known topic of sociology. People are not autonomous actors but are embedded in social structures, as Giddens (1984) has pointed out in his structuration theory. According to Giddens (1984: 9):

> "*Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place …. Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened.*"

The term refers to the individual's ability to 'make a difference' and change the course of events. Individuals do not act only of their own volition, nor are actions determined by the social structure. Social structures open up scope for individual action and at the same time set limits. As actors, the individuals make causal contributions to the course of events.

According to Bandura (2006: 164), the term refers to having a causal effect on the course of action:

> "*To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances. In this view, personal influence is part of the causal structure. People are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are not simply onlookers of their behavior. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them*".

'Agency' has become a key term in educational research since the 1970s, as well, showing that children are active subjects in shaping their social world and society. Prout & James (1990: 8) express it as follows:

> *„Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes*."

This shifted the perspective from children as future adults to children as active agents in the educational process. The growing relevance of the understanding of the child as an acting individual is also reflected in socio-political terms, in which children are perceived as social subjects, as expressed for example in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989.

Enabling action and agency means that a democratic society cannot exist without democrats, actively taking part in discussions and decision making. If people cannot make decisions about their everyday affairs, then even the best democratic institutions will be undermined. If people do not have control over and participation rights in their everyday experiences, they will be in the long-run nothing more than objects of manipulative elites. To have rights of control and participation in the decisions of everyday life of the community requires fighting for one's rights. The use of these rights and duties in a democratic manner has to be learned and trained. Democracy as a political system depends on citizens acting democratically and shaping democratic coexistence in society. Therefore, democratic agency should not be limited to the formal political system (see also Etzioni 2000 or Bellah et al. 1992).

In almost all works on democracy, agency is anchored in public debates and relates to decision-making processes of the political system as such. But only an understanding of this notion in terms of micro-politics makes it possible to relate democratic action to areas of everyday life and to ask how democracy should be part of the decision-making processes in families, schools or businesses. This opens up the space for debate on democratic agency, not in the sense of advocating for radical grassroots political systems, but in the sense of asking in which areas of daily life democratic principles should be applied and in which they should not. We will not go into this issue in depth here and will limit our argument to the fact that many areas of everyday life should be regulated by democratic principles, so that democratic action does not only concern political decision-making in the narrow sense. This leads to the need of identifying the foundations of responsible democratic agency. It is about individuals and their democratic action in social situations.

4. The question of democratic citizenship

4.1. Who forms part of the democratic system? Who are considered citizens?

The common features of democratic models identified in the previous section draw attention to the question: who can participate in the deliberative democratic processes with full civic rights? Therefore, it seems necessary to talk about the relationship between the state and the individual, which is generally discussed under the term of citizenship, Staatsbürgerschaft, ciudadanía, kodakondsus, obywatelstwo or kansalaisuus, among others. Especially the German term Staatsbürgerschaft or state citizenship expresses the linkage between citizenship and state in the sense that the state confers on some persons living in its territory a legal status defining their rights and obligations.

Citizenship is an institution for establishing and ensuring the autonomous status of an individual and relating them to state authorities and fellow citizens. Citizenship, as we know it, is a relatively new phenomenon. Historically, there has been no comparable legal and political position for common people in terms of status and agency. Instead, people had been characterised as 'subjects', subjugated to rulers (e.g. Heater 2004). Modern citizenship developed with the modern state, especially in its nation-making stage during the last two or three centuries (e.g. Raadschelders 1998; Pierson 2004). The modern theories of citizenship, therefore, depict the political community as a sum of individuals bearing equal rights, with the rule of law and the legitimacy of government deriving from the consent of and accountability towards the rights-holding citizens (Chandler 2012: 119).

Not least for historical and socio-economic reasons, citizenship is not the same e.g. in France, Russia, China or the United States of America, giving only some examples. Citizenship as a concept and/or practice can also change over time for the same country, as it has not been the same to be a citizen of the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic or the actual Federal Republic of Germany, even if they all are temporal manifestations of 'German citizenship' (Dobbernack 2017). Although European and North American scholarship has linked the concept of citizenship closely to the concept of democracy, citizenship does not depend on the type of the political system; citizenship exists even in authoritarian systems. "*Citizenship is a concept that pertains to participation in a nation and society, without defining the type of participation. It is in fact an ideologically neutral concept*" (Veugelers & de Groot 2019: 17).

However, as history (Marshall & Bottomore 1992; and Isin 2002) and recent developments show, citizenship is a contested terrain in which people must fight for their rights; their rights to political participation but also to social welfare, security and human dignity, against the state. Citizenship is not only a status but also a process in which the concept of citizenship can change substantially (Isin & Turner 2002: 4).

Citizenship is simultaneously constraining and enabling. As a constraint, it has classically been characterised by closure, enabling feedback in a bounded community, a polity (Brubaker 1992). Polity is the locus of citizen agency and membership, be it legal, political, social or other. Citizenship is also an instrument of inclusion and exclusion, creating a community of sentiment and developing its identity basis, i.e. marking the borders with others, and strengthening that with symbols, routines, rituals, division of rights and obligations, etc. But citizenship is also an enabling concept, conveying the values of democracy, equality, empowerment and responsibility.

One main topic is the possibility of conferment of citizenship on certain social collectives. Examples are the recognition in the course of history of various groups such as workers, women and people of other ethnic or racial origins, originally considered 'second class citizens', as citizens with political rights (see Kerber 1997 and Isin 2002). More recent examples are the recognition of emigrants or refugees as citizens. This is not only a question of the relation between the state and these people but also of the relation among the people with and without full citizenship rights. Citizenship status may directly affect the individual's right of political participation in the sense that persons without the citizenship of the respective state have limited rights to participate in the political process and even less rights if they are considered as illegals in the state territory.

At the same time, citizenship is an object of international codification of human rights, the constitution of supranational entities, such as the European Union, or judicial bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice. This indicates that the rights of the citizens are increasingly defined and defended at transnational level breaking up the exclusive relation between a state and 'its' individuals, in defining the people's rights and duties. This trend is expressed in terms such as 'European citizen' or 'global citizen', which may (in the first case) or may not (in the second case) have any legal standing as yet.
Also, changes in global society suggest that the link of citizens to nation states has begun to weaken. Due to the ease of travel, the widespread use of the Internet and the growing migration flows people no longer have only one territorial reference point but may have several or the world as a whole, to which the virtual space or cyberspace should be added.

Therefore, we propose to use here a slightly modified definition (Isin & Nyers 2004), according to which citizenship is an 'institution' mediating rights and duties between the subjects of politics and the polity to which these subjects belong prior to being recognized as citizens. Institution is not understood here as an organisation but in sociological terms as relatively permanent and stable patterns of action that are nevertheless open to change. This definition makes explicit the political character of citizenship, and the fact that belonging to the community and the rights and duties that go with it is an ongoing issue.

4.2. Democratic Citizenship

The proposed definition is neutral to the specific political system of the polity granting citizenship. In the next step, we will delineate the term democratic citizenship, which is often equated with citizenship in academic and non-academic works. But citizenship is the premise of modern democratic governance, says Tilly (1995), for whom democracy is the prime relationship between the state and the citizen. Citizenship rights enable and encourage citizens to stand up for their other rights (Skinner & Strath 2003). This is related to citizen agency, active and democratic citizenship, etc. (e.g. Crick & Lockyer 2010; Stoker et al. 2011) and, more broadly, to political and societal participation and membership as a lived practice and also to identity construction (e.g. Sicakkan & Lithman 2005). Citizenship is the status that makes members of the polity (formally) equal, regardless of their income, education or descent, as it grants people equal rights to decide over the affairs of the general community and provides an equal minimum social standing.

For those who are recognised as citizens in modern democratically constituted polities, citizenship is an instrument of empowerment, as it grants citizens' rights to freedom, equality and solidarity and opens up ways to claim them but also imposes responsibilities for socio-political development. Democratic citizenship is characterised by the fact that members of the polity are (formally) equal, regardless of their income, education or origin, because it formally grants people equal rights to decide on the affairs of the general community. As famously noted by Marshall (1992), focusing on citizenship enables political evolution and is the alternative to revolutionary change (see also Kalev & Jakobson 2020). In practice, it is linked to political agency and active

socio-political participation. Without the active participation of a large proportion of citizens, formal democratic institutions become hollow and ossified. On the other hand, effective democratic participation also requires democratic institutions.

Democratic citizenship is a multifaceted process of negotiation between actors with different interests and resources at different levels and arenas of society. This is why Balibar (2001: 211) speaks of imperfect citizenship. Democracy implies conflict and contestation and is not geared towards consensus, consent and unequivocal allegiance. This also underlines the ideational or normative diversity of citizenship. There are different expectations of citizenship and the role of the citizen. These result in the internal contradictions (aporias) in the concept of citizenship (Huysmans & Guillaume 2013), and require contextual practical strategies to be reconciled, e.g. see below the liberal, republican and communitarian approaches to citizenship (e.g. Delanty 2000, Kalev & Sinivee 2017).

We can talk about at least five key normative perspectives on citizenship and the role of citizen (e.g. Kalev & Hallik 2023):

- In the *national communitarian perspective,* a citizen is expected to function harmoniously in a nation-state that is based on language, religion, common origin or historical experience. The qualities seen as important are national patriotism, cultural and social harmony, fitting into the traditions and customs space, knowledge of language, national culture and history.
- The r*epublican perspective* expects citizens to be politically aware and active. Citizenship is based on the personal political choice of agency, the committed and informed participation in the political community. Constitutional patriotism, civic spirituality and practice, sense of responsibility, knowledge of the state, politics and governance, political meaning-making and participation skills are seen as important.
- The *liberal democratic perspective* regards citizens as parties to the social contract, legal order and democratic political community. The qualities seen as important are personal development and civility, human dignity and rights, openness, awareness of how to use one's rights, often also critical thinking skills. Citizens themselves decide to what extent and in which areas they use their rights, but it is assumed that they mostly participate in democratic politics.
- Differently, the *neoliberal perspective* expects citizens to be engaged in the private sector. Market agency, entrepreneurship, innovativeness within the given rules are important. One has to obey the legal order, including competition regulations, administrative procedure rules, etc. The qualities seen as important are self-efficacy, competition, cooperation, flexibility, legal, social and business knowledge.
- The *social justice-oriented perspective* expects citizens to question and change the established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time. A citizen who is oriented towards social justice critically evaluates social, political and economic structures, examines the root causes of problems, change strategies, social movements and how to carry out systemic changes, for example why some people live in poverty and how to deal with its root causes. In a social justice-oriented perspective citizens must have good character, they must be honest, responsible and law-abiding members of the community. A personally responsible citizen behaves responsibly in the community, for example, works and pays taxes, picks up trash, recycles and donates blood, helps those in need, provides aid in times of crisis, obeys the law, contributes food to a food bank.

The diversity and debate of various normative perspectives on democratic citizenship and the role of the citizen can be seen as a strength, an intellectual resource that can be used to update and enrich the concept

of responsible democratic citizenship and ensure its sustainability. Emphasising the role of citizens brings in a horizontal and a vertical dimension of democratic action (Jakobson & Kalev 2012).

The vertical dimension concerns the interrelations of citizens and public authorities, both top down and bottom up. Democratic citizenship is an institution for establishing and ensuring the autonomous status of an individual and relating him or her to state authorities and fellow citizens. It depicts the polity as a sum of individuals bearing equal rights and duties, where the rule of law and the legitimacy of government is derived from the consent and accountability of rights-holding citizens. Without a formal focal point of accountability, there can be no democratic political community, nor a framework binding and subordinating individuals as political subjects. The attenuation of politics and hollowing out of representation constitutes the collapse of any democratic community. Without the need to worry about the constitutive relationship between the government and citizen, political community becomes entirely abstract. There is no longer a need to formulate a political programme and to gain supporters in order to challenge or overcome individual, sectional or parochial interests (Chandler 2012, 119).

The horizontal dimension is built up by citizens' everyday actions and interactions (e.g. Andersen & Hoff 2001, Sicakkan & Lithman, 2005, Isin & Nielsen 2013). According to the performative view of democracy (e.g. Chwaszcza 2012), it is constituted by acting and observing the actions of others informing on how relevant the democratic practices are. As a result, democracy can be more or less vivid in civil society, public sphere and political practice resulting in stronger or weaker democratic political communities. Active citizenship starts from rather basic levels of obtaining information and being active and may lead up to considerate political agency (see e.g. Bee 2014).

It is the interplay between democratic institutions and democratic action that keeps democracies alive. Looking only at formal political processes does not go far enough. Only by looking at democratic action in everyday life allows us to grasp the quality of a democracy.

5. Learning democracy

5.1. Do we need to learn democracy?

Those who understand democracy as a form of life or a social order, claim that it must be constantly cemented through democratic actions. "*Democracy denotes a historical achievement whose preservation and development – as a way of life, as a form of society and as a form of government – does not come about by itself, but depends on the knowledge, convictions and education of all*." (Edelstein & Fauser 2001). According to this view, democracy as a political system depends on the citizens acting democratically and shaping democratic coexistence in society. Democratic action requires a mindset based on the acknowledgement and comprehension of the interrelation between one's own actions and the environmental, socio-economic and political surroundings in which one lives and operates. Going beyond understanding, democratic agency signifies actually influencing these surroundings in a broadly beneficial direction.

Himmelmann (2005) argues similarly, emphasising that democratic behaviour is not an innate virtue but must be learned, applied and relearned in practice. The school as a place of learning is a central instance of democratic learning in democracies, while democratic agency also needs to be practically exercised in community. Veith (2010: 150) considers that learning democracy at school "*promotes: 1. An understanding of democracy as a way of life by opening up school-cultural spaces for shaping social relations; 2. An insight into democracy as a form of society by making conflicts of interest and diversity practically tangible; 3. An interest in democracy as a form of rule by awakening an understanding of state orders and forms of procedure. Finally, democracy learning also 4. Awakens awareness of the processes and dynamics of globalisation and the developments associated with it*."

Along these lines, the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy (UN 1993)[4] stresses that democratic values are necessary for the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Education for human rights and democracy should receive special attention and is in itself a human right and a prerequisite for the full realisation of social justice, peace and development. Moreover, the educational process should itself be a democratic and participatory process that empowers individuals and society to improve the quality of life.

The democratic agency of citizens, though, along with the societies within which it is exercised, is a highly dynamic reality and should be the matter of permanent revision and adjustments. The basic determinants of a healthy democracy, i.e. freedom, control and equality (Berlin 1958), although mutually encroaching, must remain in a dynamic equilibrium. Societies rarely tend towards harmony. More often, they do so towards discord, not because of a lack of humanity on the part of their participants, but because the human impulse for individual freedom may conflict with the preservation of the group or even the perception of a goal as common. At the same time, the amount of control that must necessarily be exercised to re-establish the balance between freedom and boundaries ought to be governed by the principle of equality so that control is exercised from a position of zero leverage. When one of the determinants develops unexpectedly, for example in times of crisis or political turmoil, it always does so at the expense of the other two. Democratic learning must anticipate these processes, recognise the imbalance and enable action to rebalance accordingly.

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[4] https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/10-world-plan-action-education-human-rights-and-democracy-montreal-declaration-1993

5.2. Citizenship education as public policy and organisational practice

There are diverse opinions on how extensive and standardised citizenship education should be, and on the role that public authorities – be these national, regional, local or international – and other actors should play in organising citizenship education. It can be a powerful tool for the governments to prepare citizens for political and also for broader societal and economic life (e.g. Crick 1999; Stoker et al 2011; Westheimer 2015; Stoker 2016), with the capacity to effect social and political change. If it is not organised properly, by omission or commission, it may result in the underpreparedness of citizens and thus limited citizen agency in practice. A patchy competence base may lead to the alienation or radicalisation of citizens, especially the youth, and aggravate the earlier discussed problems of contemporary democracies. Thus, it is necessary to pay attention and ensure a prudent organisation of citizenship education. This could involve various national (or any other competent level) policies, regulations and frameworks, to develop governance practices in school democracy and leadership, in classrooms and during extracurricular learning, in communities and NGOs. Countries and regions have different ways of organising civic education but the aforementioned objectives provide the shared basis for its normative orientation, organisational and pedagogical enactment, and the assessment of results.

Citizenship education is based on human interaction even more than other education subjects, so it is not possible to develop it purely technocratically, rigidly and top-down. The front-line implementers, especially teachers but also civil society actors, have a key role in how it is enacted, what messages are actually conveyed and how effectively. Teachers and other grassroots-level educational actors can engage people directly and shape the practice of policy implementation. Street-level bureaucrats exercise wide discretion in decisions about citizens with whom they interact. The policy-making roles of street-level bureaucrats are based on two interrelated aspects in their positions: relatively high degrees of discretion and relative autonomy from organisational authority. The position of street-level bureaucrats regularly permits them to make policy in practice with respect to significant aspects of their interactions with citizens (Lipsky 2010).

In the DEMOCRAT project we address the aspects of citizenship education policies and organisational practices relevant to our research being broadly based on the tradition of educational policy (implementation) studies, considering the cultural, discursive or argumentative turn in policy sciences (Fischer, Forrester 1993; Fischer, Gottweis 2012). Here, the role of language is of central importance. Language creates, codifies, and conveys policy, and shapes the meaning and understanding of policy. From the initial framing of particular policy problems to debate, discussion, negotiation, and decision-making inherent in the policy-making process, talk and text often serve as the primary vehicle through which the shaping of policy is made visible and consensus is built among concerned stakeholders for its intended outcomes, especially among those called upon to implement the policy afterwards (Lester et al 2017: 2). In particular, all this has to make sense to educators, helping them to understand their own role and required strategy (Spillane 2004, Hogan et 2018, Tan 2017).

Traditional implementation studies have typically looked at whether bureaucrats' practices align with formulated policy goals (Hupe et al 2015), or how lower order bureaucrats carry out the orders of higher order principals (e.g. Brehm & Gates 1997). In the newer studies, researchers have turned their attention towards the practices influenced by policy, as well as the ways in which these practices influence policy development (Raaphorst 2019). We will address policy development and enactment combining the top-down and bottom-up perspectives, and the positions of various actors, institutions and discourses.

6. DEMOCRAT's vision of EfD

6.1. Democracy and European Identity

The construction of nation-states in Europe was based on idealised, clearly distinguishable national identities and a loyalty to the constituted, territorially rooted political community, usually with references to a glorious past. This marks a difference to the 'European identity'. The building-up of the European Union from its humble beginnings in the 1950s was an elite project aiming to consolidate the peace through close economic and political cooperation between Western European nation-states. It was not accompanied by the construction of a European identity.

The first step towards such an identity was taken with the Document on The European Identity published by the Nine Foreign Ministers on 14 December 1973 (EC 1973) in Copenhagen. In this document "*The Nine wish to ensure that the cherished values of their legal, political and moral order are respected, and to preserve the rich variety of their national cultures. Sharing as they do the same attitudes to life, based on a determination to build a society which measures up to the needs of the individual, they are determined to defend the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice — which is the ultimate goal of economic progress — and of respect for human rights*" (EC 1973: 119). The so defined European Identity is based on cultural diversity, common values and principles based on representative democracy, rule of law, social justice and human rights. Partly conceived as a by-product of the growing economic and political integration – a 'spill-over effect' – this is a political top-down strategy for the integration of the European Union, as the declared objective is that "*the European Identity will evolve as a function of the dynamic construction of a United Europe*" (EC 1973: 122). It was eventually capped by the establishment of EU citizenship, in parallel to the national citizenships, in 1993. [5]

Although the EU citizenship does not mean that a uniform European identity has actually taken shape, it does point to a constitutionally rooted identity, as postulated by Habermas for the common German identity, which is compatible with national identities in so far as these are also respecting the same fundamental values and principles. Kain (2009: 48) concludes that the degree to which EU citizens are committed to the European identity can be taken as an indicator of democratic acceptance and legitimacy of the EU. Moreover, to the extent that the EU is a polity, with its own political processes, election to representative bodies and separation of powers with corresponding institutions exercising them, as well as a distinct society with its social order, what has been discussed about citizenship and democratic agency before applies – mutatis mutandis – to the EU level too.

The DEMOCRAT Project needs to combine these two levels of identity and citizenship, and develop curricula and tools that advance both in a democratic context, with a national element that builds on nation-state citizen education as it evolves under today's challenges and opportunities (e.g. digital technologies), and a supra-national element, as far as the EU level is concerned, which is also susceptible to the same challenges and opportunities. While these two citizenships refer to different formal political systems operating at two different levels of governance, their social order and citizen agency frameworks share the same characteristics, as they both refer to the representative liberal democracy model. In short: a European education for democracy should take the fundamental principles of the European Union as reference, as they are enshrined

[5] https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2017-06/2016-factsheet-flash-eurobarometer-430-citizenship_en.pdf

in the Treaty on European Union and resumed in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights and justice, together with the essentials of democracy as participation and deliberation regarding the solution of social problems.

6.2. The vision of responsible democratic citizenship and citizen agency, on- and off-line

Personal readiness for positive democratic engagement is often discussed as part of a 'culture of democracy', which the Council of Europe defines as follows: "*The term 'culture of democracy' rather than 'democracy' is used in the present context to underline the fact that, while democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions and laws, such institutions and laws cannot function in practice unless they are based on ... democratic values, attitudes and practices*" (Council of Europe, 2016: 15).

This highlights the fact that while democratic institutions are relevant, they become a mere hollow construct without the broader engagement of citizens with each other and society as a whole on the basis of shared democratic values, conspicuous in 'instinctively' and consistently expressed attitudes and practices. At the same time, one has to be fully aware that democracy entails a constant social bargaining, sometimes even highly conflictual, that (re)defines the extent of access to political, civic and socio-economic rights and duties through participation in the deliberation process and decision-making.

Such participation still has a strong territorial anchorage but has become increasingly diverse. The historical labour migration flows to Europe (in the 1960s and 1970s workers from the Northern Mediterranean countries to France, Germany, the Benelux and Scandinavian countries; and inhabitants of former colonies to France, Belgium and the Netherlands) and current migration from Africa, the Middle East and Asia to Europe suggest a multiple territorial identification of at least the second and third generation of migrants. To this should be added the movement of people within the European Union, combining different national citizenships in the broader context of EU citizenship. This includes 'digital nomads', i.e. people who settle in a physical location of their choice but work over the internet with counterparts in different polities around the world, while also belonging to non-nation-state communities, as 'digital citizens' or 'global citizens'.

The democratic citizen of the future will be increasingly working and living in cyberspace but also interacting physically with their local environment. EfD should make them feel both empowered and responsible for the well-being of themselves and the communities they are part of, both physical and digital. Luksha et al. (2018: 1) suggest that: "*Education can become an avenue through which global society will overcome the gaps and barriers we have created: the digital divide, the imbalance of information flows, the growing economic and social inequality, religious, ethnical, and cultural divides, and extreme ecological pressures we are placing on the earth*."

Diverging from the individualistic conceptions of citizenship education, Education for Democracy (EfD) aims to empower individuals to participate in governance and contribute to pluralistic democratic societies (Biesta, 2011 and Gutmann, 1993). As explained by Parker (2008: 65), "*democratic citizens need to both know democratic things and to do democratic things".* In addition to the principles of respect for humanity, appreciation of diversity, and environmental sustainability promoted in current models of citizenship education *(Green, 2020; Guo, 2014),* global democratic citizenship emphasizes political action *(Biesta, 2011, Parker, 2008),* democratic virtues, including *"the ability to deliberate, to think critically about one's life and one's society, and therefore to participate in conscious social reproduction*" (Gutmann, 1993: 8), and "*an ongoing orientation towards the wider political values of justice, equality and freedom*" (Biesta, 2011: 2).

Closely related to EfD, human rights education has focused on education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, aim to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Council of Europe, 2010: 5).

Youths' near-universal access to the internet through smartphones and other mobile devices creates unique opportunities for participation in authentic human rights education and EfD. Digital literacies include knowledge and skills that enable youth to participate effectively in digital spaces and are generally defined along two dimensions: technical skills and critical engagement with digital content (Pangrazio, 2016). Social media enables multimodal content creation for a diverse, international user base, providing students with a platform to make their voice heard and learn from others about various human rights issues (Cho et al., 2020; Gleason & von Gillern, 2018; Manca et al., 2021). Similarly, youth are able to form or contribute to online global communities, analysing, problem-solving, and mobilizing in relation to issues with personal and social value (OHCHR, 2023), and issues which may not be as visible in their local communities, through websites such as The Global Goals (Project Everyone, n.d.) for students' action towards achieving the SDGs.

Put systematically and simply, though not exhaustively, the EfD we envision for tomorrow will have to:

1. Empower students by right and knowledge to actively **participate** in the making of decisions that govern the affairs of the polities they are part of, to shape the policies and the actual polities themselves, as well as the economy that serves them, while maintaining a healthy natural environment. Specific elements include:
    - Knowledge of rights, personal and collective, civic, social, etc.
    - Knowledge of goals and policy frameworks, like the SDGs, the European Green Deal and Just Transition
    - Knowledge of electoral, judicial, administrative and other processes
    - Access to/participation in electoral and other decision-making processes
    - Recourse to objective adjudication regarding decisions that may affect one
    - Access to knowledge vital to the running of infrastructure and society, including algorithms
    - Access to finance, at least the basic income necessary for a dignified living for students and their families without fear of destitution

2. Enable students to deliberate and develop further their many dimensions and personal characteristics, including defining ones, like ethnicity, culture and gender/sexual identity, as well as linguistic skills and relationships, as expressed in person and online. Specific elements include:
    - Exposure to different ways of thinking, languages, cultures, etc.
    - No one size fits all, encouragement to search and identify personal characteristics without fear of persecution or ostracism
    - Exposure to diverse knowledge areas
    - Exchange of ideas and direct debate

3. Cultivate individual judgement of what is truthful and what is fake, in terms of news but also behaviours and intentions of others, again as expressed in person and online. Specific elements include:
    - Clarity of vision, not obstructed by chatter, obfuscation, flattery, misinformation or disinformation

- Not compromising ethical principles for short-term gain, as ethics is a proven path for long-term personal and societal stability
- Decision-making techniques and personal 'algorithms', healthy suspicion, double-checking, proof seeking
- Trust, but verify

4. Provide students with conceptual and practical tools to remain resilient when facing personal and collective crises, enabling them to successfully address threats to their physical and psychological survival. Specific elements include:
   - Personal peace and balance
   - Solidarity and sense of duty to the community
   - Empathy expressed towards others and accepted when it comes from others
   - Individual survival skills from food growing and cooking through making do without electricity, internet, etc., to first aid and other core skills
   - Knowledge of alternative practices, focus on substance rather than form
   - Solution oriented, collective problem-solving, not zero-sum thinking

Can all or at least some of the above elements be taught, and if yes, how and when in a person's development path? Can they be tested and measured, acquired and/or strengthened, through school and/or other educational methods, external and self-teaching, continuous education and life-long learning? Are the teachers knowledgeable and confident enough to impart such knowledge? The DEMOCRAT Project and the consortium implementing it will do their best to establish curricula, pedagogies and supportive tools that equip students with the necessary competences for acting as responsible democratic citizens in their society/ies and polity/ies.

6.3. Teaching and learning methods

6.3.1. A holistic approach to EfD

Classrooms – physical, digital (see COVID-19 experience) or hybrid – increasingly comprise of students and teachers with a diversity of cultural backgrounds, experiences, values, beliefs, and aspirations. They offer an auspicious environment for the development of democratic citizenship competences among students. Despite a shift towards active, student-driven models of learning, state/teacher authority is an inherent characteristic of public education (Gutmann, 1993)[6]. School success (or lack thereof) is externally determined based on the measurement of students' progression towards learning objectives prescribed on the basis of a centrally determined productive citizen model.

[6] The degree of authority exercised by the state varies from one national or regional education system to another, depending on the specific configuration of the system in question. In general, public authorities are responsible for regulating a number of key aspects of the education sector, including the formal curriculum, teacher qualifications and school operations.

Similarly, the role of teachers in the classroom differs from one national or regional education system to another, and even from one school to another. The growing emphasis on student autonomy is prompting a transformation in how teachers conceptualise and execute their role in the learning process of their students.

The ways in which students experience authority and democracy in school can be as influential for their civic education as formal classroom activities (Biesta, 2011; Gutmann, 1993). Educators can empower students to be responsible citizens in their physical interactions and in cyberspace through modelling appropriate behaviour, providing safe and secure environments for students to practice their citizenship skills, and educating students about their rights and responsibilities. It is also convincing if the teachers are convincing in their performance as role models for democratic behaviour. For the digital realm in particular, it is key to help develop the capacity of students to make their voice heard through active participation, engage respectfully with others, protect and promote human rights (Curran & Ribble, 2017; Hollandsworth et al., 2011; Hughes et al., 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2023).

Education for democracy must be conceived holistically to form mature citizens actively imbued with democratic values and principles, also recognising the important role of the agency of children to co-create their learning processes. EfD must also consider:

(i) the need for a fair transition to a world that is more sustainable in environmental, social and economic terms, and more resilient to shocks;
(ii) the increasing digitalisation of everyday life, which offers new opportunities to widen the practice of democracy but also entails risks of undermining pluralist democracy;
(iii) the need to proactively combat populism and extremism, which deny scientific knowledge, e.g. on climate change;
(iv) advancing globalisation, not only of the economy but of all aspects of life, which requires nurturing a sense of global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development; and
(v) promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence in resolving political, social, economic and environmental conflicts.

There is also an increasing recognition that the education system can be used to promote narrow, individualistic forms of citizenship (Banks, 2004; Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Kymlicka, 1996), failing to provide children and young people with opportunities for democratic participation (Lanahan & Phillips, 2014; Lundy, 2007), and in certain cases perpetuating the forms of violence witnessed in the wider society (Davies, 2021; Harber, 2004). In this complex context, Lawy & Biesta (2006: 75) argue that democratic education should focus on children and young people within the social, economic, cultural and political context(s) in which they live their lives, and the ways in which they learn about and through democracy.

Classroom based democratic citizenship education could be enhanced through interactive learning methods (such as forum theatre) giving students more active role. But it should also be supported by practical experience(s) beyond the classroom. There are several possibilities for practice, i.e. project-based learning, school democracy, participating in community, association or media activities, public speaking, participation in the activities of local, regional or central government, assemblies etc.

As such, developing democratic agency can be supported by innovative educational practices that seek to mediate the tensions within specific educational settings, wider political contexts and in broader debates around contemporary democracy. These innovative educational practices and transformative education focus not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on the quality of interaction and real-life skills to act as a democratic citizen. Recent trends in education focus more on learner-centred learning models, where the learner is not seen as the object of information transmission but rather as a partner in the learning process

and as an active co-creator drawing on their experience and life context as agent in the process, like in challenge-based learning (Gallagher & Savage, 2020).

6.3.2. Civic and democratic education teaching and learning methods

There exists a substantial corpus of empirical studies about effective teaching and learning methods in the field of civic education, which in democratic societies largely overlaps for practical purposes with EfD.[7] The relevant literature has been reviewed in several articles including those by Goren, H., & Yemini, M. (2017), Hoskins, B., Janmaat, J. G., & Melis, G (2017); Campbel (2019), Brent Edwards (2020), Burth, H.-P. & Reinhardt, V. (2020), Oliveira Figueiredo & Giroux (2020), Bramwell (2020), Donbavand, S., & Hoskins, B. (2021), Aura et al. (2022), Teegelbeckers et al. (2023), Jerome (2024) and Nur Rahman (2024), to mention only the reviews published since 2015. The key points that follow have been extracted from a compilation of the aforementioned literature reviews, which will be soon published as a DEMOCRAT Working Paper.[8]

Conceptual and measurement issues

The field of formal civic education is characterised by a tension between state requirements, for instance the promotion of patriotic values, self-efficacy, and pedagogical ambitions, such as the transmission of civic values including human rights, children's rights and the rights of minorities.

It is a common misconception among academics that civic education is synonymous with democratic education. A review of the literature, however, indicates that research on effective civic education is primarily focused on democratic civic education.

The conceptualisation and measurement of civic learning outcomes exhibit considerable heterogeneity. For instance, some studies have evaluated the effectiveness of civic education in terms of political knowledge, while others have focused on attitudes and behaviours, such as the intention to vote.

The heterogeneous conceptualisation of civic education precludes the possibility of establishing a clear evidence base demonstrating that formal education, as defined by the fixed content of the official school curricula, has a positive impact on civic behaviour. Notable studies that have identified an impact on civic learning outcomes include those by Niemi & Junn (1998), Galston (2001), Torney-Purta et al. (2001), Finkel & Ernst (2005), Lindstron (2010), and Feitosa (2020: 6). Conversely, studies by Manning & Edwards (2014) and Weinschenk & Dawes (2021) have observed either no impact or a minimal one.

The majority of impact studies concentrate on the immediate effectiveness of a civic education intervention at the conclusion of the measurement period. Some studies examine the mid-term effectiveness of the intervention, for example, one year after the conclusion of the measurement period. There is a notable dearth of studies examining the long-term effectiveness of these interventions, interventions, including whether the new competences are practically used in democratic process in society.

Another issue is that more open-ended approaches to democracy education (based on the Deweyan tradition) emphasise utilising several diverging approaches, competences and methods that could all be feasible to

[7] In general, the literature treats democratic citizenship under the umbrella of civic education and related terms such as civic knowledge, civic attitudes, civic participation or civic engagement.

[8] A comprehensive analysis of the existing literature on the effectiveness of civic education interventions is beyond the scope of the DEMOCRAT Project.

support the development of students as democratic agents in a contextual and agile way. This reduces the benefits of standardised impact assessments and increases the value of contextual, participation and practice-based assessments.

In their literature review, Jerome et al (2024) note that "*evaluations often set out to measure a range of indicators, all of which relate to perfectly reasonable expectations from the intervention, but many studies report measurable change only on some of these indicators. This suggests that, whilst it is easy to construct coherent models of impact akin to a 'theory of change', the evidence does not always support such neat models*."

Teaching and learning environment and approaches

The findings of the studies indicated that the teaching and learning environment and approaches are crucial factors for the effectiveness of civic education. More specifically, the educational factors that correlated with civic competence development are as follows (based on Hahn, 2010; Geboers et al, 2013):

- deliberate instruction on civics and politics existed as part of the curriculum (it increased student knowledge).
- inclusive school & classroom culture:
  e.g. an open classroom climate, with students consulted about school policies and rules, involved in planning class work.
- opportunities for discussion, dialogue and debate:
  e.g. discussing controversial public life and political issues in an open and safe/respectful classroom environment, students encouraged to make up their own mind about an issue; methods such as 'structured academic controversy'.
- real opportunities for participation and problem-solving:
  e.g. 'issues-centred curriculum', participation in extracurricular activities and 'service learning' programmes, opportunity to learn to solve problems in the community, learning cooperation skills, decision-making, and civic action
- more broadly 'student centred pedagogies'

These factors are addressed in the following sections under the headings of open school climate and open classroom climate, interactive and participatory approaches, and service learning or community-based learning. Additionally, the use of digital learning tools and strategies to accommodate diverse social backgrounds are also discussed.

Open school and open classroom climate

Open school climate[9] appears as favourable for the achievement of civic learning outcomes, as the studies of Donnelly (2000), Covell (2010), Jagers et al (2017) and Jarkiewicz (2020) indicate. However, the effectiveness

[9] Cohen et al (2009) defined School climate as follows: „School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures". One example oft he definition of open school clmate is offered by Hoy, Smith & Sweetland (2003: 38): „The open school climate is one in which behavior of both teachers and principals is authentic; teacher and principals respect one another and are 'straight' with each other. Acts of leadership emerge easily and appropriately as needed from both groups.

of this approach is difficult to verify. This is demonstrated by the study of Thornberg (2010), which reveals a form of ritualistic or performative participation that masked a combination of naivety and cynicism. This prevented such forums from being effective sites for citizenship education for many. Therefore, the open school climate approach should be handled with caution, as some studies indicate that its implementation may be purely formal and thus have no impact on civic learning outcomes. In other words, using the concept of open school climate requires a more detailed analysis of the real practice.

Open classroom climate, on the other hand, which includes the teacher-student relationship, appears conducive to the achievement of civic learning outcomes. The literature reviews conducted by Schuitema et al. (2009) and Geboers et al. (2015), which referenced studies utilising a diverse array of data sources, revealed that an open classroom climate, e.g. open discussions between teacher and students and among the students, has a favourable impact on civic learning outcomes. Notable examples of such studies include those conducted by Finkel & Ernst (2005) in South Africa and Wanders et al. (2020) in the Netherlands. Moreover, numerous studies that analysed the ICCS survey results[10] from different waves reached the same conclusion. For further examples, see Godfrey & Grayman (2014), Lin (2015), Maurissen et al. (2018), and Carrasco & Irribarra (2018).

Nevertheless, the notion of an open classroom climate should be approached with a degree of caution too, as Campbell (2019) has observed: "*There are, nonetheless, sceptics that the results for classroom climate are anything more than a self-reinforcing perception of young people who are already predisposed toward civic engagement. By this reasoning, students with a taste for political discussion are simultaneously more likely to perceive an open climate and to be more politically active, efficacious, and knowledgeable*." This assertion is supported by Barber, Sweetwood, & King (2015) and Hart & Youniss (2018), who note that perceptions of openness among the students within the same classroom not always exhibit a high degree of coincidence.

Interactive and participatory approaches

While the analysis of ICCS data conducted by Galston (2001) and by Feitosa (2020) respectively indicate that traditional classroom instruction seems more effective, at least regarding for the intention to vote and increasing civic knowledge, interactive and participatory approaches are generally regarded as some of the most promising for developing civic competencies. The systematic literature review of Teegelbeckers et al. (2023) analysed which teaching and learning approaches of civic education are the most effective means of achieving civic learning outcomes. Similar to the previously mentioned categorisation (Hahn 2010), they identified five categories of teaching methods that have impact on civic learning outcomes:

"*1) Instruction with classroom discussion shows effects for knowledge and dealing with differences.*

2) Small-group work shows effects for political engagement and dealing with differences.

3) Application assignments show effects for knowledge, internal political efficacy and media use.

4) Civic projects show effects for internal political efficacy and political engagement.

[10] The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study represents the most significant international survey on civic education. Until now three waves have been conducted in 2009, 2016, and 2022. The next sub-section offers a summary of the results of the last wave.

5) Practicing democratic decision-making in simulations or school decision-making programs show effects for knowledge, internal and external political efficacy, dealing with differences, political engagement and trust". (Teegelbeckers et al; 2023)

These approaches are either teacher-regulated, or co-regulated with a student voice in teaching and learning management. Student-regulation is not mentioned in existing studies. Teegelbeckers et al. (2023) distinguish between two combinations: lecture-focus with teacher-regulation (e.g. instruction and assignments) and discussion-focus with co-regulation (e.g. group work, projects and democratic decision-making). Their findings indicate that the latter promotes the broadest variety of democratic competences.

Consequently, it seems more prudent to take interactive and student-centred teaching and learning approaches as reference points rather than the ambiguous notion of 'open classroom climate'.

Service learning, community learning and similar approaches

The 'civic projects' and 'real opportunities for participation and problem-solving' also deserve separate attention. These approaches can include, among others, project-based learning, service learning, community-based learning or place-based learning, challenge-based learning, and the like. Often these can be introduced as part of 'education for sustainable development', 'peace education', 'global citizenship education', 'entrepreneurship education' or something else, meaning these approaches may not necessarily have an immediate 'political' or 'citizenship' focus. What characterises these approaches is their focus on real-life problem-solving, connections with community/place where applicable, relatively high student autonomy, the need to collaborate with peers, and 'learning by doing'.

One of the benefits of such approaches is that they often give opportunities to practice civic behaviour beyond the confines of the educational centres, as demonstrated by several studies. Among them, Toncar et al. (2006) report positive impact on engagement with the local community, Yorio & Ye (2012) observe that service-learning students have a better understanding of social issues, and Lee et al. (2019) observe positive impact through the engagement in local political processes, volunteering in local organisations or organising student groups to address local issues. Halverson et al (2024) note that numerous studies on service-learning report positive impact on civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Conversely, Campbell (2019) asserts an absence of clear evidence about the positive impact of service learning on civic learning outcomes. This is because the majority of studies are based on observation, with only few exceptions measuring causal impact on civic education. Therefore, it is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion.

Project-based learning (PBL), similar to service learning, has also become a promising way to help students develop transferable '21st century' competencies, such as the ability to solve problems in novel contexts, develop leadership, social skills, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity, as well as make learning deeper and more meaningful (Thomas, 2000; Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Bell, 2010; Bentley, 2012; Bruce & Bloch, 2012; Williams, 2017). Research also suggests that when authentic real-life based pedagogies, which in addition to PBL involve service learning, place-based learning and the like, are connected to the community and societal topics, even global topics, they prove to be an effective way to develop citizenship competencies for active (global) citizens, i.e. students empowered to take action in their communities and feel that they have a voice and use it (Augustine, Harshman & Merryfield, 2015; Sobel, 2004; Staff, 2017).

Particularly in the United States, there are specific programmes focusing explicitly on civic learning outcomes. Studies have demonstrated that these programmes generate positive effects on a range of outcomes, for instance: Owen (2015) for 'We The People'; Feldman et al. (2007); Pasek et al.(2008) and Syvertsen et al. (2009)

for 'Student Voices'; and McDevitt & Kiousis (2006) for 'Kids Voting'. Conversely, the study of Goodwin et al. (2010) that analyses an interactive environmental programme implemented in the UK found no positive impact comparing the selected students' group with a control group.

Digital learning tools

In the era of digitalisation, it is crucial to consider the use of digital tools in the field of education for democracy and responsible democratic citizenship. Relevant research revolves around two areas of debate: firstly, the impact of digital tools on political and civic engagement, including the possible formation of echo chambers; and secondly, the deployment of digital technologies in education, particularly the use of serious games.

Digital media and political participation

Early meta-analyses suggest that, in general, digital media, including social media, has been conducive to civic participation, particularly outside the context of traditional power structures (Boulianne, 2015). Xenos, Vromen, & Loader (2014) found positive impact in the USA, UK, and Australia, while by contrast Theocharis & Lowe (2016) identified a negative impact associated with the use of Facebook accounts. In 2020, the meta-analysis of Boulianne & Theocharis (2020) revealed the absence of evidence of a detrimental effect of digital media usage on political and civic engagement In 2020, a meta-analysis of Oser et al. (2020) based on 38 studies demonstrates that digital media is utilized for political and civic activities by individuals who are already politically motivated, and that this relationship is sustained over time.

Boulianne (2020) conducted a meta-analysis revising more than 300 survey based studies from all over the world on the relationship between use of social media and participation. She included in online participation "*campaign or news websites, email, social networking sites, blogs, chat rooms, petition-signing websites, and so forth*" (ididem 955) and offline participation refers to voting, volunteering, boycotting, demonstrations among others. The analysis indicates that the small positive correlation between the use of digital media and political participation detected in the early studies has been become stronger in the course of time with no cross-national differences. This is confirmed by the meta-analysis of Lorenz-Spreen et al (2023) observing that most studies detected a correlation between the use of digital media and participation. Some studies even detect a causal relationship between digital media use and electoral participation and others with online political participation.

The extensive use of social media is driving changes in the forms of political participation and the creation of public opinion (Seeliger & Sevignani, 2021). The European Youth Survey (European Parliament 2021) also indicated that nearly nine in ten respondents (85%) engage in political discussions when they gather with friends or relatives. Of these, 25% do so 'frequently' and 61% do so 'occasionally'. This suggests that, in general, youth (aged 16-30) do engage in political discussions, albeit not to the same extent online (approximately 26%, according to the same survey). However, the majority of respondents indicated that they obtained their information on political and social topics from online sources, with social media and news websites being the most frequently cited platforms. The social media platforms most frequently utilised by respondents were Facebook (54%) and Instagram (48%), followed by YouTube (35%) and Twitter (29%). Nonetheless, the Estonian Human Development Report indicates that only 12% of the country's youth engage in online discussions about political or societal issues, despite the extensive usage of the Internet among this age group. This may be attributed to a dearth of robust argumentative culture and the perception that one cannot effectively influence change (Kalmus & Beilmann, 2017; European Youth Survey, 2021).

Online media have had a notable impact on the structure of public opinion and the nature of public discourse (see Seeliger & Sevignani, 2022). From the end of the Second World War until the advent of social platforms, the structure of public opinion was dominated by traditional communication media, including the press, television, radio, book and journal publishers and a wide range of civic associations. The formation of public opinion was based on the presentation of reasoned arguments in the mass media or through personal talks among individuals. The advent of digital platforms has precipitated a significant shift in communication, with online channels becoming increasingly prominent.

The preference for emotional-moral information (Brady et al 2020), coupled with the strategies employed by digital enterprises such as those that own Facebook, Twitter, Google, Instagram and TikTok to prioritise this type of messages, has favoured the emergence of echo chambers, filter bubbles or, more broadly, polarisation,[11] making the political debate in the sphere of public opinion more difficult. Kalmus & Siibak (2019) propose a solution in the form of "*consecutive web-based civic or political initiatives that result in real outcomes*".

Deployment of digital technologies in education

Kahne et al. (2016) and Lo et al. (2022) argue that EfD should encompass the utilisation of 'digital spaces' for dialogue, participation, mobilisation and other forms of engagement, given the prevalence of digital platforms and the influence of the digital sphere on young people as citizens. For example, Kahne et al (2016) write that *"youth can investigate issues through online search engines, start or join an online group to address a political issue, engage in dialogue with their peers and community via social networking platforms, produce and circulate compelling blogs and other content using a wide array of digital tools, and mobilize their networks around a common cause. /--/ …collect data from members of their communities, carefully analyse community issues, present findings to authentic audiences, and interact with community leaders. Such opportunities can help youth develop needed civic skills and, by providing opportunities for voice, foster a related sense of agency*." This, however, is beyond the scope of the learning and teaching activities that could be conducted as part of EfD.

One potential avenue for EfD in Europe is the integration of existing platforms of digital tools into the existing curricula and various learning activities. There are numerous EU-wide applications, including TrackMyEU, Democracy Game, Palumba, and others that try exactly that. Additionally, there are various national digital tools, such as the school democracy and participatory budgeting voting tool in Estonia. The use of this participatory budgeting and voting tools is often combined with project-based learning in the participating Estonian schools. The Estonian Cooperation Assembly (https://kogu.ee/en) that run the programme has conducted surveys showing positive results on students' attitudes. For example, there has been a 15% rise in number of students who actively participate in school life and more interest in decisions over the school budget. This information was reported in the NGO's newsletter 36 in 2024 (Cooperation Assembly 2024)

[11] There are several ways in which the term 'polarisation' can be defined. One possible definition is the phenomenon whereby political opinions at the extremes of the political spectrum grow in popularity, while the intermediate positions decline. This is known as cognitive political polarisation. Another definition is that, the understanding becomes increasingly difficult between different political options and that radical rejection of each other's political positions and vice versa grows, which can go as far as demonisation of each other. This phenomenon is called affective polarisation.

One area of particular interest within the wider debate on the use of digital tools in education is the potential of videogames as an education tool (Breuer 2010; and Wagner, 2011). Most studies on the impact of video games indicates their positive impact on learning. One concern is their impact on the behaviour of the players, particularly in relation to violent video games and their potential to incite aggression. Most studies detected an increased level of aggressivity among the players and the community of players, when engaged in playing (Anderson et al 2010; Burkhart y Lenhard 2021; Dowsett et al 2019; Greitemeyer 2019; Greitemeyer & Mügge 2015, and Möller et al 2009). Greitemeyer & Mügge (2014) in their meta-analysis observed that the increase of aggressivity seems to be proven although at low to median levels. Other studies suggest that the tendency to aggressivity linked to violent videogames decreases when playing cooperatively as a team (see Mihan, Anisimowicz & Nicki, 2015; Velez, Greitemeyer, Whitaker, Ewoldsen, & Bushman, 2016), which suggests that videogame playing as a team could reinforce civil behaviour even in violent games.

Greitemeyer & Mügge (2014) also examined the impact of prosocial games on the behaviour of the players. Their meta-analysis suggests that these video games have a positive impact on the players, which is higher compared to the negative impact of violent videogames. Another meta-analysis (Greitemeyer 2022) achieved similar results observing a positive impact on the prosocial skills and attitudes of players, although in some cases the impact was modest. Similar to the contagion of aggressive attitude in player communities engaged in violent videogames, prosocial behaviour seems to be contagious too. Despite the heterogeneity of the studies in terms of reference framework and impact measurement, their results are promising.

While there are numerous examples of digital tools used for EfD in schools, the scope of their use and their impact on developing competencies for democratic citizenship is unclear due to a lack of comprehensive and comparative research. The related subject 'media and information literacy', that as 'judgment of information' forms an important part of RDC competencies, is more explored (see e.g. Manca et al, 2021; Zhang et al, 2020). Finally, it should be noted, that in view of an increasing amount of hate speech online there is the necessity to develop a concept of a civilian digital society and train young people in the implementation of civilian dialogs.

Accounting for diverse social backgrounds

Interactive and participatory approaches have been identified as the most effective strategy to transmit democratic civic competences to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. With regard to civic education in general, Hoskins & Janmaat (2019) observed that research on the impact of civic education reveals unequal benefits from civic learning in the UK and Europe. Godfrey & Grayman (2014) using 1999 ICCS data of US ninth graders did not find significant differences in civic learning outcomes between students from social majority or minority groups, except in the dimension of socio-political efficacy defined as "*one's perceived ability to act to change social and political conditions*" (Ibidem).

The studies indicate that applying Interactive and participatory approaches benefit minority group students compared to the other students, but also compared to more 'traditional' approaches. Nevertheless, the extent to which civic education measures benefit students from disadvantaged social groups, who tend to exhibit lower levels of political engagement, and the specific competencies that are most influenced by such measures, depend on the specific characteristics of the measures/interventions in question. It appears that interactive pedagogical approaches, which are related to an open classroom climate, are more effective (see Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld 2009). For instance, Blevins et al. (2014) and Wanders et al. (2020) observed that active citizenship projects have bigger impact on younger students than on older students at the end of secondary school.

In essence, the most suitable methodology for evaluating the efficacy of civic education interventions refers to teaching and learning approaches, avoiding the potential ambiguity associated with the terms 'open school climate' and 'open classroom climate', which are the primary references in the ICCS surveys. The majority of studies on the effectiveness of civic education indicate that interactive and participatory approaches are the most appropriate for achieving impact on social learning outcomes and for addressing the needs of students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups in particular.

6.3.3. Survey on civic education

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) represents the most significant international survey on civic education. The most recent cycle of the survey was conducted in 2022, in 22 countries and two German benchmark regions: North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein. Three of the countries (Estonia, Poland and Spain) and one of the benchmark regions (North Rhine-Westphalia) are included in the DEMOCRAT project. Poland and Spain participated in both the 2009 and 2022 cycles, while North Rhine-Westphalia participated the 2016 and 2022 cycles.

The findings of the 2022 survey are summarised in this section. While the main finding relevant for Education for Democracy are presented, the understanding of three key terms should be explained:

The ICCS understanding of *knowledge* is not aligned with the definition of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which defines knowledge as factual knowledge. The ICCS concept of knowledge encompasses besides factual knowledge also cognitive processes that inform action and its planning. In this respect, it includes aspects of skills set forth by the EQF in its concept of knowledge. The term 'knowledge' refers to the recall of information but also to reasoning and its application. It includes "*students' capacities to apply knowledge to concrete situations, but also to concepts associated with democratic values as they may relate to a range of contexts*." (ICCS 2023: 63).

Attitude is distinguished from *disposition*, which refers to personal characteristics, beliefs and ideologies that are more enduring over time (see Hanel et al., 2021). "*Attitudes refer to judgments about, or evaluations of, ideas, persons, objects, events, situations, and/ or relationships*" (ICCS 2022: 151), which are not free of contradictions, and may change more frequently over time than dispositions.

Civic engagement is seen as a pivotal aspect of democratic societies reinforcing civic engagement. It appears commonly as a goal of civic and citizenship education. It encompasses involvement in collective affairs and action.

The ICCS provides a wide range of insights on civic education and its impact on civic knowledge, engagement and attitude, but its own report underscores that it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between civic knowledge, engagement or attitude and the different variables used by the ICCS. For this reason, the ICCS report usually does not use the term causal relation or correlation and employs the term association. Nevertheless, some trends across countries can be observed:

Organisation of civic education:

- A variety of organisational approaches to civic education can be identified. In general, schools tend to adopt a combination of approaches. The heterogeneity between and within countries makes it impossible to associate a single type of approach with a higher impact on civic knowledge, engagement, or attitude.

- The ICCS observed across the three waves 2009, 2016 and 2022, a positive association between an open classroom climate and opportunities for students' engagement within schools with civic knowledge and their prospective participation in society.

Civic knowledge

- Female students demonstrate superior levels of civic knowledge compared to their male counterparts.
- The students' socio-economic background (parental occupation, parental education, and the number of books in the home) was found to be associated with the acquisition of civic knowledge across countries. This seems consistent with findings of education studies that students with better socio-economic background obtain better education results in term of knowledge acquisition.
- Immigration status is identified as a negative factor for the acquisition of civic knowledge in 16 of 20 countries under consideration. This seems consistent with the preceding statement as it may be assumed that immigrants' families tend to have a lower socio-economic status. Furthermore, the lack of use of the country language at home does not appear, in general, to facilitate the socio-economic progress.

Relation between civic knowledge, attitude, and engagement

- Civic knowledge is positively associated with expected electoral participation, expected environmental activities and interest in political and social issues.
- Civic knowledge is negatively associated with expectation that the students will participate in the future in illegal protest activities, legal active political participation and civic engagement with digital media.
- Civic knowledge has a weak negative association with the satisfaction with the political system and is positively associated with a critical view on the political system.
- Civic knowledge is generally positively associated with a good civic attitude, particularly with gender equality and environmental protection.
- The dispositions toward civic interest, citizenship self-efficacy and trust in civic institutions were positively associated with the expectation of electoral and political engagement.
- Satisfaction with the political system is positively associated with the expectation of political activities, but not with the expectation of electoral participation.
- The belief in democracy as best governance system is positively associated with electoral engagement.

In order to fully comprehend the implications of the DEMOCRAT project and its vision of Education for Democracy, it is essential to consider the following points:

a) The impact of civic education in school is strongly influenced by the family environment of the students: socio-economic level as well as the social and political interest of the parents. This is in line with findings of general education research, that formal education systems tend not to balance the learning opportunities between social classes.[12]
b) A civic education at school – centred on civic knowledge - facilitates the readiness for electoral participation of the people, but not for political and civic participation.

[12] The term 'learning opportunities' refers here to learning in formal, informal and non-formal environments. The social, economic and cultural capital of better situated families facilitates their children Access to more and better learning opportunities.

c) Open classroom climate and opportunities of participation in civic activities in school open more opportunities of civic knowledge acquisition.

This in turn gives rise to the following conclusions:

1) It seems reasonable to conclude that education centres are actually not the primary means of learning democratic behaviour. External factors, such as the family environment exert a stronger impact.
2) Education centres should develop strategies to reinforce the civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement of students with unfavourable backgrounds.
3) Given that democracy is founded upon political and civic participation beyond voting, it is imperative that educational centres prioritise the cultivation of these fundamental tenets.
4) As civic knowledge does not associate positively with a higher political participation, the education strategy should be reoriented towards practical experience, also to enhance the perception of self-efficacy among students. This is consistent with the observation that political and civil engagement in school is positively associated with civic behaviour.
5) Offering opportunities to practice democracy necessitates the establishment of collaborative relationships with external actors, including non-governmental organisations, neighbourhood associations, trade unions, business associations, political parties, municipal authorities and parliamentary bodies.

6.3.4. Concluding Remarks

The DEMOCRAT project's aim is to deploy interactive and participatory educational techniques in support of children and young people's learning of democracy, through reflection on democratic/citizenship identity, development of democratic dispositions, nurturing relationships and undertaking citizenship as practice within their unique educational settings and within the broader societies in which they live. Through diverse learning techniques, DEMOCRAT aims to support young people's acting in diverse, normatively heterogeneous, and dynamic contexts as conscious democratic actors. We seek to address the context, relationships and dispositions in democratic education practices (Biesta, Lawy & Kelly 2009). The key is the authenticity of the educational experience and its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, while the focus is on studying and developing the transformative educational experiences, content and practices in various contexts and locations. Authentic, (inter)active learning requires educational content and contextualisation that enable the learner to approach and retain an interest in the subject, challenge or topic at hand (Park & Choi, 2014).

7. Competences for Responsible Democratic Citizenship

7.1. Competence: a definition

Competence is the umbrella term that refers to a complex set of skills, attitudes and other components such as factual knowledge. In this sense, competence represents a holistic concept. Competence refers to the ability to perform acts based on motor and/or cognitive skills of different degrees of complexity in different environments (see Figure 1 below). Competence is not just about technical skills, but about acting correctly in social situations (Pfadenhauer 2010: 153–54). In this sense, competence cannot be taught, but is acquired mostly within socially shared practice, in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments including life and work experience. (De Jong 2003, cited in Biemans et al 2004: 528). Together with external resources, it can lead to appropriate performance in given situations.

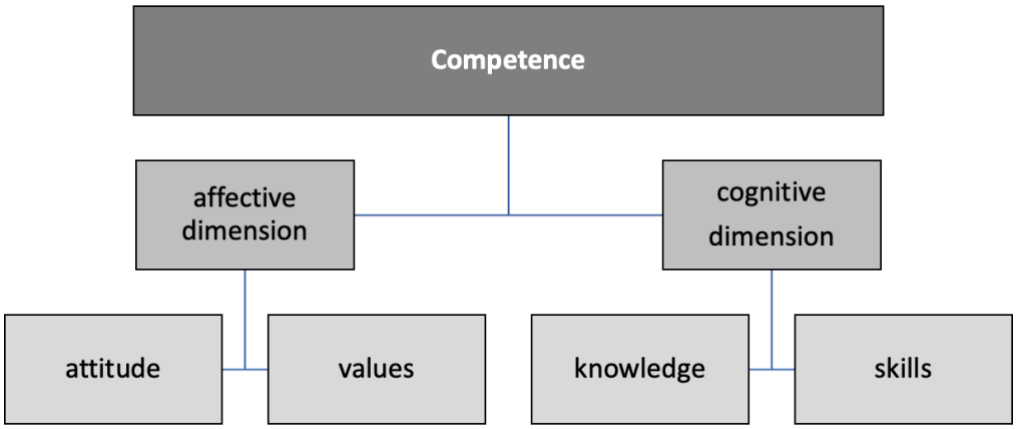

Figure 1: Competence Model

The first challenge in developing a competence framework for responsible democratic citizenship is to define its scope, as it is not exactly the same as political education, citizenship education, civic education or others. It concerns democratic agency in the sense defined above, putting into practice the vision for responsible democratic citizenship developed in the previous chapter. The second challenge is to define a framework with clear boundaries, but at the same time open for flexible use in different contexts.

In the European academic debate, the term political competence is often interpreted as a synonym for democratic competence (e.g. Talpin 2010). But politics also exists outside democratic contexts, interpreting politics as the formulation and implementation of binding collective decisions. This collective decision-making need not be governed by democratic principles, as the examples of autocratic states and also organisations in democratic societies such as business companies or military organisations, show. Therefore, linking the concept of political, civic or citizenship competence to democracy is a European and North American perspective.

For this reason, democratic competence is chosen here to underline the commitment to democratic values and procedures. We add the word responsible to draw attention to the need to consider society and the environment in any action we undertake. All policy processes must take into account not only the social and political impact but also the environmental impact. The European Union's model for dealing with climate

change must be based on democratic principles. Therefore, our project speaks of responsible democratic competences based on the willingness to apply democratic norms to coordinate socially relevant interests and action plans or to resolve social conflicts guided by the principles of human rights and justice, to deliberate on binding and sustainable decisions and to share the consequences (Veith 2010).

7.2. Citizenship competences and competences for democratic culture – a literature review

We do not plan to re-invent democratic competences. There is an extensive debate on this issue. Our objective is to consider proposals elaborated at the European and the national level, and to develop a competence framework clearly centred on the issue of democratic agency, which could be operationalised in practice. We will use proposals which have been worked out in similar domains as citizenship competences or competences for democratic culture as the basis for the elaboration of our proposal.

For the development of our competence framework, a first reference is the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework of the European Union (Council of the European Union (CE) 2018), which established 8 key competences: 1. Literacy competence, 2. Multilingual competence, 3. Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, 4. Digital competence, 5. Personal, social and learning to learn competence, 6. Citizenship competence, 7. Entrepreneurship competence, and 8. Cultural awareness and expression competence.

Elements of Citizenship competence		
Knowledge	**Skills**	**Attitude**
Knowledge of basic concepts and phenomena relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, society, economy and culture; Understanding of the European common values; Knowledge of contemporary events, as well as a critical understanding of the main developments in national, European and world history; Awareness of the aims, values and policies of social and political movements, as well as of sustainable systems; Knowledge of European integration; Awareness of diversity and cultural identities in Europe and the world; Understanding of the multi-cultural and socioeconomic dimensions of European societies. Understanding how national cultural identity contributes to the European identity.	Ability to engage effectively with others in common or public interest, including the sustainable development of society; Critical thinking; Integrated problem-solving skills; Skills to develop arguments and participate constructively in community activities; Participation in decision-making at all levels, from local and national to the European and international. Ability to access, have a critical understanding of, and interact with both traditional and new forms of media; and Ability to understand the role and functions of media in democratic societies;	Willingness to participate in democratic decision-making and civic activities at all levels; Support for social and cultural diversity, gender equality and social cohesion, sustainable lifestyles, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence. Readiness to respect the privacy of others; Readiness to take responsibility for the environment; Interest in political and socio-economic developments, humanities and intercultural communication.

Table 2. Elements of the citizenship competence. Source: Source of the Table CE 2018: 10-11

For our proposal, the citizenship competence is of special interest as it includes reference to democratic participation. It is defined as: "*the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social*

life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability" (ibidem 2018: 10). It includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes presented in Table 2.

A second reference is the Reference framework of Competences for Democratic Culture of the Council of Europe (CoE 2016), which defined the general democratic competences through knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as follows:

- "*An attitude is the overall mental orientation which an individual adopts towards someone or something (e.g. a person, a group, an institution, an issue, an event, a symbol). Attitudes usually consist of four components: a belief or opinion about the object of the attitude, an emotion or feeling towards the object, an evaluation (either positive or negative) of the object, and a tendency to behave in a particular way towards that object*" (ibidem 68).
- "*Knowledge is the body of structured and interconnected information which an individual possesses and is closely connected to the notion of understanding. In education, knowledge is seen as an essential element of curriculum, often referred to as curriculum content, and encompasses the essential elements which humanity accumulated in time and which school is supposed to pass on to new generations in order to advance in the understanding of the world and in the progress of human society*" (ibidem 75).
- "*Skill is the capacity for carrying out a complex, well-organised pattern of either thinking or behaviour in an adaptive manner in order to achieve a particular end or goal*" (ibidem 77).
- "*A value is a belief about a desirable goal that motivates action and serves as a guiding principle in life across many situations. Values have a normative prescriptive quality about what should be done or thought*" (ibidem 78).
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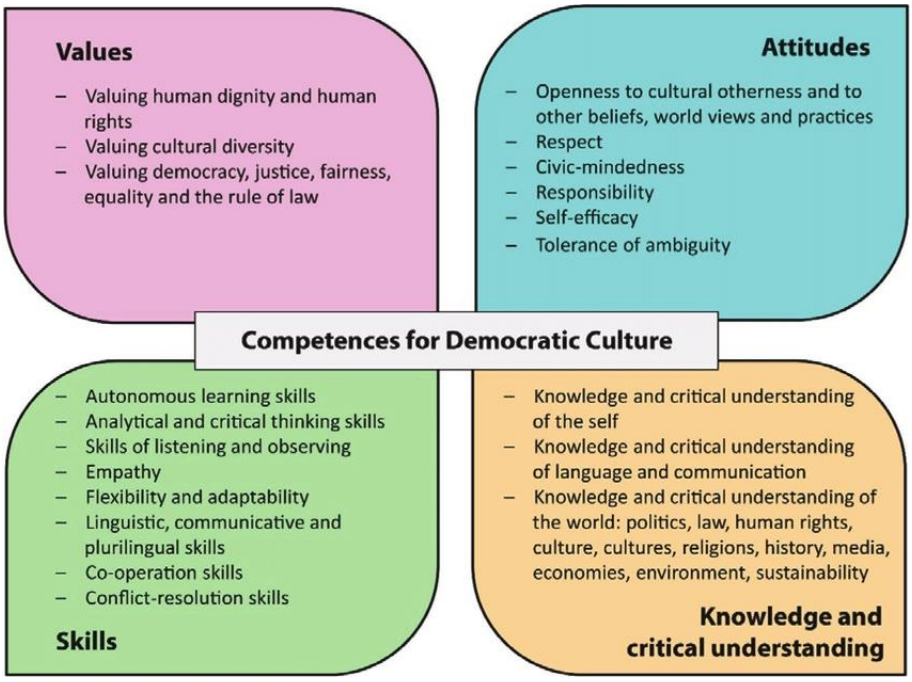

Figure 2: Model of Competences for Democratic Culture; CoE (2016: 40

This understanding led to a four-field competence framework (see Figure 2) This proposal does not opt for sub-competencies of the general competence, defining one comprehensive Key Citizenship Competence with all the indicated elements of knowledge, critical understanding, skills, attitudes and values.

Another reference is the work of Johnson & Morris (2010), who elaborate a proposal for citizenship competences starting from the literature analysis of the differences between approaches of critical thinking and critical pedagogy, the last one related to the work of Paulo Freire. They advocate for a critical citizenship approach through "*a conceptual framework which relates these to characteristic curricular language regarding the desired knowledge, skills, values and dispositions of students*" (Johnson & Morris 2010: 78), as shown in Table 3.

The framework for critical citizenship education of Johnson & Morris				
	POLITICS/ ideology	**SOCIAL/ collective**	**SELF/ subjectivity**	**PRAXIS/ engagement**
Knowledge	Knowledge and understanding of histories, societies, systems, oppressions and injustices, power structures and macro-structural relationships	Knowledge of interconnections between culture, power and transformation; non-mainstream writings and ideas in addition to dominant discourses	Knowledge of own position, cultures and context; sense of identity	Knowledge of how to effect systematic change collectively; how knowledge itself is power; how behaviour influences society and injustice
Skills	Skills of critical and structural social analysis; capacity to politicise notions of culture, knowledge and power; capacity to investigate deeper causalities	Skills in dialogue, cooperation and interaction; skills in critical interpretation of others' viewpoints; capacity to think holistically	Capacity to reflect critically on one's 'status' within communities and society; independent critical thinking; speaking with one's own voice	Skills of critical thinking and active participation; skills in acting collectively to challenge the status quo; ability to imagine a better world
Values	Commitment to values against injustice and oppression	Inclusive dialogical relationship with others' identities and values	Concern for social justice and consideration of self-worth	Informed, responsible and ethical action and reflection
Disposition	Actively questioning; critical interest in society and public affairs; seeking out and acting against injustice and oppression	Socially aware; cooperative; responsible towards self and others; willing to learn with others	Critical perspective; autonomous; responsible in thought, emotion and action; forward-thinking; in touch with reality	Commitment and motivation to change society; civic courage; responsibility for decisions and actions

Table 3. Framework for critical citizenship education of Johnson & Morris. Source: Johnson & Morris (2010: 90)

7.3. Focusing on competences for democratic agency

The proposal which Ten Dam & Volman (2007) and later Ten Dam et al (2011) elaborated based on an analysis of literature and empirical research on social competences is more focused on democratic competences needed to participate in democratic society.

Democratic competences as defined by Ten Dam et al. (2004)				
	Knowledge A person, with this knowledge	**Attitudes** A young person with this attitude	**Skills** A person with this skill	**Reflection** A person with reflection capacity
Acting democratically Accepting and contributing to a democratic society	… knows what democratic principles are and what acting in accordance with them means.	... aims to hear everyone's voice, engages in dialogue and makes an active, critical contribution.	… can articulate their own point of view and listen to the views of others.	reflects on (un)democratic issues and issues of power (un)balance and (un)equal rights.
Acting responsibly Taking co-responsibility for the communities to which one belongs	… knows social rules (legal or unwritten rules for social interactions).	… wants to be socially just (does not exclude anyone), is willing to care and help, does not want to harm others and the environment through their own behaviour.	… can act in a socially just manner.	... reflects on conflict of interest, social cohesion, social processes (inclusion and exclusion) and their own contribution to social justice.
Dealing with conflicts Concerning (minor) conflict situations or conflicts of interest in which the young person himself is a 'party'	…knows ways to resolve conflicts such as seeking win-win solutions, seeking help from others, admitting wrong, avoiding escalation	... wants to explore conflicts, is willing to take the other person's point of view seriously and to search together for an acceptable solution.	... can listen to other persons, put themselves in the other person's place and seek win-win solutions.	... reflects on how the conflict could have arisen, on their own and others' roles in it and on ways to prevent or resolve conflict.
Dealing with differences By 'differences' we think here particularly social, cultural, religious and external differences.	…knows differences of a cultural nature, has knowledge of rules of behaviour in different social situations, knows when prejudice and discrimination exist.	... wants to learn about other people's views and lifestyle, is positive about differences.	... can move in unfamiliar social situations, adapt to others' wishes or habits.	... reflects on the nature and consequences of differences between people, cultural backgrounds of behaviour and processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Table 4. Democratic competences as defined by Ten Dam et al. (2004). Source: Ten Dam et al (2011: 6).

They acknowledge the academic strand of social competences for adulthood, which is framed in developmental psychology, emphasising the development of social competences in general depending on the phase of development of the pupils. But they advocate for the strand of citizenship education, which puts emphasis on social participation in democratic and multicultural societies referring to the works of Boyd & Arnold, (2000); Naval, Print, &Veldhuis (2002); Print & Coleman (2003); Rychen & Salganik (2003); Gordon

(2003). Ten Dam et al. (2011) ask what behaviour is needed to make a contribution (a) to one's own social chances and (b) to social responsibility towards a well-functioning democracy. The first one is focused on the opportunities for social success. It "*refers mainly to learning cultural codes and acquiring elementary social and cultural capital. In present-day society, coping and communication skills are also increasingly necessary to function socially*" (Ten Dam et al. 2007: 288). The second aspect notes that people, besides the social success, should aim to take social responsibilities in society. This allows them to define four democratic competences and the respective knowledge, skills, attitudes and reflection capacity (see Table 4).

Another approach to define democratic agency is to take as point of departure the basic assumption of a democratic society as outlined in European documents as, for example, The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Council of Europe 2010 – EDC/HRE). It defines education for democratic citizenship as: "*education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law*." (EDC/HRE section 1 Point 2)

Human rights education is defined as: "*education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms*." (EDC/HRE section1 Point 2)

Besides democratic institutions and laws, democracy does not function without citizens' active commitment to its values. The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture of the Council of Europe (2018: 23) includes the following elements:

- "*commitment to public deliberation;*
- *willingness to express one's own opinions and to listen to the opinions of others;*
- *conviction that differences of opinion and conflicts must be resolved peacefully;*
- *commitment to decisions being made by majorities;*
- *commitment to the protection of minorities and their rights;*
- *recognition that majority rule cannot abolish minority rights;*
- *commitment to the rule of law*."

From the above core elements, we can deduce three core competences of democratic agency, which are similar to the proposal of Ted Dam et al.: solidary participation, deliberation and democratic resilience.

Hughes et al. (2023) point out that the digital environment must be considered when developing a framework of democratic competences, as social media is massively used to engage in discussions about collective issues in personal, local, regional, national and global communities. As Black Lives Matter, Fridays for Future and other social movements show, social media are increasingly influencing public debates. This will be incorporated into the further concretisation of the competences framework. Moreover, it seems necessary to add the competence of judging information, which has become more relevant for democratic processes in the age of digitalisation. The rapid spread of fake news and its unchecked use shows that citizens need this competence to judge the trustworthiness of sources and the veracity of information. On the positive side, through the creative use of digital tools and social media, social groups can be reached that usually do not

participate in the deliberative processes. The digital tools and social media also have the potential to encounter different ways of thinking and establish intercultural dialogues.

7.4. DEMOCRAT Framework of Competences for Responsible Democratic Citizenship

Through the above literature review and competence identification process we have identified the following four competences of responsible democratic citizenship:

- Solidary participation which refers not only to one's own participation in democratic processes but also to promoting the inclusion of the other, especially of minorities and social groups significantly affected by the problems discussed and in need of a solution. It also includes collaboration with (different) others, with whom one has social, cultural, religious and other differences to get things done. Solidarity is understood here as the social practice of overcoming existing social inequalities in the processes of participation and deliberation, especially in times of crises (see Lessenich 2022).
- Deliberation ideally means that "*people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face and, on the basis of those discussions, decide on the policies that will then affect their lives*." (Bächtiger et al. 2018: 2). Mathews defines deliberation as "*to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others*" (Mathews 1999: 110). Similarly, Bächtiger et al. (2018: 2) define it minimally as "*mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern*." Without discussing in depth these and other definitions and their relation to formal democratic decision-making processes, a fundamental point is to confront different arguments and interests in a public debate and dealing with conflict situations and conflicting interests.
- Judgement of what is trustworthy information or not is requisite for the deliberation process. It should not be confused with rationality in the strict sense or with scientific judgement. Judging trustworthiness is even more important in the digital realm, where the internet and applications of artificial Intelligence allow to create disinformation and distribute it at a massive scale.
- Democratic resilience as part of individual and collective resilience when facing the polycrisis. Adapting a definition by Merkel & Lührmann (2021) to our concept of democratic agency, democratic resilience is defined here as the ability of an actor (or an agent) to prevent or react to social challenges, of internal (socio-political) or external (e.g. economic or environmental) nature, without losing their democratic disposition (in the sense of attitudes or patterns of behaviour)[13]. Democratic resilience is based on a critical commitment to democratic norms and rules. It means acting democratically by critically following existing norms and rules also in adverse situations (see Lührmann 2021)., and contributing to the consolidation and development of democracy by supporting the improvement of these norms and rules. It also means acting responsibly for the community to which one belongs at local, regional, state and global levels. Democratic resilience includes supporting democratic procedures in the face of authoritarian tendencies.

[13] From the perspective of the political system; Merkel and Lühmann (2021: 872) defined democratic resilience as "the ability of a political regime to prevent or react to challenges without losing its democratic character."

For these core competences, knowledge, skills and attitude shall be defined, so that they provide a framework for assessing the success of curricula and pedagogies to be developed by DEMOCRAT.

Key competences of responsible democratic citizenship			
	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
Solidary participation	Being competent to actively participate in democratic processes and promote the inclusion of others, especially minorities and social groups affected by problems and solutions in collective decision-making processes with the intention of overcoming existing social inequalities in the processes of participation and deliberation.		
	Being aware of the analogue and digital channels and mechanisms to make their own voice heard and to bring in the voices of others.	Ability to use channels and mechanisms to make their own voice heard and to bring in the voices of others, particularly groups, which usually do not participate in collective decision-making.	Willing to participate in collective decision-making and to involve as many people as possible, particularly underprivileged groups, which usually do not participate.
Deliberation	Being competent to promote debates on the consequences of collective decisions that could be taken to solve a shared problem, respecting different preferences, values and interests.		
	Being aware of the democratic deliberative principles and what it means to act in accordance with them.	Ability to articulate one's own point of view and to listen to and respect the opinions of others.	Willing to listen to everyone's voice, to dialogue and to make active and constructive contributions.
judgement	Being competent to judge what is reliable information and what is not, knowing how to assess the reliability of data received and interpret it.		
	Being aware of tools for searching, finding information and assessing its reliability and veracity.	Ability to analyse the reliability of information and its veracity.	Always ready to double-check the veracity and reliability of information.
Democratic resilience	Being competent to prevent or react to social challenges without losing their democratic disposition based on a critical engagement with democratic rules, norms and values. It implies acting democratically also in adverse situations, contributing to the consolidation and development of democracy, and acting responsibly towards one's community at local, regional, state and global levels.		
	Being aware of democratic rules, norms and values (e.g. respect for minority rights) to resolve social challenges at the different levels of society and in different fields. Being aware	Ability to apply and defend democratic procedures to solve social challenges even in adverse situations defending democratic rules, norms and values (e.g. minority rights) and contributing to their improvement	Willing to apply and to defend the use of democratic procedures to solve social problems even in adverse situations.

Table 5. Key elements and dimension of responsible democratic agency. Source: own elaboration

In summary, a competence framework of responsible democratic citizenship has been outlined from the understanding of democracy as a socio-political order and a way of life. For their application in education, it is necessary to define learning outcomes linked to the competences. The learning outcomes will then serve to insert the competences into existing (global) citizenship curricula or to develop a curriculum of their own.

8. Snapshot of EfD across Europe

In order to assess the current state of EfD and establish a baseline for evaluating the achievements of the DEMOCRAT project, a questionnaire was prepared with different thematic fields and questions pertinent to the project's goals, to which the project partners from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain were asked to respond[14]. This section summarises their responses, identifying gaps and deficits in education for democracy that DEMOCRAT aims to alleviate, and getting to know the particularities of the civic education 'culture' of each country. This is not an exhaustive and scientific overview, and the assessments outlined here are the product of the subjective opinions of the questionnaire respondents. Thus, this chapter is only intended to give an indication of the starting point of EfD in each country, which will be further examined for improvement in the main part of the DEMOCRAT project.

In comparing EfD systems, areas of overlap or divergence fall under the following general categories:

Curriculum and curricular structure

Each country has its own curriculum and educational guidelines, with subjects and approaches to EfD that may differ. In terms of context, we note how the historical and political background of each country shapes its educational systems, with some of the countries coinciding in terms of their transition from communist rule to democracy, which has influenced their approach to EfD and the promotion of a nationalist identity, as a reaction to Soviet 'internationalism'. The focus and priorities of education programmes are also an element of contrast between the national/regional cases being analysed. The implementation and scope of EfD programmes may differ according to prevailing attitudes in public opinion towards issues such as diversity, xenophobia, environmental crises, etc. Finally, an approach to the legal framework could provide information on circumstances that have a modifying effect on curricula, such as curricular reforms, the approval of laws or the stipulation of different types of educational centres.

The variable centrality of civic and democratic values education within the various curricula is informed by the psychosocial, economic, political and identity-related reality of each country/region. This can be read all the way round, i.e. national aspirations and taboos making for specific curricular requirements and for the place of EfD within the whole educational curriculum. There is also a lack of agreement among the different educational systems on whether democracy should be considered as knowledge or practice and consequently, whether the inclusion of EfD content in the curriculum refers to the teaching of concepts or to the active fostering of practices, such as improving the experience of school life.

The questionnaire is broadly structured around questions concerning the state of EfD and the relevant dimensions of democracy for each national context. Further information has been harvested around curricular implementation for EfD or lack thereof. Another aspect of interest includes getting a clear picture of the key decision-makers and actors who need to be involved for any EfD/RDC curriculum review or change to take place. Other variables considered include:

- The relationship between formal education, socio-economic background and democratic, civic and political participation.

[14] These are the countries in which DEMOCRAT is organising living labs and will test new curricula, pedagogies and tools for EfD, in pursuit of its vision of EfD and the proposed competence framework.

- Attitudes towards specific key societal themes that encompass any type of inequality related to class, gender, ethnicity, cultural or religious background, immigrant background, ableism, age, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Proneness to credit scientific knowledge and democratic debate over esotericism, fake news, especially in the face of an increasing digitalization of informational sources and systems.
- Cultural and historical factors affecting the relevance and disposition of EfD.
- School types and how EfD is integrated into the formal educational system.
- What is the guiding frame for the content of education.
- The externalisation of democratic education from the formal education system (the EfD role of political parties, NGOs, educational associations).
- The role of religion and other codes of conduct in the shaping of notions of citizenship.
- Types of policy strategies and legal provisions regulating the field of education.
- The interconnection of EfD with social discourses on topics such as the climate emergency, human rights or the Sustainable Development Goals.

Education for Democracy across the countries/regions covered by DEMOCRAT

Starting from a general understanding of EfD, we note that there seems to be a subject that encompasses some kind of citizenship education in all countries. The way in which this subject coincides with the framework of democratic values of the EU, as well as its placement within the structure and type of school varies from one country/region to another. For example, in Spain EfD is strained by the polarisation of positions. On the one hand, there is a conservative current that advocates a more functional approach focusing on the mechanics of democracy and rejects a broader interpretation that promotes democratic and civic behaviours in everyday life. On the other hand, there is a more progressive approach that advocates a broader interpretation of civic education, related to diverse topics such as the Spanish Constitution, education for sustainable development and global citizenship, the social function of taxes and tax justice, equality of women and men and the value of respect for diversity, the promotion of a critical spirit, a culture of peace and non-violence, and respect for the environment and animals.

This tension between more conservative and more liberal undercurrents is also present in the case of Poland, with primary and secondary schools, where civic education aims to develop pupils' civic, patriotic and social attitudes and practices with the intention of reinforcing a sense of national, ethnic and regional identity, as well as increasing engagement with national history and traditions. Civic education motivates and encourages action for the good of the school, the local community and the environment. While this is the vision of civic education as rendered in the curriculum, there are substantial gaps when it comes to its practical implementation. This takes place at two levels: 1) with a promotion of values such as acceptance and respect for another human being, as well as respect for the natural environment; 2) with the development of civic competences and skills such as communication and cooperation in groups. In Poland, however, there is the caveat that the current curriculum was approved by the previous government, thus encompassing less influence by the Catholic Church and conservative political forces on the understanding of education for democracy.

In Estonia there is a civics course in the general schools encompassing much of the discourse on EfD/RDC. The course on society study is conducted in the 6th, 9th and 12th grade, with an additional early course on human, family and community issues in the 3rd grade (all this may vary by 1-2 grades in different schools). In addition, the social, civic and communication competences are expected to be addressed by all other subjects too. The

challenges are threefold: first, the overload of the subject as it covers numerous topics from all the social sciences, including family, community, politics, governance, law, media, geography, economics, international relations, European studies. Second, the study outputs have been defined on an abstract level (e.g. knowledge of the operation of the parliament, social stratification, global economy), providing little basis for the development of personal citizen agency. Third, the linkages to practice and use of interactive learning methods needs to be improved (e.g. Kunitsõn et al. 2022). Also, the education for citizenship has received relatively little attention outside schools.

In Finland democratic education is broadly integrated into the curriculum, defining seven transversal competences that should be applied to all subject areas and school subjects. These broad-based transversal competences have been linked to the learning objectives of each subject, making it easier for teachers to understand which skills are associated with each competency area in each subject. One of the seven competences is called 'Participation, Influence, and Building a Sustainable Future'. It is designed to prepare students for active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society. This aspect of the curriculum focuses on practical involvement and experiential learning. Students actively participate in shaping their own learning and group activities, gaining insights into democratic principles such as fairness, equality, and reciprocity. They become members of the student council, participate in decision-making processes, and learn to express their views constructively even on early years of primary education. One challenge for EfD in practice is that teachers have a high degree of freedom in organizing their teaching, and there is minimal oversight. Thus, the emphasis on various aspects of education can vary from one school and teacher to another. The increasing differentiation in democratic participation in Finland is alarming. There is also a growing tension between more conservative and liberal perspectives or along the left-right political spectrum. This tension poses challenges not only to politics but also to the belief and trust in democratic processes and institutions. The average level of political trust among Finns is one of the highest in Europe. However, their self-assessment of their ability to influence politics, i.e., internal efficacy (civic competence), is among the lowest in Europe (OECD 2021). This internal efficacy is significantly linked to education, particularly among the adult population, and it has a strong connection to political participation. The school appears to be a significant factor in the development of students' internal political efficacy (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Tiihonen 2022). Despite the prominence of democratic education in the curriculum, there's much work to be done in the field of education for democracy.

What these cases, except in Finland, show is that either the skills and competences aspect is missing altogether (with national curricula revolving around knowledge more or less shaped by the interests of more or less conservative discourses) or that the link to EU dimensions and/or diversity values is poorly reflected. The national curricula also do not indicate or recommend anything about democratic practices in school, so child participation in decision-making is missing. In other words, it suffers from a lack of understanding of democracy as a practical political phenomenon, as well as of the capacity, skills and personal interest to act as a responsible democratic citizen in a meaningful and relevant way. In view of these gaps, EfD implementation should emphasise student participation and engagement in decision-making processes within schools, fostering democratic practices and values. It should also unify and update content in terms of human rights, equality and social justice.

Variations in the structure of the education system

In terms of the structure of the education system, there are meaningful national specificities to consider, when it comes to the placement of RDC contents and goals. So, for instance, Germany and Ireland share a rather varied landscape in terms of school types. This translates into either a lack of a unifying institutional link to the content of the curricula or into a marked divergence in terms of the content that each school includes in its

educational programme. Irish schools are extremely diverse – they may be denominational (e.g. Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim, Jewish) or multi-denominational. They may be single sex or co-educational. They may be large schools (+1000 students) or very small schools (one class of children). They may be urban or rural schools. They may operate in areas of social and economic disadvantage (under the DEIS programme). They may work specifically with learners who have additional learning needs. This hints at the diversity of groups involved and/or concerned with the provision of education. Germany, on the other hand, is faced with an educational system already compromised by the variety of emphases and expectations from students in terms of learning achievement in general, with Gymnasiums, Realschule, Hauptschulen, etc. Added to this are the constitutive variabilities typical of a federal state, as is the case of Germany.

Attitudes towards key social issues

Attitudes toward issues of social controversy are determined by cultural, historical and political factors specific to each country's development. It is important to note that approaches to and emphasis on these issues may vary from country to country, depending on their specific cultural, political and social contexts. Moreover, attitudes towards these key social issues may evolve over time, as societies become more inclusive and tolerant. So, for example, in Poland there is an ideological link between ministerial prerogatives and curriculum development. The Ministry of Education and Science uses civic education to approve basic standards and to train citizens in accordance with the ideology of the current conservative government. Civic education is no exception in this case. The impact of the government is reflected in the curriculum that emphasises national patriotism (idealising national identity) rather than civic values or contemplating the pluricultural reality of the EU. As stated earlier, however, the current curriculum was developed and approved by the previous, less conservative government.

Spain is one of the least 'multicultural' or diverse countries in Europe and shares a compendium of ideas entrenched around traditional values inherited from the Franco dictatorship. This conservative current endorses a more functional approach that teaches how democracy works, rejecting a broader interpretation that promotes democratic and civic behaviour in everyday life. It is important to note here the diversity of education approaches from one autonomous region to another and that Catalonia is a frontrunner in using transformative approaches in civic education, in contrast to more conservative approaches in other Spanish autonomous regions. It is also important to emphasise that the last education reform introduced citizenship education as a transversal topic.

The increase in ethnic diversity in Ireland in the early 2000s, coupled with the development of European identity, led to a move away from nationally oriented forms of citizenship education and towards approaches focused on democratic citizenship concerned with fostering tolerance of diversity and connection to the EU. In light of globalisation considerations, Global Citizenship Education has become a growing focus of work in this area in light of globalisation considerations. At the same time, Ireland shares with Poland and Spain parallel structures of schools run by religious authorities, with a significant degree of agency in determining one's own approach to citizenship education, which would therefore differ from that of the public/secular school system.

Legal frameworks

Finally, if we look at the issues surrounding the legal framework in each country. In Finland, democratic values are the bedrock of the national core curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014). Basic education is built on respecting life and human rights and promotes well-being, democracy, and active agency in civil society. The newest national core curriculum that is implemented to basic education in 2016 has seven

transversal competences that should be applied to all subject areas and school subjects. Their common goal is to support personal growth and promote the skills required for membership in a democratic society and for a sustainable way of life.

Also, the Estonian national (framework) curriculum emphasises i.a. democracy, civic and social competences, entrepreneurialism etc. that should be supported by all the subjects in school beyond just the society study. As how to implement the curriculum much relies on the competence and judgement of the teachers who enjoy a high autonomy in developing their subjects.

For the German context, we have a strong commitment to implementing issues of civic education and education for democracy in the framework plans of the individual federal states. While the implementation differs in detail, the joint reference is the latest Resolution of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs from 2018 stating that a democratic school and teaching development manifests itself in the school and teaching culture of a school as well as in appreciative and diversity-conscious communication within the school, in the curricular anchoring of democracy in the subjects as well as in interdisciplinary, cross-curricular and extracurricular contexts, in the school organization, e.g. in the degree of development of participatory committees as well as in the introduction and maintenance of parliamentary forms in the form of class councils and comparable committees, in the active democracy-promoting attitude of teachers and specialists, in the leadership style of the school management, in the communication channels between the various groups in the school, and in the transparency of information and opinion-forming (KMK 2018). Although primarily located in the social science subjects, democracy education should take place in all subjects-

Between Ireland and Spain, we observe similar situations. Ireland's civic education curriculum for post-primary students was made compulsory in 1996 but was limited by the lack of professional support for teachers and participatory or action-oriented approaches. The so-called ‘Citizenship Education’ appeared in the curriculum characterised by the inclusion of a Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) programme focused on human rights, in place since the years 1993 and 2003, respectively. CSPE was taught through participatory methodologies and focused on local and global forms of action with projects designed to give students the opportunity to participate in actions while developing citizenship competencies. However, the Irish Primary Curriculum is undergoing a period of reform. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has recently published the Primary Curriculum Framework (Department of Education, 2023), and identifies ‘Being an active citizen’ as one of a number of key competencies within the framework, and one that fosters "*knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions in children that motivate and empower them as citizens to take positive action to live fairly, sustainably and with respect for the rights of others*." Attributes of this competency include understanding and acting on one's own and others' rights, democratic learning, recognizing inequality and injustice and taking action to address them, and developing the capacity to make sustainable decisions. This reform could present an opportunity to capitalise on DEMOCRAT's achievements in implementing content and enabling appropriate teacher training.

Spain is also immersed in a major reform of the legal framework for education. The current progressive government has approved in 2020 a new law (LOMLOE), which introduces as a point of reference the UN’s 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The new law conceives democratic civic education as transversal axis that advocates an education for coexistence, respect, prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts; the development of equal rights, duties and opportunities, especially in terms of gender, but also the promotion of a critical spirit and active citizenship; and education for ecological transition, with criteria of social justice, as a contribution to environmental, social and economic sustainability. It also confirms as an

objective, among others, education in respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, in the exercise of tolerance and freedom within the democratic principles of coexistence, as well as in the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts, for peace, respect for human rights, life in common, social cohesion, cooperation and solidarity among peoples, and preparation for the exercise of citizenship. This law is in the implementation phase and DEMOCRAT may therefore represent an optimal opportunity to assess to what extent the adapted curricula are really in line with the spirit of the new law with regard to teaching democratic behaviour.

9. Concluding Remarks

In stressing the need for education for democracy, this conceptual paper had to first consider the definitions of what exactly we are talking about when we speak of democracy. This analysis has taken place in a transversal fashion, putting an emphasis on the performative aspects of democracy: the required competences, its conceptual dimensions and the various levels of participation. The authors considered it essential to highlight the relationship between the development of democratic competencies and citizen empowerment and agency. Thus, the need for DEMOCRAT to consider ways of helping the disadvantaged to make better use of their rights, and improve their knowledge and skills, to access resources and to participate more actively in the process of shaping society. Within this framework of proposals, the analysis of a third element seemed unavoidable: what it means to be a citizen. Ultimately, the areas of intervention foreseen by DEMOCRAT are: a review of existing curricula and subject didactics, as well as teacher training programs; the designing of a toolkit to support the development of transformative RDC practices and competencies for the EU and beyond; a proactive networking among the various actors surrounding educational institutions and processes, in line with the above; the provision of platforms for information and exerting influence on policy and decision-makers.

After this we hope to have given enough arguments to prove that democracy must be learned. This learning must be constantly cemented not only through the transmission of theoretical concepts to students but through democratic actions. As part of a prospective analysis of the next steps and interactions within the project, it is stated that this learning must be continuous and self-reflective. Therefore, it is recommended that the proposed DEMOCRAT project livings labs establish themselves as self-reflective and corrective feedback loops between theory and practice.

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