
Political Education in Croatian Secondary Schools: an emergency reaction to a chaotic context

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ABSTRACT The article draws on an analysis exploring how the content and aims of secondary school political education have been framed in official Croatian policy documents following the country's war for independence, with particular focus on the underlying conception of citizenship promoted in such a post-conflict setting. The article also addresses how official textbooks for the secondary school subject of 'politics and economics' shape this conception of citizenship through their choice of topics. It is argued in the article that the case of Croatian political education illustrates how a social and historical tipping point can influence what counts as official political knowledge to be transmitted in schools, and thus exemplifies the transitional nature of such knowledge in emergency settings. This locates the issue of knowledge transmitted in Croatian secondary school political education in a broader theoretical discussion on how knowledge can be radically affected by 'paradigm shifts' in social and political circumstances, and raises the question of ways in which its arbitrariness can be minimised. To this end, special attention is given to the role of skills and values in political education.

Introduction: a political and educational transition

Croatia's independence from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s marked the beginning of the country's movement away from a past of Eastern European socialist/communist totalitarianism towards a vision of western-European-style democracy (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2003, p. 33); a period characterised by the political, economic and social transition from a socialist regime, planned economy and state ownership to a principally democratic system of governance, market economy and private ownership. Educational policy interventions during this period primarily responded to these broader societal changes by reforming the content of certain school subjects. These interventions particularly pertained to those subjects belonging to the social sciences and humanities, with the introduced changes being of an ideological kind. To illustrate this at the secondary school level, subjects which explicitly transferred a socialist ideology and Marxist world view, such as the 'theory and practice of socialist self-management', were replaced by new subjects expounding a democratic rhetoric, such as 'politics and economics'. In the case of Croatian secondary school political education, the Croatian Ministry of Education and Sports implemented the official programme for the subject of 'politics and economics' in 1992, a year after the Republic of Croatia was established as an independent parliamentary democracy.

This top-down policy decision meant an almost overnight shift in what counts as legitimate political knowledge for educational purposes. The decision was accompanied by new textbooks officially confirmed by the Ministry of Education but often taught by teachers who had previously taught the subject of 'theory and practice of socialist self-management'. In effect, teachers taught one year group of students about socialism and Marxism as valid political discourses in a Yugoslav national context, whereas the following year group was to be taught the official discrediting of these discourses and the promotion of democratic principles in a Croatian context. At this time of sudden changes, it is interesting to note the policy decision to maintain political education in

schools, albeit in a different form, rather than abolish it altogether or even temporarily pause its implementation. Namely, this 'instant response' approach to educational policy formulation and implementation meant no discussion about how the selection of 'political knowledge' to be transmitted in schools should be conducted, save for the ideological marking of the (propositional) content. This policy decision seems especially relevant in contemporary Croatia since no major changes have been made to secondary school political education since the 1990s, whereas the social conditions it is expected to reflect have changed; a particularly relevant change relating to Croatia becoming an accession country to the European Union.

This article explores how the content and aims of secondary school political education, as they have been framed in official Croatian policy documents and textbooks, fare against theoretical considerations underpinning the construction of content for political education. By doing so, the article provides an illustration of how the cost of policy expediency in emergency situations includes the overlooking of important theoretical and epistemological questions, thus rendering the policy product insufficiently comprehensive.

The 'Good' Citizen in Croatian Secondary School Political Education

In 1992, Croatian secondary school political education changed officially from the 'theory and practice of socialist self-management' to 'politics and economics', as part of ideological changes made to the curriculum in response to changing social, political and economic circumstances. Since then, the Croatian Ministry of Education's programme for the subject of 'politics and economics' has been reformulated on one occasion, in June 1997. However, the changes were minor, relating only to a greater emphasis on issues such as democracy, citizenship and the Croatian constitution. The subject of 'politics and economics' is taught only in the final year of secondary schooling in Croatia and to varying degrees, depending on the type of secondary school.[1]

The 1997 programme is still the existing political education programme for Croatian secondary schools, which provides guidelines to teachers on what is to be taught in the subject of 'politics and economics' and is divided into two main sections. The first section outlines the aims and tasks for the politics part of the subject, and the second does the same for economics. The analysis reported in this article focuses on the politics section as the crux of political education offered in secondary schooling. The main question guiding the analysis is: how is political education in Croatian secondary education framed in official policy documents and textbooks? The issue that is hinted at but unanswered is the appropriateness of the answer to this question in the contexts of Croatian schooling in the 1980s (pre-transition), 1990s (armed conflict and transition) and today (European Union accession aspirations).

The politics section of the Croatian programme starts by outlining the aims of the subject; it then outlines its tasks and, finally, it provides a table of contents for the subject. This provides the only guidelines to teachers teaching the subject of 'politics and economics' and spreads over two and a half pages which address the content of the subject and fail to provide teachers with any suggestions on how to teach the notions set out in the document. In fact, the only allusion to teaching practice can be found in the short 'explanation' section at the end of the document, where it is stated that '[t]o acquire political culture one needs to use methodological practices which enable the development of attitudes towards current political events' (Croatian Ministry of Education and Sports, 1997, p. 181), without elaborating on what these 'methodological practices' are. The omission of teaching guidelines may not be so important if teachers were to receive adequate pre-service and in-service teacher training. However, certain Croatian authors such as Domović et al (2001) report that in both pre-service and in-service teacher training in Croatia teachers rarely encounter topics relating to democracy, civic education, intercultural education, human rights education and education for development. These authors report their research, which shows that the teachers in their sample were even less familiar with the kinds of (inter)active teaching methods that such topics require.

A more focused lens taken to examine the programme draws on a theoretical discussion about propositional knowledge, values and skills, which is to be elaborated on later and which appears compatible with Gutmann's (1987) understanding of political education as 'the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation' (p. 107). This conception is

also reflected in Langeveld's (1979) *Political Education for Teenagers*, published by the Council of Europe: 'By "political education" is meant the acquiring of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the study of politics and for participation in the political process' (p. 13). As one can gather from this quote, Langeveld highlights four concepts taken as central to political education, namely knowledge, skills, attitudes and participation. Drawing on Gutmann's understanding mentioned above, as well as the theoretical discussion that is outlined in the following section, one could also add values to this list. In applying these five concepts as codes to the official programme for the Croatian subject of 'politics and economics', one sees that three out of the five concepts used for coding are addressed in the aims part of the document. This part of the document talks about the importance of political education and tells the reader that political education is an inevitable part of education which exists in 'the democratic world' (Croatian Ministry of Education and Sports, 1997, p. 178), implying that political education is not an inevitable part of education in the non-democratic world. This is an interesting point to make when political education did exist in the Yugoslav communist regime, albeit in a different form. The three concepts which can be related to this section refer to the aims of the subject: to develop attitudes (towards current political events), acquire knowledge (of politics as a phenomenon, political institutions and political processes) and encourage participation (in the political system). Skills and values are not addressed in this part of the document. What is interesting to note is that participation is addressed in this section solely as participation in political life, rather than also community involvement or participation in the voluntary sector.

The document goes on to outline the basic tasks of the subject of politics. Three main tasks are listed: developing patriotic sentiment for the Republic of Croatia; civic commitment to its constitution, laws and symbols; and developing competences for political participation. Here again we find attitudes (patriotism), as well as participation, and there is a noticeable focus on the national level (Republic of Croatia). According to Ichilov (1998): 'Citizenship education limited to the inculcation of traditional patriotism or conventional nationalist ideology is obviously insufficient in a highly dynamic, complex or interdependent world' (p. 56). In this sense, the tasks of the subject of politics as outlined here, with their focus on patriotic sentiment, may seem inappropriate, but one must bear in mind the context in which this programme was framed. Namely, patriotism was a driving force in Croatia's war for independence and political education obviously reflected the spirit of its time. However, by acknowledging the transitional nature of political knowledge for educational purposes, one opens up the possibility of reformulating this knowledge when appropriate. Croatia's current status as an accession country to the European Union may be such an appropriate moment, yet policy reformulation in this respect is still missing.

Finally, the aims and tasks of the subject of 'politics and economics' are followed by a table of contents. An analysis of this table of contents according to the frequency of notions relating to knowledge, values, skills, attitudes and participation is represented in Table I. The notions were placed into each category according to the way they are articulated in the official document. Thus, concepts such as 'democracy', 'dictatorship' and 'monarchy' were taken as indicators of knowledge, while 'freedom', 'equality' and 'social justice' were taken as value indicators.

Knowledge	Values	Skills	Attitudes	Participation
114	12	2	1	2

Table I. Frequency of elements of political education in the official programme.

Table II shows the frequency of the level at which these concepts are addressed (local, national or supranational) in the national programme.

National	Local	Supranational
41	5	5

Table II. Frequency of level at which the concepts are addressed in the official programme.

Tables I and II are not incontestable since not all notions can be unambiguously slotted into the given categories; it is obvious, though, that the predominant category in Table I is the 'knowledge' category and, in Table II, the 'national' category. This points to the conclusion that the official programme for political education in Croatian secondary schools is predominantly knowledge-based and national in character. The one-dimensional knowledge-based approach is reflected in the titles specified in the programme, such as 'types of political systems', 'political parties' and 'elections'. It is also reflected more specifically in the content of each of these titles, which are further broken up into specific concepts such as 'democracy', 'dictatorship', 'tasks of political parties' and the 'history of electoral law'. This is quite different from the multidimensional understanding of political education as presented by authors such as McLaughlin (1992), Inman & Buck (1996), Davies et al (1999), Tate (2000) or Arthur & Wright (2001). For example, in their discussion of citizenship education, Arthur & Wright (2001) talk about three categories: 'education about citizenship', which provides the citizen with knowledge of the political system; 'education for citizenship', referring to the development of skills and values; and 'education through citizenship' or emphasising learning by doing through experiences in and out of schools. In this sense, the Croatian 'politics and economics' programme seems outdated.

The values mentioned in the Croatian politics programme are mentioned in the context of the highest values in the Croatian constitution and include freedom, equality, peacebuilding and the rule of law – values which are typical for democratic systems of governance. However, there is no mention of values such as mutual respect, cited by Fogelman (1991) as important, or honesty, integrity, altruism and justice, mentioned by Arthur & Wright (2001). Even though values are mentioned in the programme, they are extremely underrepresented when compared to knowledge. Skills are even less represented; there is no mention of some of the skills identified by Edwards & Fogelman (1993) as important: judgement; identification of bias, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination; recognising and accepting differences; problem solving, negotiation, or debate. Participation and attitudes are equally underrepresented. The programme for political education set out by the Ministry of Education appears to be a good example of the 'civics' text (Brindle & Arnot, 1998): 'most purely constitutional (factual and knowledge-based) – they focus on the mechanisms and personnel of government (local, national and international) and largely they avoid anything more controversial than this simple explanation of polity' (p. 35).

The national character of the Croatian politics programme comes out in several of its topic titles, including 'the Croatian parliament', 'the Croatian government', 'the Croatian president', 'the Croatian Supreme Court' and 'local governance in Croatia'. The national character is again re-emphasised in the content part of these titles so that there is frequent mention of the Croatian constitution and different Croatian institutions. Gutmann (1987) is critical of this mainly national approach and says that '[a]lthough students need to learn a great deal about their own society to function as well-informed citizens, learning only about their own society is not enough to satisfy the moral demands of a democratic education' (p. 309).

Overall, this analysis of the official policy document for political education in Croatian secondary schools points to what McLaughlin (1992) calls a 'minimal' interpretation of political education, whereby there is

the provision of information (relating, for example, to the legal and constitutional background to the status of citizenship juridically conceived and to the machinery and processes of government and voting) and the development of virtues of local and immediate focus (such as those relating to voluntary activity and basic social morality). (McLaughlin, 1992, p. 237)

As a result, the general message about what it means to be a 'good' citizen in the official policy document is akin to a more passive conception of citizenship in which the identity conferred upon an individual is seen merely in formal, legal and judicial terms; loyalties and responsibilities are seen primarily as local and immediate, and the citizen is seen as a private individual with the task of voting for representatives (McLaughlin, 1992). In a country in which democratic citizenship is in the making, one might expect a more active conception of citizenship rather than a passive one which, in its passivity, bears the markings of the previous political order. In addition, focus on the Croatian context may have been appropriate at the beginning of the 1990s when a democratic Croatian state was in the making that required individuals to take on a new national identity;

however, its appropriateness may need to be re-evaluated in a broader context of European Union integration.

Apart from the Ministry's official document, teachers also have officially prescribed textbooks to guide them in preparing their lessons. In Croatia, the Ministry of Education officially confirms the textbooks to be used in all state schools. Currently, there are five officially prescribed textbooks for the subject of 'politics and economics' and these include different textbooks for vocational and grammar schools, since, as already mentioned, vocational schools have one hour extra of the subject per week.[2]

Since the Ministry prescribes the official textbooks, it is not surprising that these textbooks follow the Ministry's official programme discussed above. This can be observed in the content analysis carried out by Šalaj (2003) on the five textbooks, and these results are shown in Table III. Šalaj's content analysis on the frequency of knowledge, skills and attitudes in Croatian political education textbooks clearly shows the dominance of the knowledge element and, as such, points to the conclusion that these textbooks reflect well the knowledge-based content of the Ministry of Education's official programme. This is also confirmed by other research which found that 'curricula and textbooks are still fact-oriented instead of skills and competency-oriented' (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2003, p. 48). Interestingly, the Vulić & Benić textbooks for grammar and vocational schools have identical forewords signed by the authors that state how the textbook has been written according to the specifications in the official policy document for the subject of 'politics and economics', which restricted their conception and structuring of the textbook. One can wonder whether having more freedom in conceptualising the textbooks would have resulted in the authors giving a more even representation of political education elements as identified in Table III.

Textbook	Knowledge	Intellectual skills	Participatory skills	Attitudes
Vulić & Benić – grammar school (2000)	46	7	2	6
Vulić & Benić – vocational school (2001)	46	7	2	6
Fanuko – grammar school (2000)	36	2	0	3
Fanuko – vocational school (2000)	31	2	0	3
Rašan & Križanac – vocational school (1998)	26	1	1	9

Table III. Frequency of elements of political education in content of textbooks (Šalaj, 2003).

As one can gather from Table III, the differences in the frequency of concepts relating to knowledge, intellectual skills, participatory skills and attitudes between the textbooks offered are negligible. In fact, the two Vulić & Benić textbooks cover identical topics, as do the two Fanuko textbooks. Therefore, the overall message about what constitutes political education is compatible with the official policy document, i.e. political education is primarily about gaining propositional knowledge about what politics is, the types of political parties, the types of political systems and elections, with particular focus on the national level. This comes across in the emphasis on, for example, political parties in Croatia, the Croatian people and the Croatian electoral system, to name but a few topics. Following on from this, the conception of citizenship that is perpetuated at the textbook level is equally compatible with that of the official policy document. In other words, with its emphasis on the knowledge element, pupils are expected to be passive receivers of a body of knowledge, rather than active participants in its shaping, just like the overall official conception of citizenship is more about being a rights holder rather than an active citizen with responsibilities.

Training 'Good' Citizens in Theory

'Instant' educational policy solutions to political education in Croatia in the early 1990s overlooked several crucial theoretical and epistemological considerations which could have influenced a very different form of political education. One of these overlooked considerations is the debate between 'rationalist' and 'empiricist' approaches to contextually sensitive content – political education being an example of such content.[3] On the one hand, according to the 'rationalist' approach, even though our senses (and experiences based on them) are deceptive, by relying on rational thinking

(which is akin to using the 'organ of reason') we can come to know unchangeable truths. In this way, a group of allegedly intellectually superior subjects (for example, logic and mathematics) become the educational paradigm guiding all other knowledge acquisition, even those 'value-laden' subjects such as politics. Thus, it was once taken that the study of formal logic can aid the development of the rational mind and thus positively influence social and political life.[4] For many, however, this turned out to be an empirically unsupported assumption (George & Gandhi, 2005). The 'empiricists', on the other hand, claim that the untrained mind is the *tabula rasa* that is to be furnished by sensory experience, and is at the outset incapable of rational thinking. Their suggestion might then be to expose students to as wide a range of experience as possible and thus allow them to frame their own hypotheses, supported by the canon of empirical proof, about the world surrounding them. As does extreme empiricism in the philosophy of science, this proposition also suffers from Popper's criticism that the ideal empirical proof is unattainable – the best that we can hope for in any case being the temporary corroboration of a theory. Furthermore, to be able to bring the educational process to some level of conclusion, we need to directly transmit some of the ready-made hypotheses about the world, as well as to direct any individual investigation in search of the right clues. In that, we already heavily rely on language (as the universal categorising code of the community), thus transmitting the non-empirical categorisation, which a student is forced to accept *tout court*.

Today's general ideal seems to be the middle ground between the two extremes (Hirst, 1993). Education is more than the acquisition of knowledge; it is an initiation into rationally enhanced social practices to secure the most efficient satisfaction of wants. Propositional knowledge is of great importance here in securing the wide reach and efficacy of beneficial practices, but is only a second-order category built out of a critical reflection on the first-order satisfaction of practical wants (Hirst, 1993) through the appropriation of skills. In the case of political knowledge, this contemporary model prescription seems to lean closer to the 'empiricist' approach, outlined above, which is streamlined, when streamlining is called for, by the appropriation of (as objective as possible) propositional knowledge.

In addition to the rationalist and empiricist approaches to knowledge, there is a further theoretical complication which educational policy makers in Croatia have not explicated. This refers to perspectives which teach us that all knowledge is, and always has been, regardless of its ontological status or methodological source, modified by language and interpretation (Ward, 1996; Young, 1998). Again, the position of political knowledge is especially acute here as, arguably, more than any other aspect of the curriculum, education in politics and citizenship eventually affects the political knowledge within a community.[5] Recently, for example, it has been explicitly stated that school curricula are not purely theoretical constructs, but also have a social role to perform through their contribution to the developmental needs of national economies (Standish, 2003; Flego et al, 2004). As the earlier analysis showed, with their focus on the knowledge component in Croatian political education, the official policy document and textbooks for the subject of 'politics and economics' seem closer to a rationalist approach, thus overlooking the complexities contributed by the other approaches mentioned here.

Ideological (value-laden) markings aside, what in fact counts as the legitimate content of political education to be transmitted in schools? Can we label political education to be transmitted in schools as legitimate if it is vulnerable to socio-historical changes? Is legitimate political education only that which is officially prescribed in policy documents? Or is legitimate political education also defined at the level of schools, teachers and students? Apple (1993) reminds us that teachers may mediate and transform text material when they employ it in the classroom. This seems especially complex in post-conflict and transitional contexts, which are often marked by 'identity crises' that are reflected at individual levels. In addition, such teacher-induced mediation and transformation is significant in educational systems, such as the Croatian one, where external evaluation procedures do not exist and thus the choice of the political knowledge to be transferred ultimately rests with the individual teacher. In addition, Apple (1993) notes that it is not only teachers who may transform official materials, but that students themselves bring their own varied biographies (including their class, racial, religious and gendered identities) to their learning and they accept, reinterpret and reject what counts as legitimate political education. Therefore, can legitimate political education be attributed to all these levels or are some sources more legitimate than others? To approach these questions it is important to recognise that political education is not

simply an issue of selecting the appropriate ideology of the content, but also its type – for instance, whether it comprises not only knowledge but also, significantly, skills and values.

The first of the knowledge types, propositional knowledge [6], is the ‘knowledge that’, also known as theoretical or factual knowledge, ‘knowledge that *p*’, where *p* is a proposition expressing a truth. We are, therefore, expected to make sense of all experiences by subsuming them under knowledge that is in correspondence with reality, knowledge that consists of a canon of unshakeable propositions concerning that reality. Yet, philosophically, we are not only in dire straits to provide a satisfactory model of truth that allows us to pick the appropriate factual propositions from a wealth of meaningful but untrue ones, but we also lack a satisfactory account of what instances of belief (something in the mind) are knowledge (and thus factually connected to the world) and what are not (we can also ask whether knowledge contains belief at all). In the search for a bare minimum of knowledge that satisfies the conditions set by different analyses [7], we have come increasingly close to attributing the status of knowledge to individual beliefs dependent on the contexts in which they arise and in which they are assessed for validity. These issues gain particular importance in the case of political knowledge with the addition of an assumption that what directly influences the supposed body of knowledge is taught at schools. False association of knowledge with ‘rationalism’ (unlike that of skills and values with ‘empiricism’) suggests that heavy emphasis on theoretical content steers away from Hirst-style ideal middle ground (characterised primarily by the optimisation of individual development) towards instrumentalising political education for political ends. Moreover, when talking about emphasising theoretical content, we should expect that a person ‘knows that *p*’ only if he or she can differentiate ‘the truth that *p*’ from its relevant alternatives (Goldman, 1976) [8], i.e. appropriation of knowledge is not demonstrated (for example, in school assessment) through mere imitation.

Finally, let us briefly apply some realist (modernist) brakes here. Though the history of philosophy and science warns us that the ways in which we conceptualise the world – what we ground our experiences in – can be susceptible to fleeting human values and interests, it is still reasonable [9] to assume that whether these conceptualisations are correct or not, whether they are true or false, depends primarily not on how we are inclined to construct them but on *the state of affairs in the real world* (cf. Carr, 2003). Perhaps it is obvious that there are incontestable (at least at the level of school education) propositions to be transmitted (such as, for example, the content of the constitution), but there are also more speculative theoretical propositions that might be in stark contrast with reality in the public sphere (for example, the role and objectivity of the media, practice or the rule of law).

This article illustrates the general complexity of defining what counts as legitimate political knowledge for educational purposes. The perspective taken is that legitimate political knowledge essentially means accepting the ‘transitional’ nature of the subject’s overall context at the level of all stakeholders. In other words, it implies the assertion that political knowledge is spatially and temporally bound and, just as societies undergo transitions, so does the updated political knowledge about them. Moreover, societal transitions leave a particularly strong mark on received political knowledge in ways that are not always in the best interest of the learners. However, this does not imply that such knowledge should not be taught because of its fickle nature, but rather that it should be taught in a critical manner and in a way that acknowledges its contextual dependency. To this extent, we contend that the consideration of political knowledge should also be closely related to an appreciation of values and to a development of skills. The appreciation of values and the development of skills have further theoretical issues associated with them, being more contextual than propositional knowledge, but are, possibly, harder to develop in students.

So, what is the essence of mastering a skill, of the knowledge *how* to do something, such as grammatical speech, chess playing, fishing, debating or choosing political options for sustainable satisfaction of individual wants.[10] A part of this mastery is the successful performance of these actions. However, this is an insufficient part for the whole know-how. Ryle’s (1949) original analysis runs into trouble in setting the explicit (propositional) criteria that differentiate procedural knowledge (possession of a skill) from successful imitation/theatrical performance. After abandoning the ‘internally’ elaborated theoretical foundation of successful performance as a guarantee of skill possession, Ryle fails to say what it is within/about the performance or the performer that makes the successful performance of an action different from crafty imitation of a successful performance of a given process (except for the – still ambiguous – dictum that a

performer ought to be 'thinking what s/he is doing' (p. 32). We are left with a Wittgensteinian solution of relying on the context – the role of the community or culture of the performer (Wittgenstein, 1967). However, this does not provide much clarity about the selection of assessable skills to be transmitted through education, nor the methodology of transmission that would ensure appropriation of skills and not mere successful displays of its imitation.

In the case of political knowledge, an important additional component is provided by values, either explicitly stated or implicitly incorporated into the factual structure. Thus, in one extreme view, all the relevant and universally applicable values are included in the structure of the political system (this includes the constitutional documents) and stand 'behind' the knowledge of the theoretical operations of the political system (of the relevant community), so education merely has to provide an introduction to the institutional practices of the state (including the minimum procedural knowledge required). At the other extreme, children (future citizens) should not be saddled with the communal practices in existence now (as those are imperfect), but should be provided with the full capacity of creating their own means of public co-existence, which must be constructed and practised on the spot under mere considerate guidance (but not instruction) from the teachers (Giarelli, 1995). Both extremes face problems. The former perpetuates the existing political system, the existing arrangement of the community, with all its inadequacies, and offers little scope to young citizens for individual development in the political sphere. It is thus open to criticism (again from standpoint theories, cf. Moore, 2000) that it commits the state schooling system to perpetuation and legitimation of the knowledge and values that serve to preserve the interests of the ruling class (and to secure the reproduction of the dominant means of production). This sort of criticism often invites the statement that knowledge (especially that of politics) is never theory-free and neutral (such as is the ideal of scientific knowledge) and that this value-laden nature of political knowledge is never elucidated in its curricular presentation (Harris, 1995). The latter, on the other hand, is almost entirely open to repeating all the mistakes of the past, thus allowing student communities to go through stages of fascism or slavery-based society, before potentially settling for a more liberal and democratic structure. It is not clear how much considerate guidance from the teachers is allowed here before the consequences become dire for at least some groups of students.

The middle ground between the two extremes seems to lie in admitting the need for as much 'hands-on' experience as possible in the transmission of political knowledge within the confines of the relevant society and culture as such, thus encouraging active citizen participation over and above the often dry propositional knowledge about the theoretical operations of the political system. This way, Hirst's call for social initiation through education is heeded in the obviously delicate case of political knowledge (Hirst, 1993). However, in order to legitimise such knowledge (both in transmission from teacher to student and in the construct the students end up with), there is a need for a set of values appropriated by each student (this is a temporal as well as a conceptual precedent) upon which the obviously uncertain and often impermanent knowledge may rest. This should allow students to weed out some of the imperfections from such knowledge, and thus provide individual control of knowledge through values (White, 1995). But this middle ground rests on an assumption that there is a universally acceptable distillate of values that are appropriate for all humans and whose appropriation by students does not represent indoctrination of the style criticised above. And this assumption is becoming more difficult to justify in contemporary Western societies committed to value pluralism, as the condition they end up providing practically spells the end of political (and moral) education through extreme relativism that is, arguably, damaging to the individual, rather than liberating. On the other hand, the pluralistic view is not a product of a political whim, but is a fact about contemporary society, as well as a product of applying reason to the conduct of daily life. But, as such, it is a rationally constructed thesis about values, not *in itself* a political or ethical ideal (Williams, 2003). Namely, we argue that it is desirable to instil in students (for, among others, the reasons outlined above) a set of values and to attempt to show them that morality in general is more than an arbitrary choice between conflicting alternatives. However, it is certainly hard, if possible at all, to justify a choice of any given complete set of values over and above the said alternatives (Mendus, 1998).

Likely, the best reconciliatory route is to embrace *some form* of relativism, and to be explicitly conscious of this fact. We argue that it is impossible to make the school entirely value-free (thus opening the way for most vulgar value-relativism supplied through other means – an 'anything

goes' scenario), but that it should not be made to stick to immutably imposed value sets either. Rationally guided, though not rationally hierarchically organised, exposition to a range of value sets and accompanying social practices is, we argue, the best that can be achieved. In that, students should be initiated in following Raz's (2003) value judgements, or evaluations, with reference to 'genre' or perspective, explicated by the context of the social practice engendering a given value. For social practices, and associated political systems, produce and sustain values which come in distinct sets (and not as manifestations of one and the same goodness), some of which may be incompatible (i.e. cannot all be realised in the life of a single individual or society). Knowledge associated with these value sets is based on the defining standards of the genre, and avoids contradiction with judgements from another genre since different objects that belong to different genres can be judged by otherwise contradictory standards. And any political decision, such as setting the outer limits of the value sets transmitted through education, will inevitably incur value losses.

The Need for Policy Reformulation

Educational policy decisions made in Croatia in the early 1990s were instant responses to an emergency situation. The secondary school subject of 'politics and economics' is an example of such a response in its replacement of the former subject of political education, which expounded a communist/socialist rhetoric and promoted concepts such as 'brotherhood and unity', with a new discourse promoting democracy, the rule of law, national liberation and human rights. One could have predicted syllabi reforms at that time which would involve freeing the content from markings of previous ideology, as well as the encouragement of a Croatian identity and patriotic sentiment in the midst of conflict. However, the suddenness of policy development in this respect has not been met by necessary subsequent monitoring and reappraisal. Indeed, reformulation of this policy decision has not taken place since 1997 and even then the changes made were cosmetic rather than substantive. Most obviously, the structure and type of subject content have not changed, keeping focus on a 'rationalist' knowledge-laden perspective rather than shifting to a more hands-on approach reliant on skills and values as well; and despite the requirement to transmit concepts such as democracy, individual freedom and responsibilities, etc.

The static nature of the subject of 'politics and economics' reflects the static nature of educational policy making in Croatia in this respect and one can but speculate why this is so. Is it because no one has pointed out comprehensive alternatives to the current programme? There are claims that there has been pressure for changes to the subject's content from members of various non-governmental associations, academics and professional teacher associations in Croatia. However, such small-scale local initiatives have gone formally unregistered. Is it, on the other hand, connected to the relatively uninterrupted rule of one party since the beginning of the 1990s? Possibly, but this does not explain the lack of changes during the four-year period between 2000 and 2004 when a coalition government was in power. It seems that the best chance for change is an emergency situation requiring instant reaction: in the 1990s the urgency was brought about by Croatia's independence; in the 2000s it is brought about by European integration processes. In both cases, policy changes in the Croatian context of political education were/are reactive rather than proactive and, as a result of this reactive approach, very little space is left in Croatia for creativity and innovation in educational policy making. Pressures to align with European standards could be an opportunity for such creativity, if it was not for the 'copy-paste' model of policy borrowing that seems to be the trend. This makes the top-down approach to policy reformulation even further removed since bottom-up proposed modifications to educational policies are no longer only in dialogue with national bodies, but international bodies as well. For this reason alone, policy-making instances at national level need to engage more reflectively and theoretically with current policy, both national and international, in order to be accountable to those stakeholders who feel their impact most directly – teachers and students.

Notes

- [1] There are three types of secondary schools in Croatia: grammar schools, vocational schools and art schools. Grammar schools and art schools are four-year schools, whereas the length of study in vocational schools ranges between three and four years. According to data provided by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2007), out of a total of 138,923 enrolled secondary school pupils in the 2006-07 school year, 60% attend a vocational school, 36.6% a grammar school and 3.4% an art school. Enrolment into one of the streams is based largely upon grades obtained in the final two years of primary schooling, with grammar schools being the most competitive for entry. The subject of 'politics and economics' is not taught at all in art schools, whereas it is allocated 36 lessons during the final year of grammar schools (one lesson per week lasting 45 minutes) and 72 lessons in the final year of vocational schooling (two lessons per week each lasting 45 minutes). A higher number of lessons in the vocational stream is accounted for with claims that vocational schools do not have subjects such as philosophy or sociology – which grammar schools do have – which might cover some of the topics addressed during the politics lessons. However, whether this actually happens in grammar schools is questionable. It is also unclear why art schools do not have the subject as part of their curriculum at all.
- [2] There is no overall curriculum document for any type of Croatian school that could provide a satisfactory overview of cross-curricular topics.
- [3] 'Empiricist' and 'rationalist' labels are used here as illustrations of extreme positions, without exact theoretical adherents.
- [4] Supposedly, Rudolf Carnap and Ernst Nagel supported Lillian Lieber's intent to prevent the occurrence of another world war through the study of formal logic (George & Gandhi, 2005). The claims that political maturity or even communitarian thought are nourished by the study of formal logic are today seen as vacuous.
- [5] A discussion of the educational outcomes of selected curricular context exceeds the scope of this article. For some general results not focused on political knowledge, cf. Moore (2000).
- [6] In the remainder of the text simply 'knowledge', as opposed to 'skills' and 'values'.
- [7] From Plato's tripartite to Williamson's unanalysable (Williamson, 2000).
- [8] Of course, the issue of determination of relevant alternatives remains, and cannot be addressed here. Briefly, such an alternative is where the 'cause of belief that *p*' is partially altered whilst the surrounding physical context remains the same. But, in education, students often approach given situations with a ready-made view of the context and, in many cases, the task of education is not only to convince the students that *p* is true, but also to place *p* in a new context. For example, the Earth's rotation around the Sun is perceptually identical to the Sun's rotation around the Earth (as viewed from an everyday earthbound perspective). The causes of both beliefs are perceptually indistinguishable. What differentiates them is the remaining physical context that the students are to be introduced to, i.e. the planets of the solar system, planetary mechanics, etc.
- [9] Postmodern perspectives may cry foul here and claim that what we may find reasonable or unreasonable is not universal but a product of our social and historical context. In a possible parallel context, then, it may not at all be reasonable to assume that the correctness of our conceptualisations of the world depends on some ideally objective and real state of affairs, but on the whim of some omnipotent being, the workings of the reality-generating deception machine, or some such. Even this much may be conceded here, providing we keep in mind that none of our friends or foes, no member of our or any other community we may come to interact with, is or can be such an omnipotent being or machine. The issue is not whether we are mistaken, or even deliberately deceived, about the detailed structure of some independent reality, but whether such a reality, as independent of our actions and will, does or does not exist.
- [10] We are labouring under an idealist assumption here that to satisfy short-term selfish wants is unsustainable and thus not in the overall interest of the individual after all.

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