

# Politische Bildung

## Citizenship Education in Germany from marginalization to new challenges

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- Analysis of different concepts and the basic principles of citizenship education in Germany
- Results fo a quality research on the constitutional status of citizenship education
- Deabte about citizenship education and neutrality
- Marginalization of citizenship education as a problem in schools
- Challenges for citizenship education: inclusion, partizipation, digitalization

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to describe the state of current citizenship education in Germany with the focus on education in schools. The term 'education' in this paper refers to the concept of Bildung. It not only describes how to teach, but also the ability of self-determination of the individual.

**Methodology:** The main focus of this article is to discuss the current state of citizenship education in Germany while taking into account various methodologies. Amongst these are findings of qualitative studies, which for example relate to the legal anchoring of citizenship education or to political action as a learning opportunity. In addition, a comprehensive analysis of the state-of-the-art research on the basic principles of citizenship education is provided. Finally, current challenges are discussed, taking into consideration existing socio-political discourses, such as the question of neutrality.

**Findings:** The article shows that the relevance of citizenship education is increasing, also in regard to current socio-political phenomena, such as the growth of right-wing populism and digitalization. At the same time, the results indicate that in various federal states the subject is marginalized and threatened by current debates about the alleged neutrality of citizenship education.

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is the only state-constituted social order that needs to be learned again and again. This applies not only to children but also to adolescents, young adults and elderly

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individuals (cf. Negt 2018, p. 21). Democracy has to be learned continuously. However, this does not imply accepting the existing political system with its current socio-political relations of power and authority. Instead, this understanding of citizenship education is based on the concept of maturity [Mündigkeit] of Theodor W. Adorno. He emphasized that the goal of education [Bildung] is maturity and does not stop at producing “well-adjusted people” (Adorno, 1971/1966, p. 109). Aiming for a mature citizen does not necessarily entail producing a politically active citizen. Although everyone is equally entitled to participate, it is up to the individual how they make use of it. However, his decision not only requires the right to participate but also the ability to participate. Hence, the German researcher Sibylle Reinhardt describes citizenship education as part of relevant general education which must not be characterised by *privater Beliebigkeit* (private arbitrariness) (Reinhardt, 2018, p. 16).

As a consequence, citizenship education is of prime importance in the German education system. Even though extracurricular citizenship education also plays a central role, this article will focus on school as a place of learning democracy (Kenner & Lange, 2019).

The second chapter will clarify the key terms. Here, citizenship education is classified in regard to the various fields of activity (school subject, the task of all school subjects, and school principle) (chapter 2). Then, current debates on the basic principles of successful citizenship education (chapter 3) will be summarized. Chapter 4 provides an outline of the significance of citizenship education in Germany in regard to its constitutional grounding. Subsequently, the current socio-politically virulent question will be raised: What Is Citizenship Education Allowed to Do? (chapter 5) Chapters one to five describe the necessity of good and comprehensive school-based citizenship education. Chapter 6 outlines the marginalization of citizenship education in the students' timetables based on the latest empirical findings concerning the significance of the subject. By way of example, the chapter also shows that citizenship education as a school subject in Germany is in constant competition with other novel subjects such as ethics and economics. Finally, current challenges for citizenship education in Germany are identified and reflected upon (chapter 7). The following questions are highlighted: “What demands are placed on inclusive citizenship education in the migration society?” (chapter 7.1), “To what extent can citizenship education take up political participation as a learning opportunity?”, also in regard to the growing youth movements (e.g. Fridays for Future) (chapter 7.2), and “How does citizenship education adapt to digital change?” (chapter 7.3).

To classify this country report, it is necessary to point out that in the Federal Republic of Germany, around 50 research institutions or chairs for *politische Bildung* (political education) are anchored at universities which is probably a unique characteristic throughout Europe. This field of research is heterogeneous and pursues different approaches. This article is mainly shaped by methodologies from *kritische politische Bildung* (critical political education, see chapter 3), the work at the *Institut für Didaktik der Demokratie* (Institute of Didactics of Democracy) and the Center for Inclusive Citizenship (CINC) both at Leibniz University of Hannover.

One of the challenges political educators are facing in Germany is the diversity of this discipline. A variety of terms and concepts circulate within the field of research and practice of citizenship education. Thus, an attempt will be made to outline three approaches that are currently discussed intensively.

## 2 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION – MANY CONCEPTS, ONE AIM?

Citizenship education describes an integrative process of education to maturity [Mündigkeit] which emanates from the subject and is based on basic democratic values such as freedom, equality, justice, and solidarity. In the academic discourse, various definitions and concepts in the field of citizenship education are continuously discussed controversially. This chapter will not focus on different terminology, but rather on different concepts that exist for achieving a

common educational goal. With *Politische Bildung* (Political Education) and *Demokratiepädagogik* (Democracy Pedagogy), two different approaches have been established in Germany (cf. Pohl, 2009), which differ particularly in regard to education in schools. In the following, an attempt will be made to unite these two controversial perspectives under the umbrella of citizenship education in an understanding of schools as places of Learning for Democracy (Kenner & Lange, 2019).

The point of reference for citizenship education is not only the existing democratic system, but the citizens' ability to see through the given order, standards and norms, to reflect, to change, to criticize, and to shape it in ways that they consider adequate. Therefore, citizenship education can not be affirmative - it inevitably has to be critical. (cf. *ibid*)

To achieve this goal, it is possible to rely on the basic principles, established through decades of research in the field of political education. For instance, in regard to develop knowledge, citizenship education takes up controversies surrounding basic/technical conceptions and misconceptions (e.g. Weißeno et al., 2010 & Autorengruppe Fachdidaktik, 2011). Citizenship education underlines the necessity of (social-scientific) analytical skills and the ability to critically reflect upon the power of judgment of a subject (cf. Autorengruppen Fachdidaktik 2016; Reinhardt 2018). Decision-making processes, as well as the role of political actors and political institutions, are continuously renegotiated and questioned in a democratic society. Based on empirical findings of political education, the following competencies can therefore be regarded as fundamental for understanding citizenship education in Germany: (1) Analysis and orientation, (2) judgment and (3) action.

Thus, the research on the didactics of political education emphasizes the role of critical education and includes injustices and contradictions of the society in the learning process. This is what citizenship education is built upon. Citizenship should not only be understood as the ascription of status but also as a (political) practice of inclusion and exclusion. Citizenship education therefore aims to also shape political learning processes in light of groups affected by exclusion (cf. Kleinschmidt, Kenner & Lange 2019).

In addition to the theoretical scope of reference of political education, representatives of democracy pedagogy (see also: Beutel & Fauser, 2007) stress the necessity of experiencing democracy in practice as early as possible. In order to anchor democratic basic values in as many pedagogical teaching-learning constellations as possible, a stronger orientation towards action and the necessity of making democracy a tangible experience are emphasized. In his work "Demokratie Lernen", Gerhard Himmelmann (2001) links discourses of democracy pedagogy and political didactics by integrating democracy as a form of rule, society, and life. One aim is to enable children and adolescents to experience self-responsibility and self-determination while supporting them in building personal and social skills.

Citizenship education tries to combine these two approaches and, taking the subject as a point of departure, to promote the individual's maturity. For this purpose, it relies on competency models developed in political education, which do not only underline analytical skills but also highlight the importance of a critically reflected judgment. This theoretical approach of citizenship education is complemented by the possibility of providing physical spaces of experience to enable political and democratic participation in schools and beyond. To act politically competent is therefore acquired in class, at school, and in the close environment.

In order to achieve this goal without overwhelming the learners, basic principles for citizenship education have been established. These basic principles of successful citizenship education as well as the discourse about their meaning and (mis)interpretation, are the focus of the following chapter.

### 3 THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND THE DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

In Germany, a common self-conception for school-based citizenship education has established itself in recent decades, which is based on the following three basic principles:

1. Überwältigungsverbot (Prohibition against Overwhelming)
2. Kontroversitätsgebot (Treating Controversial Subjects as Controversial)
3. Befähigung zur Selbstbestimmung (Giving Weight to the Personal Interests of Students)  
(cf. Wehling, 1977, p. 179f)

A detailed description of these three basic principles in several languages is presented on the homepage of the State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Württemberg (see sources). Today, these principles are referred to as the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" (Beutelsbacher Consensus), although this term is certainly worthy of discussion, given this "consensus" neither in its time of origin (1976/1977) nor today implies that it is an equally recognized approach in the field of citizenship education (cf. Widmaier & Zorn, 2016a). The history of the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" can be traced back to a time in which the Federal Republic of Germany was characterised by a "system-critical democratic awakening in society and politics" (Widmaier & Zorn 2016b, p. 9). The party-political controversy at the time also directly influenced the new school subject "politics". During this time, the State Agency for Political Education of Baden-Württemberg hosted a symposium to bring together representatives of this young research discipline and to discuss a possible minimum consensus for the work of citizenship education. A conference documentation by Hans-Georg Wehling resulted in the summary of the three central principles. The development process indicates that this alleged "consensus" was not a decision or a declaration supported by all participants. Nevertheless, the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" still plays a formative role in research and educational practice today and most of the educational schemes of the sixteen federal states refer to the three basic principles.

For the recent occasion of the 40th anniversary of the "Beutelsbacher Konsens", scientists and citizenship education trainers from school and out-of-school practices came together at the educational institution "Haus am Maiberg" in Heppenheim to discuss the question: "Do we need the Beutelsbacher Consensus?" This conference as well as essays in the anthology published on account of the conference, demonstrate that the three basic principles of the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" are not regarded as problematic by any of the participants. In fact, it is rather the indeterminacy of the three principles, leaving too much scope for interpretation and instrumentalization (cf. Geßner, Hoffmann, Lotz & Wohnig, 2016) that is criticized.

In addition to the fact that the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" focuses on school-based citizenship education and thus cannot provide principles for an entire profession (Eis, 2016, p. 132), Andreas Eis places emphasis on the risk which the indeterminacy of these three principles present. Eis argues that the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" in this form cannot constitute a "*professional self-understanding*" (ibid.; translated by the author; emphasized in the original), considering these three aspects are the premises for a democratic education and science system anyway (cf. ibid.). According to Bettina Lösch, the far-reaching indeterminacy of these three principles also lead to the issue of understanding judgment formation as a simple exchange of opinions. Indeed the competence to act, if at all, includes the competence to behave. Students should learn to behave democratically (cf. Lösch, 2019, p. 18).

Within the profession, there is growing consensus to further develop the requirements for successful citizenship education based on the "Beutelsbacher Konsens". In recent years, researchers and practitioners in the field of citizenship education have discussed if there is a need to advance the "Beutelsbacher Konsens". As a result a group of researchers expressed six central aspects, summarized in the "Frankfurt Declaration. For a Critical Emancipatory Political Education". This presents an attempt to counteract the vagueness of the "Beutelsbacher

Konsens" and to provide clarity around the principles of successful critical-emancipatory citizenship education. The Frankfurt Declaration lists six basic principles: crisis, controversy, criticism of power, reflexivity, empowerment, and changes (cf. Eis, Lösch, Schröder & Steffens 2016, p. 74f).

These six basic principles are described more detailed by the first signatories of the Frankfurt Declaration in the JSSE 1/2016. It is important to underline the dimension of reflexivity here. The authors draw attention to the fact that the ability to critically reflect on power relations may lead addressees of citizenship education (e.g. students) to reflect on the political learning process (e.g. on the school subject politics) and thus also on the role of political educators. The sixth principle follows the third principle of the "Beutelsbacher Konsens". However, the authors of the Frankfurt Declaration do not challenge the request that citizenship education should create spaces for real political action. This is what the declaration states:

"Political Education opens up spaces and experiences to all children, adolescents and adults through which they can appropriate politics as a social field of action. It enables learning processes of self-appropriation and adaptation to the world through confrontation with others to find ways not only to reproduce but also to change the existing order through individual and collective action. Political action gives rise to new possibilities of experience, of thinking, and of establishing (new) political alternatives." (ibid., p. 75)

This approach clearly contradicts previous notions of political education on political action in the context of public school instruction. Joachim Detjen (2012) states, for example, that the school is not a place to train real political action (Detjen, 2012, p. 235). That indicates that there is no agreement on the basic principles and objectives of successful citizenship education in Germany. However, agreement exists on the importance and necessity of citizenship education as an educational goal in formal and non-formal learning settings. Nonetheless, the legal ground is not clear on this matter. Hence, the following chapter will examine the extent to which the educational objective and the teaching subject are grounded in the state constitutions.

#### 4 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION WITH CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS

Due to its federal structure, education in Germany lies within the sovereignty of the 16 federal states. As a result, decisions on education policy are often regulated very differently, which also applies to citizenship education. However, the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states were able to agree on a joint declaration. This declaration states:

"Schools can and should prove to present places in which democracy is reflected and lived as a dynamic and permanent task - also in the tension between different democratic rights. The discussion of diversity and tolerance of ambiguity are fundamental prerequisites for a successful historical-political education in schools." (KMK, 2018, p. 2f, first: 2008, translated by the author)

In order to live up to this standard, all people in Germany should come into contact with citizenship education in formal, non-formal or informal settings in the course of their lives. This was ensured, among other things, by the grounding of citizenship education in the state constitutions. Joachim Detjen (2015), researcher in the field of political education, points out that with citizenship education and religion there are only two school subjects or central school tasks with constitutional status in Germany. In this context, it is particularly noteworthy to mention that religious education is embedded in the Grundgesetz (constitution). Article seven

(section 2) stipulates that parents may determine the participation of their child in religious education. The subject religion is an ordinary school subject at public schools, which is determined by Article seven (section 3) of the constitution. Therefore, the constitutional status and thus the protection against abolition is clearly evident for the subject of religion in Germany. Concerning citizenship education, this constitutional status is less clearly defined. Only in exceptional cases, a clear constitutional commitment to the subject is apparent. In most cases, the state constitutions formulate a general educational objective in the sense of citizenship education. Out of the 16 German federal states, citizenship education is fixed anchored as a teaching subject in only two. Although the subject names are different, the states of Baden-Württemberg (social studies) and North Rhine-Westphalia (civics) ensure citizenship education is not removed from the timetable. Moreover, citizenship education is not set as a clear educational goal in all federal states.

**Table 1:**

	federal states	CE as education aim with constitutional status	CE as school subject with constitutional status	CE in a broader sense with constitutional status	CE without constitutional status
1	Baden-Württemberg	•	Gemeinschaftskunde		
2	Bayern	•			
3	Berlin				•
4	Brandenburg	•			
5	Bremen	•			
6	Hamburg				•
7	Hessen	•			
8	Niedersachsen				•
9	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern			•	
10	Nordrhein-Westfalen	•	Staatsbürgerkunde		
11	Rheinland-Pfalz	•			
12	Saarland	•			
13	Sachsen	•			
14	Sachsen-Anhalt			•	
15	Schleswig-Holstein				•
16	Thüringen	•			

Ten federal states (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Saxony, and Thuringia), and thus less than two-thirds of all German states have defined citizenship education as a clear objective in the state constitution (see Table 1 - highlighted in green). However, for this study, citizenship education was more narrowly defined. Central concepts include education based on "democratic values and principles", education for "democratic attitudes and convictions", "rule of law", "respect the conviction and dignity of others" and many others.

In two federal states (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt), references to citizenship education in a broad sense can be identified (see Table 1 - highlighted in yellow). Here it becomes clear that citizenship education is not explicitly grounded in the sense of education for democracy, but refers to concepts such as "social responsibility", "tolerance" and "sense of community". In regard to social learning, these concepts can undoubtedly be understood as partial elements of citizenship education; however, a clear commitment to citizenship education in the sense of political learning, the recognition of human dignity and democratic conviction cannot be derived from these constitutions.

In four federal states (Berlin, Hamburg, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein), citizenship education is not anchored in constitutional law, neither as a teaching subject nor as a central educational goal or in a broader constitutional sense. Thus, citizenship education is not protected from abolition as a subject of instruction, as a school principle, and as an extra-curricular task. In a quarter of the German federal states, citizenship education cannot be assumed to have constitutional status. This analysis reveals the tension in which citizenship education finds itself in Germany. Education policymakers in all states emphasize the importance of citizenship education, yet the structural and legal framework conditions diverge.

Not mentioning citizenship education in the state constitution cannot be put on the same level as neglecting its educational goal. Lower Saxony, for example, places great value on citizenship education as a teaching subject (see also chapter 6: Citizenship education as a teaching subject).

Nevertheless, it is vital to deal with the constitutional anchoring of citizenship education in the Federal Republic of Germany. A right-wing populist movement has established itself in recent years. The so-called Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) (Alternative for Germany) constitutes a party that provides simple answers to complex questions and uses this populist strategy to undermine basic principles of multi-perspective and critical citizenship education. In May 2019, the right-wing populist AfD party presented a draft bill (printed matter 6/17601) to the Saxon parliament, which intends to completely prevent state funding of citizenship education in the state. It states:

It is forbidden to warrant grants from funds of the Free State of Saxony or its local authorities for purposes of state political opinion and will formation, democracy pedagogy or other forms of political education outside the legally regulated party financing. (Drucksache 6/17601 – p. 4, translated by the author)

Realising this would terminate decades of work of numerous non-formal political youth and adult education institutions. Fortunately, this proposal is very unlikely to be successful, not least because it requires a two-thirds majority to remove citizenship education as an educational goal from the Saxon constitution.

A lack of constitutional grounding does not necessarily lead to a marginalization of citizenship education, but it does present a risk. Citizenship education is an important task of all educational institutions and thus, must not be dependent on the benevolence of respective parties in power. The only way to prevent abolition of citizenship education is to firmly ground it in the state constitution. This applies in particular to Berlin, Hamburg, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. It is assumed that in coming years, a discourse on the anchoring of citizenship education in the state constitution will unfold in these federal states.

Both school-based and non-formal citizenship education have been repeatedly challenged in recent years. Instances to be pointed out in this context are the debates about an alleged requirement for neutrality in schools and the controversial influence of the Ministry of the Interior on the work of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (BpB) (Federal Agency for Civic Education). The latter regards citizenship education as one of their core tasks. The following chapter explains these attacks on citizenship education and elaborates the question of how political we should allow citizenship education to be.

Further information and more details on this topic have been published in a study that examined how citizenship education is anchored in the 16 state constitutions (cf. Kenner, 2020).

## 5 COMMITMENT TO NEUTRALITY? - WHAT IS CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION ALLOWED TO DO?

Apart from the goals and principles of citizenship education, it has been emphasized that all people are entitled to the inviolability of human dignity. The education ministers of all 16 federal states have committed to this principle in their resolution "Democracy as an aim, object and practice of historical-political education and upbringing in schools". They stress the value system conveyed by schools must correspond to the fundamental democratic and human rights and thus, must not be a value-neutral place. (cf. KMK, 2018, p. 3).

The extent to which institutions of citizenship education (e. g. schools) should maintain neutrality is controversially discussed in research and in practice. This question has become particularly relevant in recent years as right-wing populist tendencies have gained support throughout Germany. The AfD, a relatively new right-wing populist party that is now represented in all German state parliaments and represents the largest opposition force in the Bundestag, launched an online portal for "disagreeable" teachers. Some state associations, including that of Hamburg, published a reporting portal on which students and parents were to anonymously report on teachers who allegedly positioned themselves biased and critically towards the AfD. The AfD makes the demand for a neutral school and justified the necessity of the reporting portal with the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" (see chapter 3) and referred to the "Prohibition against Overwhelming the student" and "Treating Controversial Subjects as Controversial". These reporting portals, but particularly the call for anonymous denunciation, caused an outcry. Trade unions, interest groups of students, parents and teachers as well as politicians supported the denounced teachers and opposed the platforms. Three central associations of citizenship education in Germany, the *Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Bildung* (DVPB, German Association for Political/Civic Education), the *Gesellschaft für Politikdidaktik und politische Jugend- und Erwachsenenbildung* (GPJE, Society for Civic Education Didactics and Civic Youth and Adult Education), and the *Sektion Politische Bildung der Deutschen Vereinigung für Politikwissenschaft* (DVPW, German Political Science Association) published a joint declaration referring to the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" as:

"Its principles call for an objective examination of the positions represented in politics, science and the public. Neither the controversy imperative grounded there nor the equally treated prohibition of overwhelming the people justify a "neutrality" or even tolerance towards anti-democratic slogans or anti-human expressions." (DVPB, GPJE, DVPW, 2018, translated by the author)

The reporting platforms of the AfD triggered a crucial debate in the scientific community and society. How neutral should schools, teaching, and teachers be?

The group of authors, Autorengruppe Fachdidaktik, a team of eight researchers from the field of *politische Bildung* (political education) examined this problem in the light of the "Beutelsbacher Konsens". They emphasize that controversy in teaching needs to be ensured by standardised procedures and didactic methods (cf. Autorengruppe Fachdidaktik, 2016, p. 26f.). Different perspectives in teaching ought not to be constrained by taking on established positions, explains Andreas Eis. Rather, controversy must mean giving "excluded, disadvantaged and publicly invisible positions and groups a chance to be noticed in the first place and to be able to take part in collective disputes" (Eis, 2019, p. 9f., translated by the author). Sociologist Stefan Breuer positions himself even more strongly on the side of politicized teachers who are supposed to function as role models for democratic action. As a result, he considers complete neutrality to be



neither compatible with democratic values or school laws nor functional for political learning. Moreover, Breuer (2018) states that a completely neutral teacher is blind to the political in supposedly apolitical situations.

In a recent article, Sibylle Reinhardt points out that the reporting portals of the AfD undermine the rule of law. Reinhardt clarifies that teachers may indeed take a political stand, but should not elevate the very same to the given and right position. She concludes: "Citizen neutrality as an educational goal is suitable for authoritarian states, not for democracy" (Reinhardt, 2019, p. 15, translated by the author).

Neutrality is not an educational goal of school-based citizenship education. Expecting political neutrality from teachers contradicts the basic understanding of citizenship education in a free democracy. Moreover, it impugns the demands of education and school laws of many federal states, which define education for a democratic attitude as the school's mission. Successful educational work requires teachers to create a space, which is free of fear and enables complex topics to develop in a multi-perspective way while not overwhelming the students. However, these basic principles do not outlaw personal positioning. In fact, an open, fear-free learning space explicitly permits this.

In Germany, however, citizenship education has not only been at risk by growing right-wing populist tendencies. Two case studies in the field of extracurricular citizenship education has recently attracted attention. The cases deal with politicians exerting targeted influence on educational materials and events. The Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (BpB) (Federal Agency for Civic Education) presents an important actor in this field. This institution promotes pilot projects in the field of citizenship education, specialist conferences and networking events. It also organizes congresses, publishes scientifically relevant articles and educational materials. Financed by public funds, the BpB plays a key role in strengthening citizenship education in Germany. The BpB mostly acts independently, although the BpB is ultimately a subordinate authority within the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The BpB is controlled by a board of trustees consisting of 22 members of the German parliament. In recent decades, the BpB has succeeded in strengthening the role of citizenship education in Germany in a non-partisan and independent manner. However, in the past five years, the Federal Ministry of the Interior intervened the daily work of the BpB twice. In 2015, the Minister of the Interior at the time, Thomas de Maizière (CDU), urged the BpB to stop distributing its published book "Ökonomie und Gesellschaft" ("Economy and Society") which included materials for citizenship education inside and outside of schools. The materials highlight economic conditions in the Federal Republic of Germany from different perspectives and explicitly takes into account ways of exploitation through market-based dependencies. This obviously led to resentment from the employers' lobby association, because the decision to ban the book's distribution was preceded by a letter from Peter Clever (2015), Managing Director of the Federal Association of German Employers (BDA), to the Minister of the Interior. The fact that (a) the Federal Minister of the Interior exerted a direct influence on the publications of the BpB and (b) the representatives of economic interests influence these decisions caused great indignation. This direct influence by the ministry was picked up the media and a few months later, de Maizière withdrew his decision. The material continued to be distributed.

In 2019, another incident occurred in which the Federal Minister of the Interior directly influenced the work of the BpB. This time the incumbent Minister of the Interior Horst Seehofer (CSU) banned Philipp Ruch, a critical action artist from the "Zentrum für politische Schönheit" (Center for Political Beauty) to participate in the Federal Congress for Civic Education 2019, which is organized by the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (BpB), the Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Bildung (DVPB) and the Bundesausschuss Politische Bildung (bap). Philipp Ruch and the Center for Political Beauty are known for their polarizing art actions. In 2016, for instance, the collective organized the "Eating Refugees" campaign. They built up an arena with tigers in Berlin and announced they would feed some refugees to the tigers in order to make the political

decision-makers and the population aware of what happens when safe escape routes to Europe are blocked. One of the reasons behind this campaign was the deal between the European Union and Turkey to keep the war refugees in the region. The Federal Ministry of the Interior justified the canceled invitation of the artist Philipp Ruch by stating it did not want to influence an ongoing legal proceedings. Only weeks later it surfaced that the artists' collective had been under secret investigation for months. The investigations were initiated by the public prosecutor Martin Zschächner, who attracted attention in the past due to questionable legal decisions and his proximity to the right-wing populist AfD. He has repeatedly sued against mass instigation of the people dropped and has made monetary donations to the AfD (cf. Prantl, 2019). Although the lawsuit was discontinued, an abstract stigmatization of the collective's artists remain. Specifically, Philipp Ruch was deprived of the opportunity to engage in a critical discourse on his art at the Federal Congress for Civic Education. This process, and above all the influence of the Federal Ministry of the Interior on the BuKo program, is highly charged.

Yet, educational work in the field of citizenship education is not only endangered in an abstract way through debates about the supposed neutrality of schools. The school subject is still quite young and competes on the timetable with long-established subjects such as German language, mathematics, and history, but also with new subjects such as ethics and economics. The following chapter outlines the role of citizenship education in German schools.

## 6 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

Historically, citizenship education served to stabilize the existing political system and the power relations of the time until the mid 20th century (cf. Pohl, 2014, p. 186). Nowadays, controversial debates about the importance of institutional teaching still exist. However, there is broad agreement citizenship education should never be seen as an instrument for placing the existing political system, standards and norms in people's minds without reflecting on it. Yet, a great deal of scepticism about citizenship education as a subject always exists in parts of the population.

The situation of citizenship education in schools is characterized by plurality and a variety of different definitions. The KMK provides a framework for the implementation of citizenship education in the school context. However, the concrete implementation ultimately depends on the decision of the individual states and varies greatly (cf. Lutter, 2014, p. 127f.). Citizenship education is taught with many different notions in schools. The term "politics" is rarely used (cf. *ibid.*). Citizenship education is often taught in combination with other subjects such as economics, history, or geography, and it is not unusual for these classes to be taught by a teacher who did not study the subjects. Citizenship education seems to play a marginal role in schools. Reductions on the timetable are not uncommon. What is needed, however, is a firm anchoring of citizenship education "in the timetable of all types of schools - if only for the sake of the democratic mandate of political education in schools" (*ibid.*, p. 133, translated by the author). The importance of the school subject citizenship education is very controversial and varies not only significantly between federal states (cf. Gökbudak & Hedtke, 2018, p. 12). Two Bielefeld researchers, Mahir Gökbudak and Reinhold Hedtke, developed a ranking in order to assess the importance of the subject. Timetables only give an indication of the significance in theory. The reality does not envisage a consistent distribution of the given hours. In the end, it often depends on the sovereign decision of the school management (see *ibid.*). Problems depict high proportions of instruction by teachers without formal qualification, high frequency of class cancellations, and different timing as well as different content of citizenship education at German schools (cf. *ibid.*). In essence, timetables provide information about the significance of a subject in the school context and can thus be evaluated as an indicator (cf. *ibid.*, p. 13).

The proportion of citizenship education in the timetable of students throughout the course of their secondary level I is quite unevenly distributed in Germany. Bavaria, Thuringia, and Berlin are

lagging and offer young people only a very small proportion of school-based citizenship education. Bavaria takes the last place by far. Here, only about 0.8% of the learning time at secondary level I is available for citizenship education. The average learning time in high schools across the nation is 2.2%. With 3.9% of the learning time, Schleswig-Holstein provides its students with almost five times as much teaching time for citizenship education as the Bavarian school system. (cf. Gökbudak & Hedtke, 2019, p. 8)

Across federal states, there is strong variation in the importance of citizenship education in schools. Bavaria and Thuringia are at the bottom of the ranking, indicating that citizenship education is not very important in schools. In Bremen, Brandenburg, Lower Saxony, and North Rhine-Westphalia, an anchoring of citizenship education is well established (see Gökbudak & Hedtke, 2018). The ranking shows that the federal states are far from having a common vision. Three education-political “cultures” for anchoring citizenship education in schools were identified. For example, the culture of neglect can be found in Bavaria, where citizenship education is not assigned an important role in the school context. The culture of recognition can be found in Schleswig-Holstein, where political education plays an above-average role. The culture of mediocrity pays little attention to citizenship education and can be found, among other places, in Hamburg (cf. *ibid.*: p. 14). In general, the ranking provides an important insight into the significance of citizenship education in all federal states. It is undisputed, however, that citizenship education in practice looks different from what ministerial guidelines prescribe (cf. *ibid.*, p. 15).

In conclusion, the subject citizenship education plays only a marginal role with an average of 2.2% effective learning time in the secondary level I, although it is very differently structured across the 16 federal states. This is not least because citizenship education competes with new subjects in the humanities and social sciences. Some examples of the subjects include economics and ethics, which have moved onto the timetable of some students in Germany.

## 7 PRESENT-DAY CHALLENGES

Current major challenges for citizenship education are inclusion, participation and digitalisation. Conducting research in this field, the *Institut für Didaktik der Demokratie* (Institute of Didactics of Democracy) at Leibniz University of Hanover focuses on what is known as *Bürgerbewusstsein* [citizenship awareness] (Lange, 2008), „a subject-centred approach referring to individuals’ intuitive ideas about the social and political world.“ (Lange & Heldt, 2015, p. 4):

“The citizenship awareness approach calls into question any teaching that focuses upon the exhaustive coverage of citizenship education knowledge or normative dispositions that does not include the meaning it implicitly possesses for the learners. Instead, the approach sets out to propose an alternative to normative approaches of citizenship education that usually draw from liberal, republican and critical theories [...], by placing more of an obligation and value in individual meaningfulness. The citizenship awareness approach means putting the learner at the centre of the process. Elaborating on the assumptions that inform individuals’ mind-set and being able to discuss these will help students to truly understand citizenship issues, not just to learn to a specific end.” (*ibid.*)

In regard to conceptions of the political-social reality, there are a lot of studies in process and published in recent years e.g. about the citizenship awareness of young people referring to for example globalization (Fischer, Fischer, Kleinschmidt & Lange, 2014), right-wing radicalism (Fischer, 2013) and human rights (Heldt, 2018).

## 7.1 Inclusive Citizenship Education

For a long time, inclusion played a marginal role in the research of citizenship education. However, the term inclusion and the associated concepts imply far-reaching questions that also pose new challenges for citizenship education (cf. Dönges, Hilpert & Zurstrassen, 2015 and Hölz & Jahr, 2019). Inclusion, understood as the structuring of social processes, is a constantly changing process that citizenship education has to take into account in particular ways. Attempts to organize inclusive participation fail in many areas of society due to a lack of resources and options for action, but also due to unequally distributed competencies to act. The transformation process towards a migration society deserves special attention here.

“The strengthening of social cohesion, the participation of all members and the coexistence of different ethnic groups and cultures, especially in times of migration and other global interdependencies, are also a key task of schools.” (KMK, 2018, p. 2, translated by the author)

For citizenship education, it is necessary to refine the focus on practices of exclusion. A paradigm shift has to take place. In view of the increasing number of people with migration biographies, the heterogeneity of society must no longer be regarded as a problem. Instead, the focus should shift on ways to deal with it. Inclusive citizenship understands "exclusion as exclusion in society, not from society" (Kleinschmidt, Kenner & Lange, 2019, p. 410, translated by the author). Considering the challenges outlined here, it needs to be emphasized, that heterogeneity and diversity in educational contexts should not be perceived as a problem or danger for successful inclusive citizenship education. (see, among others, Autorengruppe Fachdidaktik, 2016, p. 69ff.) Nevertheless, there is still much to be done in this field in terms of research and educational practice.

## 7.2. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Participation of children and young people in the sense of social activity, both in school and in the extracurricular context, is highly appreciated. Programs to promote social commitment are booming. In recent years, these programs have been institutionalized in Germany through social internships at schools and voluntary services such as the Voluntary Social Year (FSJ) or the Voluntary Ecological Year (FÖJ). Children and adolescents, who get involved with the residents in retirement homes and organize games nights with them, students who organize cleaning activities in the schoolyard, young individuals who take on sponsorships for refugees - they all usually receive a lot of recognition for their activities.

Without attempting to demean this commitment, it has to be stated that it would be of great importance for citizenship education to carve out the political aspects of social commitment (Wohnig, 2018). This entails that in schools and non-formal educational settings, we address power and authority relations and look at questions of inclusion and exclusion not only from the perspective of the individual, i.e. not only ask what each individual can do, but also to what extent political and social structures have to be changed to further enhance coexistence. Citizenship education must not teach young people to take over tasks of the welfare state. Above all, it needs to support young people in the complex process of critical self- and world-appropriation. In short, young people can engage socially at any time, but they must also be able to identify the causes of social inequalities and be empowered to engage in socio-political change.

When children and adolescents become political, stand up for their interests or the interests of others, they quickly reach their limits. To stick to the above examples, young people who, after their social work in a retirement home, initiate a petition for more and better-paid carers are

regarded as bothersome. Similarly, the students who do not only want to collect garbage on the school grounds to protect the environment but also demonstrate for climate and environmental protection on the streets on Fridays are bothersome. And those young people who show solidarity with their classmate for whom they have taken over sponsorship, and try to prevent his impending deportation, are also bothersome. Children and young people whose participation does not end with social commitment are often confronted with the fact that adults, educators, and teachers deny them their rights to participate. School strikes are regarded as illegitimate and are sanctioned with disciplinary measures and plenary assemblies of students are prohibited.

Frank Nonnenmacher (2010, p. 477f) formulates three basic principles for political action as a learning occasion for citizenship education:

- Preliminary analysis on the topic
- Voluntariness as a precondition - taking into account the right not to participate in political action
- Establishing a democratic public as large as possible

Since 2016 there has been a model project of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (BpB) called "Political Participation as an Objective of Civic Education", which organizes action and reflection seminars with young people. The project is implemented at the educational institution "Haus am Maiberg" in Hessen under the direction of Alexander Mack. Besides, the model project will be evaluated by Alexander Wohnig. The first results of their work have already been published and show the potential of political action as a learning opportunity (Mack & Wohnig, 2019).

Research projects of this kind should continue, because citizenship education in Germany cannot avoid the embedding of political action as a learning experience. More and more young people in Germany organize and mobilize themselves and resist attempts to delegitimize and defame their protests (Eis, 2019). The systematic youth studies of recent years, such as the Shell Jugend Studie (Shell Youth Study, 2019), have already shown that the political interest of the younger generation is increasing (Albert et al., p. 48f). It is merely the interest in established political institutions and participation formats that has declined. Young people are looking for new forms of articulation. They organize and mobilize themselves via the internet. They campaign against the restriction of the free internet, for more climate protection, and against a restrictive asylum policy. Citizenship education has the chance to take up those needs of the young generation and to take their desire for participation seriously. This also applies to citizenship education at school and beyond. The competence to act, at least if it is to go beyond a simulated participation, is one of the greatest challenges of citizenship education (cf. Kenner, 2018). But citizenship education can no longer ignore the need of children and young people to develop their own formats of participation, while not omitting school as a central place of socialization. If schools want to be places of learning for democracy (Kenner & Lange, 2019), they also have to create free spaces for real political action. Here, for example, tried and tested procedures of action orientation (Reinhardt, 2018, p. 110 ff.) can be used.

As described above (see chapter 3), the "Beutelsbacher Konsens", frequently quoted again in recent months, emphasizes not only the ban on overwhelming people but also the principle of controversy. If we do not want to overwhelm children and young people, we have to support them in identifying their individual interests while teaching them not to ignore the interests of their fellow human beings. It is this principle of the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" that often goes unmentioned. Therefore, the "Frankfurt Declaration on Political Education" (see Chapter 4) is an important supplement. It concretizes the third basic principle. The authors of this declaration emphasize that children and young people must be empowered to reflect on experiences of power and powerlessness. To do this, they need to be allowed to have these experiences. Participation and particularly political action enable children and young people to show pathways

to self-determination and co-determination. Citizenship education can and must take up and accompany these learning causes and support young people in creating something new with their own actions.

The willingness of young people to participate and to exert political influence is uncomfortable and at the same time the greatest opportunity for a society facing major socio-political challenges. The young generation is making digital media, above all, available for their political protest. For example, the students of the "Fridays for Future" movement organize themselves via countless WhatsApp and Facebook groups, mobilize via Instagram and other social networks. The following chapter is dedicated to the opportunities and dangers of digital media between self-determination and heteronomy.

### 7.3 Digital Citizenship Education

Technologies such as computers, the internet and smartphones have become indispensable. They accompany us in our everyday lives and create new communication channels. But they also have the potential for constant monitoring and manipulation. In recent years, media such as Facebook, Twitter, and various other virtual communication platforms have emerged as central places for social communication. This change in the way of communication affects all generations. However, access to these media is still unequally distributed. Linked to this, the concept of "digital gaps" has established itself in research. (cf. Kenner & Lange, 2018)

Digitalization presents citizenship education with new challenges. However, literature and research on political education still deal with this field to a marginal extent. It is high time to discuss both the inclusive and exclusive aspects of digitalization. The KMK emphasizes the special importance of citizenship education in the course of digitalization (KMK, 2018, p. 3).

The critical media competence includes the confrontation with power and authority relations and their shifts due to digitalization. People today must be able to recognize how power relations are represented in the digital world - whether through the shift of economic structures (e.g. advertising) and/or political activities (e.g. election campaigns). Digital citizenship education links the issue of "power" to knowledge hierarchies and access to information. In the course of digital citizenship education, children and adolescents should acquire competencies that are necessary for learning and active participation within a digital society. However, these do not necessarily differ from the basic competencies of citizenship education.

- Technical skills as a prerequisite for the reflective use of digital media
- Digital analysis competences to move in the new political spheres
- Digital evaluation skills to be able to critically reflect on changed relations between public and private and the new constellations of power and authority
- Digital participation skills to articulate and represent the own interests

These competencies are intended to ensure that all people can live out and defend their democratic rights on the Internet and comply with their democratic obligations even in the digital age.

To sum up, digitalization can have a positive impact on the democratization processes of our time. This requires a digital citizenship education that teaches people technical skills, enables them to deal competently with digital media and allows them to develop a critically reflected awareness of democracy. To achieve this, citizenship education is needed. Moreover, analytical skills that adapt to the new conditions are necessary. As a consequence, in a source analysis, not only the author, place and year of publication are asked, but also whether the source was deliberately selected or suggested by algorithms. With citizenship education, we must enable people to recognize and question technical framework conditions and to develop a digital understanding of themselves and the world. Digital media offer the opportunity to create diverse

learning environments that open up an interactive and multi-perspective exchange about political and social problems. An advancing digitalization of knowledge and increased integration into our (educational) everyday life must always be critically reflected. Just like other central themes of our time, digitalization is a topic that has to be addressed in the context of citizenship education.

## 8 PERSPECTIVES OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN GERMANY

Whenever discourses shift in society, as it can currently be observed with the right-wing populist currents and nationalist tendencies, many people call for citizenship education. However, neither can citizenship education only consist of socio-political interventions, nor can it meet the expectations associated with them. This, in turn, leads to a call for abolition due to its supposed uselessness. Citizenship education must not be dependent on current social moods or changing government majorities. Citizenship education should at least be grounded as an educational goal in all state constitutions (chapter 4) and should gain in importance on the timetables (chapter 6). Nevertheless, above all, citizenship education has to consider current socio-political challenges. Primarily, the question of how we deal with the demands of our young generation to participate in political life, to shape it, and to change it (chapter 7.2) has to be included. Citizenship education, which is future- and development-oriented and which not only follows the abstract goal of political maturity, but also specifically aims at enabling young people to question power and authority (chapter 3), has to create spaces for this. This also applies to political actions, e.g. in the context of the international youth movement Fridays for Future.

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