

# Social science education in France

## A fragmented educational landscape in transition

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- School subjects dealing with social science education in France are numerous.
- Historically, they are associated with the teaching of history, geography and civic and moral education.
- They are more differentiated at the upper secondary education level (*lycée*).
- Curricula have been undergoing major changes in the last decade (reforms in 2010 and from 2018 onwards).
- Those curricular reforms are linked to global trends (i.e. competences).

**Purpose:** After a short historical presentation, this country report highlights current developments of social science education in France and clarifies its general status in the French school system, giving not only information about the curricula baselines, but also on current reforms, shifts and conflict lines among practitioners and researchers.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This article is based on a synopsis of both official documents and evaluation reports published by the French Ministry of Education and other public organs and scientific data such as empirical case studies.

**Findings:** Social sciences education falls under broad purposes such as educating citizens and preparing the future workforce. History, geography and civics are more established and taught to more students than other more recent subjects like *Sciences économiques et sociales* (Economic and social sciences), all of those subjects raising broader research questions.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The very notion of "social studies education" and the call for papers published ahead of this issue of the *Journal of Social Science Education*, explicitly mentioning the terms "civic, citizenship, economic, political and/or social education" questions in its premises the organization of the academic and school fields and the disciplinary knowledge produced and taught in France. It is indeed more frequent to refer to "human and social sciences" in higher education and research on the one hand, while on the other hand the centrality of the school subject history and geography has been established in the

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school system since the 1880s. Therefore, this country report aims to demonstrate that “social studies” are fragmented, not very visible as a whole and sometimes controversial, on the basis of recent curricular changes (in particular the new senior high school – *lycée* - curricula enforced in 2010 and 2019) and some recent publications from different fields of educational research (didactics, sociology, history, etc.).

## 2 SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: A LONG TREND TOWARDS CITIZENSHIP AND NATION BUILDING

To understand the content and the situation of social and political education in contemporary France, it is necessary to have a look at how it developed and which role it played in the different epochs. Under the monarchy rule, the *Ancien Régime*, children in school should learn the main principles of the *civilité*, which can be defined as a bundle of moral and social values supposed to organize the social life among the population. Taking into account the hierarchic structure of society during this period of time, it was mostly about obedience, courtesy and decorum. Thus not politically in the sense of playing an active role in the society, and filled with religious contents, this education can be considered as purely social and presents the roots of social science education in modern France (Vial & Mougnotte, 1992).

A fundamental change took place after the French Revolution in 1789. To stabilize the newly founded Republic, a different type of habitants was needed, people that actively supported and defended it, and that were aware of their rights and duties. The *honnête homme*, considered as an unpolitical servant, turned more and more into a *citoyen utile*, incorporating the republican values and being ready to fulfil its role. This formation of the *citoyen* thus still didn't take place in a subject dedicated to political or social education, but essentially in history, geography and French lessons (Vial & Mougnotte, 1992). Thus, the overarching aspects of social science education have to be seen together with the formation of the citizen, the overall aim of the French education system (Hörner & Many, 2017).

Another crucial step towards the establishment of a proper social science education in the French school system were the reforms of the former education minister Jules Ferry in 1881/1882. Alongside with other reforms such as to make the school free and *laïque*, so neutral in terms of religion, he introduced the subject *Instruction civique et morale* (Moral and civic instruction) in the primary school. This purely political subject had the aim to bind the young generations to their country by teaching them their role as citizens with a priority on the constitution and the institutions of the Republic. This development went along with a push back of the strong influence of the church in the school system (Mougnotte, 1991; Ravaud, 2006).

After the First and the Second World war, social science education spread out in the secondary education system, in 1945 in the *collège* under the name *Initiation à la vie politique et à la vie économique* (Introduction to the political and economic life)<sup>2</sup>, and in 1999 in the *lycée* under the name *Education civique, juridique et sociale* (Civic, legal and social education) (Bozec, 2016; Revol, 2001). This development was accompanied by tensions finding its peak in the protests of 1968 which lead to a temporary removal of civic and moral education in the French school system until 1985 (Vial & Mougnotte, 1992). Crucial questions were amongst others the balance of contents and methods: should civic education be rather about knowledge and institutions, or should it follow a more activity oriented approach? Should it lead to rather critical or participatory citizens? In which way does the education need to change with regard to an increasingly multicultural society? (Mokkadem, 2001; Ravaud, 2007; Revol, 2001)

### 3 CURRICULA IN RENEWAL

#### 3.1 At the global level: introducing frameworks and pathways



From the age of six to 16, in the *école élémentaire* and the *collège* (elementary and lower secondary schools), the *socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture* (the common framework of knowledge, skills and culture), introduced in 2005 and revised in 2016, structures teaching and learning around five key goals, including *la formation de la personne et du citoyen* (the formation of the person and the citizen) (domain area three) and *les représentations du monde et de l'activité humaine* (the representations of the world and human activity) (domain area five). The key competences, values and attitudes to be acquired throughout the compulsory school attendance take into account roughly everything students need to know in order to become a member of the professional, social and political community. Being separated into four fields, the domain area “the formation of the person and the citizen” focusses explicitly on the life within the republican society, through the expression of the own point of view and opinion and the respect of others (1), rules and law (2), consideration and judgement (3) as well as responsibility, sense for engagement and initiative (4), giving students the necessary basis to become an autonomous, but committed member within the republican society (MENESR 2015). Those four pillars were also thought to structure the curricula of the new subject *Enseignement moral et civique* (Civic and moral education class), which was the case from 2015 to 2018; in the latest curricula, they have been replaced by three other ones: respect others (1), acquire and share the values of the Republic (2) and build a civic culture (3) (MENJ 2018).

Introduced in 2015 and 2016, the *Parcours Citoyen* (Citizenship Path) and the *Parcours Avenir* (Future Path), in the field of guidance education and focused on the development of an individual path of guidance and discovery of the economic and professional world, are another very recent form of curricular prescription. The Citizenship Path presented as a sort of civic journey throughout the school career of each

student, is one out of eleven measures within the context of the so called *Grande mobilisation de l'École pour les valeurs de la République* (Big mobilization of the school for the values of the Republic) that was promoted in 2015 as an answer to the terrorist attacks on the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket in Paris in January 2015. The global aim of that announcement was to strengthen republican values within the society and to make the school again the epicenter of the transmission of republican values such as the *laïcité*, the equality of men and women or the fight against all kind of discrimination, in order to reduce social and political tensions within the country (MENJ, 2019). It basically consists of five elements, representing a mixture of disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, and of already established and newest initiatives: the subject *Enseignement moral et civique* (Civic and moral education), the interdisciplinary field of *Education aux médias et à l'information* (Media and information education), the participation of students in the social life and the environment of their school, their involvement in debating and philosophical workshops and the preparation of the mandatory *Journée Défense et citoyenneté* (Defense and Citizenship day), existing since 1997.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the compulsory school attendance, within a formal republican ceremony in the presence of their family, it had been planned that students would get a *livret de citoyenneté* (citizenship booklet) that includes all the civic principles that – theoretically – have been acquired throughout their school life (MENJ, 2016).

Both the paths and the common framework of knowledge, skills and culture clarify the expectations in terms of civic and social competences and skills to be achieved at the end of the compulsory school attendance. Both have in common an action- and case-oriented approach, highlighting methods such as teamwork, debates/discussions, but also competitions, theme days and the organization of school events, by rather situational learning and the solving of concrete problems through the acquisition and activation of competence. Still, their logics are superimposed on the inherited and prevalent disciplinary programs, which have undergone significant changes in recent years.

### **3.2 *Enseignement moral et civique* (moral and civic education): a unique discipline**

Since the beginning of the 2015 school year, the title *Enseignement moral et civique* refers in a unified way to a school subject previously identified by the terms *Instruction morale et civique* (Moral and civic instruction) in the elementary school from 2008, *Education civique* (Civic education) in the middle and vocational schools from 1985 and *Education civique, juridique et sociale* (Civic, legal and social education) in the general senior high school from 1999. It also introduces this education into technological branches of the *lycées technologiques* (senior high schools). A political, social and educational issue, the EMC curricula that came into force in 2015 have been the subject of particular attention from social actors (media, professional associations) and academics. They have already been modified in 2018 for elementary and middle school and will be modified from 2019 on for senior high school. The Planned weekly timetable remains stable:

**Table 1:**

School type	Subject	Lessons per week
Ecole maternelle (Preschool)	--- <sup>4</sup>	---
Ecole élémentaire (Primary school)	Enseignement moral et civique (EMC)	2,5 (together with the subject Questionner le monde (Analyzing the world) (cycle 2) or Histoire et Géographie (History and Geography) (cycle 3) <sup>5</sup> )
Collège (Middle school)	Enseignement moral et civique (EMC)	3 (in Sixième, Cinquième and Quatrième) or 3,5 (in Troisième) (together with Histoire et Géographie (History and Geography), (cycle 4) 3 or 3,5 in the last year of college (Troisième)
Lycée d'enseignement général et technologique (Senior high school – general and technological tracks)	Enseignement moral et civique (EMC)	0,5; separated from Histoire et Géographie (History and Geography) (2 to 3 weekly hours)

At the *lycée professionnel* (vocational high school), the timetable is annualized and globalized (105 hours for French, history and geography and EMC – taught by a bivalent teacher, whereas teachers in other school types don't teach French – in *Seconde* from 2019 onwards, 84 in *Première* from 2020, 78 in *Terminale* from 2021).

As already mentioned before, the renewed curriculum of EMC consists in elementary school and middle high school of three pillars: respect others (1), acquire and share the values of the Republic (2) and build a civic culture (3), representing the finalities of this education. These are turned down for every learning cycle, consisting of the aims to be achieved at the end of each cycle, the associated knowledge and competences as well as the objects to be taught. But the four *domaines de la culture civique* (fields of civic culture), introduced in 2015, still run like a red thread through each chapter: *culture de la sensibilité* (sensibility), *culture de la règle et du droit* (law and order), *culture du jugement* (judgement) and *culture de l'engagement* (commitment). Concerning the methodical approach, EMC is a subject where case-oriented learning is highly estimated and where the teaching of values and practices has the same importance as subject knowledge (MENJ 2018). Older studies by order of the Ministry of Education about the relation of the subjects history and geography on the one hand and civic education in *college*, and civic, legal and social education in *lycée* on the other show that the students get much more often a chance to speak in the civic education subjects than in history and geography (Billet, 2007; Braxmeyer & Guillaume, 2007).

Moral and civic education is taught by history and geography teachers and assessed in writing with these two disciplines during national terminal examinations at the end of the middle school in *Troisième* and for the vocational baccalaureate. In other classes, EMC may be taught by other teachers, such as philosophy or social sciences and economics teachers. This circumstance leads to the fact that many teachers feel insecure about their ability to teach EMC properly which strengthens again the image of EMC as a marginalized discipline (Vial & Mougnotte, 1992). Without going too far into the details<sup>6</sup>, the normal way to become a teacher in France consists since 2013 of a bachelor-degree in any scientific subject, with preference to the subjects already taught in school, and without any pedagogical contents. After their bachelor, students have to get enrolled in the MEEF, the *master métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation* (master for educational jobs), taught at the ESPÉs, *écoles supérieures du professorat et de l'éducation* (special pedagogical schools within the universities), where they get prepared for their future teaching job by taking education-related courses such as didactics or psychology. It is also in this master where students decide for a specific school type (primary education, general

secondary education or vocational education). Between year one and two of the master's degree, a *concours* (nationwide competition) takes place, varying of the type of school and the future subject. There is no special competition for EMC (there is one in SES), but prospective history and geography teachers are interrogated in this subject – explaining again, why teachers in geography and history usually teach EMC (MENJ 2018).

In addition to this school approach centered on history-geography-EMC, there are internship periods where duration, status and motivations at stake are variable. Since 2005, a one-week *séquence d'observation en entreprise* (professional observation sequence), to be carried out in a company, association or public administration, has been mandatory in the *Troisième*. In the *Troisième prépa métiers* (pre-professional preparation), a track implemented in vocational secondary schools<sup>7</sup>, the *enseignement de découverte professionnelle des métiers et des formations professionnelles* (vocational discovery teaching of trades and vocational training) provides for internships and immersion periods.

#### **4 A MORE FRAGMENTED DISCIPLINARY LANDSCAPE IN THE LYCÉE (SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL)**

At the high school level, other disciplines than history-geography and EMC appear in the social science sphere.

##### **4.1 Sciences économiques et sociales (SES; Economic and social sciences) in the lycées d'enseignement général (general high schools)**

At the general high school, a specific course focusing on economic and social sciences was created at the end of the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Two reforms have impacted this school subject and those related to it in the last decade, with new curricula and timetables from 2010 (*Seconde*) to June 2020 (*Terminale*), and the newest ones put in place from 2019 (*Seconde* and *Première*) to September 2020 (*Terminale*).

In 2018, 765,507 candidates took the baccalaureate exams. The 131,869 candidates of the economic and social sciences track represented 17.22% of the total number of candidates and 33.47% of the candidates among the three general tracks (Literary, Economic and Social, Scientific) (Thomas, 2018).

At the beginning of the 2019 school year, the economic and social sciences (SES) will once again (it already happened between 1982 and 1992, see Chatel, 2015) become a common core subject for all students in *Seconde*. “This course aims to: enable students to master essential notions and reasoning in economics, sociology and political science; allow students to discover new disciplinary fields, that their previous studies have not allowed them to address, and thus inform their choice of subjects of specialization for their further studies in the final cycle of the high school; contribute to the civic education of students through better knowledge and understanding of the major economic, social and political issues.” (MENJ, 2019)

The new specialization subject *Histoire-géographie, géopolitique et sciences politiques* (History-geography-geopolitics-political science), triggered in 2018 and 2019, still ongoing debates take place regarding the content of this subject as well as the repartition between teachers (history and geography and/or SES) in charge of teaching and evaluating it. The most marginalized disciplines in this configuration are political science (already poorly represented in the academic field, see Déloye and Mayer, 2018) and law (the elements of legal culture have been mostly associated since the 1990s with civic education and the ECJS, see Audigier, 2017).

Table 2:

Grade	Subject (2010-2020)	Hours per week	Subject (from 2019)	Hours per week
Seconde (First year)	Mandatory choice: Sciences économiques et sociales (Economic and social sciences) and/ or Principes fondamentaux de l'économie et de la gestion (Fundamental principles of economics and management)	1,5	Sciences économiques et sociales (Economic and social sciences)	1,5
		1,5	Optional: Management et gestion (Management and administration)	
Première (Second year)	In the economic and social sciences track: Sciences économiques et sociales (Economic and social sciences)	5	Choice among 14 specialization subjects (students choose 3 specialization subjects): Sciences économiques et sociales (Economic and social sciences) and/ or Histoire-géographie, géopolitique et sciences politiques (History- geography-geopolitics-political sciences)	4/each
Terminale (Last year)	In the economic and social sciences track: Sciences économiques et sociales (Economic and social science)	5	Choice among 14 specialization subjects (students keep 2 specialization subjects): Sciences économiques et sociales (Economic and social sciences) and/or Histoire-géographie, géopolitique et sciences politiques (History-geography-geopolitics- political science)	6/each
	Optional: Economie approfondie (Deepened Economy),	1,5		
	Sciences sociales et politiques (Social and political science)	1,5		
	In the literary track: Droit et grands enjeux du monde contemporain (Law and major issues in the contemporary world)	3	Optional: Droit et grands enjeux du monde contemporain (Law and major issues in the contemporary world)	3

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### Excursus: The role of educational media in social science education in France

A short excursus should present the situation of educational media in social science education. As in other disciplines, the textbook is one of the major education media in social science classes (Braxmeyer & Guillaume, 2007). Textbooks have several functions, and one of the most important seems to be the didactically prepared presentation of contents and competences based on the curriculum. Concerning the elaboration, authorization and usage in the classroom, France has some special characteristics compared to other countries.<sup>9</sup> In France, textbooks are usually written by teachers, based on the idea that practitioners know best – and better than e.g. researchers from universities – how textbooks should be structured. Based on the fact that French teachers usually choose textbooks by themselves – only in very few cases, schools oblige teachers to use a specific textbook – this approach is profitable for the publishing houses, with the risk that textbooks focus only on the teachers' needs (Borne, 1998). In France, there is no central admission procedure for textbooks, thus they can be forbidden if they clearly violate the constitution, special laws or the morality. This approach was born on the initiative of Jules Ferry who thought that teachers know best what educational media they need in the classroom. Within this context Bruillard (2011) speaks of a threefold liberty: publishing houses can produce textbooks freely, teachers can use the textbook of their choice and can decide freely on the usage in their lessons.

Regarding social science education, the textbook market has some special characteristics as well. In accordance to the implementation of EMC, there are very little textbooks dedicated exclusively to this discipline; in most cases, one can find an appendix in textbooks for history and geography, one of the reasons being that the interest for specific textbooks is very low (Borne, 1998). For SES for instance, specific versions exist as well as for specialization subjects, where the market is very small though. A rather new, but widespread innovation consists of the publishing house *lelivrescolaire*, created by teachers in a bottom-up procedure. The textbooks published there are free of charge (for the online version only), and on their homepage special materials and visualization tools are provided. During the class, teachers can log on their homepage and use the online version while students have the printed version in front of them.

#### 4.2 *Lycée d'enseignement technologique et professionnel* (Technological and vocational tracks at high schools): several courses combined

The subject *Economie-droit* (Economy and law) is taught 4 hours weekly in *Première* and *Terminale* in one of the technological tracks called Science and Technology in Management and Administration. At the vocational school, the schedules of vocational education include either *Economie-gestion* (economy and management) in the production sector or *Economie-droit* (Economy and law) in the tertiary sector, and are globalized and annualized.

In 2018, the 73,684 candidates of the technological track Science and Technology in Management and Administration represented 9.6% of all candidates. 115,113 candidates were tertiary vocational baccalaureate candidates (15% of all candidates) and the 100,874 production baccalaureate candidates (13.17% of all candidates) (Thomas, 2018).

In agricultural high schools (managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food), there was so far no EMC but teaching in socio-cultural education, history and geography and economic, social and management sciences. The diploma standard for the technological baccalaureate sciences and technologies of agronomy and life, in force from 2019 on, includes a common teaching module called humanist culture and citizenship whose objective is "to build a humanist culture to act as a responsible citizen in the contemporary world" (MAA, 2019). On an annual basis, it includes 62 hours of philosophy, 62 hours of sociocultural education, 93 hours of history and geography and 31 hours of moral and civic education on an annual basis. Module S2 Territories and societies aims to "understand the cultural, social and economic challenges of territories" through



economic, social and management sciences (46.5 h) and sociocultural education (31.5 h). In *Terminale*, the S3 technology module is organized around domains and disciplines including SESG/commercial management or SESG/social and family economy, socio-cultural education, SESG/corporate management, SESG, while the S4 module territories and technology includes 46.5 hours of SESG. An optional citizen engagement unit should allow students to "enhance their citizen engagement within and outside the school" (MAA, 2019).

These frequent changes in curricula have once again happened recently and so have revived discussions on the major issues related to these school subjects of social science education, their aims and their place in the French education system. Those controversies will be discussed in the next chapters of this country report, focusing on three major research areas: curriculum sociology, school finalities and subject didactics.

## **5 SOCIOHISTORY OF THE CURRICULUM AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE REFORM OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULA (2010-2012)**

As the analysis of the main stakeholders and their arguments have already been carried out in this review regarding the EMC subject (press review in Busch & Morys, 2016), this chapter is based on Murati's work (Murati, 2013), who examined the writing process of the SES curricula implemented from 2010 to 2020. Those curricula "involve a plurality of actors and are spaces for struggle. Their construction is the result of compromises and negotiations between social groups driven by competing interests in the selection of knowledge" (Murati, 2013) all the more so since the content of this particular subject "is to teach so-called 'vivid' questions or knowledge both (a) at the social level in the sense that they are debated within society, challenging the actors' own social practices and (b) at an academic level where there are controversies between academic specialists" (Murati, 2013). The actors involved in and concerned by the writing process are involved in pedagogical fields (inspectors, teachers, also represented by a professional association called APSES<sup>10</sup>), academic and economic stakeholders (representatives of the business world). At the same time, teachers must decide between "reporting on scientific news and making it teachable" (Murati, 2013) whereas academics seek "to defend the topicality of their symbolic capital, their scientific, academic and social legitimacy" (Murati, 2013). On the side of external forces, the employers' field through its associations and lobbying practices aims to "emphasize the social importance of the economic information and training of students, as well as the social representation given to the company through school education" (Murati, 2013). Thus, "the official registration of university orientation, through the training offers to which the discipline gives access and socio-professional orientation, constitutes a trace of the dual curricular change that is taking place [in the preamble to the 2010] curricula: a strengthening of the framing force of the logic of pure sciences and a more explicit institutional recognition of the market logic" (Murati, 2013).

## **6 IDEALS IN TENSION: INSTRUCTION OR EDUCATION FOR ...? FUTURE CITIZENS AND/OR WORKERS ...?**

Audigier, a French didactician of history, geography and citizenship education, recalls that "an essential component of the school has always been organized to train a worker and thus has given real importance to the company, for decades in the upper primary classes, then in technical and vocational education. This is complementary to the training of the citizen, affirmed throughout texts and declarations, as the primary purpose of the Republican School" (Audigier, 2018). For him, "citizenship education and entrepreneurship education could converge under the angle of a 'critical analysis' of the 'taking into account of relationships of domination and power" (Audigier, 2018), even if their concomitance reveals rather "tensions between action skills and critical skills, between more personal goals around action, initiative, participation, [...] and civic

and political goals around current societal choices and our common future" (Audigier, 2018). Historically, citizenship education introduced in secondary schools after the Second World War "has long included economic and social content, as a necessary introduction to the contemporary world." (Audigier, 2018)

Entrepreneurship education is an emerging subject of study in the educational sciences (Champy-Remoussenard, 2018), in particular micro-enterprises, especially studied between 2012 and 2014 by a multidisciplinary team in the Lille academy, where a partnership with an association and companies has been set up (Moussy-Remoussenard, 2018; Starck, 2018; Zaid, 2018). Coming from a US tradition dating back to the 1920s, the aim for their promoters is to bring an experiential dimension to economic learning, but also to renew pedagogical practices, to invest new prescriptions (like the professional discovery modules in *Troisième*), etc. Thus, there are "as many forms as there are situations and profiles of the teachers involved: a modality of entrepreneurship education, a content to be taught, a motivating teaching approach, a space for reinvesting students' learning, a remediation tool for students in difficulty, but also a new space for expressing a professionalism that has been called into question following a reform (case of technology in secondary schools)" (Zaid, 2018). The productive aims (linked to the partners' financial investments, participation in a competition), however, clash with the educational aims (emancipation through knowledge) of the educational institution: "such a mode of engagement radically questions the school project as if the 'enterprise' form were conceived by the actors as educational in itself, acting as a revealer of know-how and *savoir-être* already present in the student" (Starck, 2018), even if in other cases "teachers can identify and anticipate the knowledge necessary for the students' action" (Starck, 2018). "The ME [micro entreprise] does not give 'naturally' access to experiential learning, even if it forces a conventional gap to the academic form and a transmissive conception of knowledge." (Starck, 2018) Moreover, "this division of labor calls into question skills, professional identities and professionalization processes" under two scenarios: "One transforms the role, skills and activities of teachers and other staff of national education and higher education institutions, by making entrepreneurship education a new mission giving rise to legitimate and recognized activities. The other scenario, while giving a place to teachers, creates a new division of labor in which partners from schools and universities play an important, perhaps even major role in the implementation of the schemes, creating a specific sector in which the pilot may no longer be the state and in which teachers play a secondary role. The orientation towards one or the other of these scenarios depends on political will but also on the means made available to teachers to exercise their new practices. It also depends on the analyses that will be made of the impact of the practices already in place" (Moussy-Remoussenard, 2018).

This tension replays the older one that exists between general economic education that prepares students for further academic studies and the more professional approach of other fields, that is between economic and social sciences on the one side, other subjects, more associated with management on the other side (Legardez & Valente, 2009; Richit, 2012).

## **7 SES AND EMC: WHAT KINDS OF SUBJECT DIDACTICS?**

### **7.1 Economic and social sciences (SES): a long-lasting questioning**

This subject didactics has followed developments made in other subjects, with the introduction of different concepts and paradigms developed in other disciplinary fields (Beitone et al., 2013). The current research questions, also replaying an eventful half-century history, mainly concern three domains (Dollo, 2018). Firstly, the emphasis in the curricula on the unity of social sciences – with references to other disciplines such as anthropology, demography, history, law – is put on the balance of the epistemological, conceptual and methodological specificities of three

contributing academic disciplines (economics, sociology, political science; this perspective has been clearly affirmed in the 2010 curricula). Secondly, the issues related to the transition from "inductive methods" (official instructions of 1982) to more socio-constructivist approaches have led to focus on "mechanisms to lead to several contradictory explanatory hypotheses, some of which will be eliminated by using peer debate, by 'logical' arguments (and which will be considered as such by the students). To decide between the remaining ones, the teacher may have recourse to new knowledge (in particular through scientific texts)" (Dollo, 2018; the author illustrates this type of pedagogical approach by analyzing a class session on the construction of the notion of the active population by a trainee teacher and students in *Seconde*). Thirdly, scholars currently emphasize one of the obstacles to disciplinary learning, consisting in the necessary break with common sense, in a distance use of language for many notions in order to approach a scientific meaning (sometimes itself unstable in the context of multi-paradigmatic academic disciplines, as in the case of the market, studied in Blanchard & Jalégo, 2018).

## 7.2 Didactics of EMC: a new field of investigation

"There is a didactics of MCE [moral and civic education], we must know it" (Kahn, 2015): this statement by the chairman of the group of experts who supervised the writing of EMC curricula in force between 2015 and 2018-2020 highlights the construction of a possibly new disciplinary identity. It would be based on practices and mechanisms derived from so-called new pedagogies (student councils, for example) or from the much more established didactics of moral philosophy and citizenship as established in Wallonia for instance (philosophical discussions, moral dilemmas), which require teachers to work on an appropriation of disciplinary habits not related to the inherited teaching of history and geography (Husser, 2017a).

In the case of EMC, challenges addressed by educational scholars concern actually various dimensions (Ravels, 2018). First of all, its apprehension as a cross-curricular approach and its possible dilution in all disciplines and in all periods of school time (class life, school climate, therefore in French secondary schools with a higher involvement of the *Conseillers principaux d'éducation*; Condette, 2013) underlies the invisibility of the students' specific "disciplinary experience" regarding that subject (Reuter, 2016). Secondly, the articulation of the principles and aims of EMC with classroom practices (Bozec, 2016) and/or representative and/or participatory democracy practices at school level, may be viewed as contradictory. Thirdly, the civic aims navigate between national belonging and critical thinking, between socialization and emancipation (Bozec, 2014), for instance as it applies to the understanding of the notion of "values of the Republic" (Ozouf, 2015; Husser, 2017b).

## 8 Conclusion

In view of this kaleidoscopic reality of the supply of social science teaching, several research directions seem promising. One of them is to question to "what conceptions of economic and social life, of its individual and collective actors, of their relationships, etc.?" (Audigier, 2018) history-geography lessons contribute to and how students construct topics and notions such as the industrial revolution or globalization.

Another would call for further comparative studies of the temporalities, content and modalities of initial teacher training in the realm of social science education. Future school teachers may present a "moral and civic education" option during the oral admission procedure for a competition organized at the regional level (*académies*). Questions about EMC are asked during the oral examinations of the national competitions for the recruitment of secondary school teachers in history and geography. More academic content and testing (in form of *dissertations*) in economics, sociology, political science, law or management is awaited according to the recruitment competition procedures for SES, economics and law or economics and management teachers, both in writing and orally<sup>11</sup>. The new specialization subject law and major issues of the

contemporary world has been entrusted to teachers with a law degree or a diploma from a political science institute after an internal certification process.

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### Images:

Socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture: <https://www.pedagogie.ac-nantes.fr/socle-commun/informations/le-cadre-juridique-du-socle-635909.kjsp?RH=1384708991041>

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All French terms and quotations within this article have been translated into English by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> The concrete denomination of the subject changed regularly.

<sup>3</sup> The *Journée défense et citoyenneté (JDC)*, the day of citizenship and defense, is a one-day mandatory event in which students are informed about several issues concerning public life. An important part is the presentation of the military and career perspectives within it, but it also focusses on much more general topics such as first aid or literacy test. Every participant gets a certificate of participation, which is mandatory to take public exams (Administration française, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> There is no proper subject of social science education in preschool, but it is mentioned as a leading principle and as a first step towards the integration into the republican society: "The preschool (...) guarantees a first acquisition of the principles of living in a society and allows the child to construct itself as an individual person within a group" (MENJ, 2018). This is amongst other things achieved by putting a strong focus on the French language on the one hand, on the other also by teaching already fundamental democratic principles such as the equality of men and women.

- <sup>5</sup> The French education system is divided from age 6 to 16 into four different *cycles d'apprentissage* (learning cycles). The first one, the *cycle des apprentissages premiers* (first learning cycle) covers the *école maternelle* (preschool), the second one, the *cycle des apprentissages fondamentaux* (fundamental learning cycle) the first three years in the *école élémentaire* (elementary school), the third one, the *cycle de consolidation* (consolidation cycle) the last two years in the *école élémentaire* (elementary school) as well as the *Sixième* in the *collège* (first year in middle school), and the fourth one, the *cycle des approfondissements* (deepening cycle) the last three years in *college* (middle school).
- <sup>6</sup> A detailed description of the different steps of the teacher training in France can be read at <http://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/>, for a broader overview of the past teacher training refer to Grundig de Vasquez, 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> This scheme follows the "3-hour vocational discovery" and "6-hour vocational discovery" options introduced in 2005, targeting vulnerable students in order to prepare them for their orientation to a vocational school. For contents, see the "pedagogical guidelines for the teaching of the professional discovery module (six hours per week in Troisième)" (decree of 14.02.2005, BOEN n° 11,17.03.2005). A Troisième "prépa pro" had already been set up in 2012.
- <sup>8</sup> For a more detailed history of the aims, curricula and contents, and the variation of the weekly hours devoted of this discipline since its inception: Chatel, 2015; Beitone et al., 2013.
- <sup>9</sup> For a detailed comparison between social science textbooks in France and Germany see Straub, 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> The APSES, association of teachers of economic and social sciences, was founded in 1971. In 2019 it has 2093 members – about half of all SES' teachers. For a history of this organization and others (e.g. action-SES): Harlé/Lanéelle, 2015.
- <sup>11</sup> The Ministry of National Education makes regulation, programs of study for national competitions, exam topics and annual jury reports available in all disciplines on the website <http://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/>