

Civic Education in the Context of the Challenge of Climate Change

SLAVOMÍR LESŇÁK[✉] and RADIM ŠTĚRBA[✉]

Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

Abstract: The article presents the challenges of civic education and a civic upbringing in the era of the transforming of society in response to climate change. These challenges include not only support for mitigation and adaptation measures but also support for maintaining or deepening democratic processes and institutions. Following the UNESCO call for educational transformation (2021), responsible civic education was defined as education that leads students to support pro-climate measures (a shared truth and a vision of the future) but also to embrace democratic civil attitudes. According to UNESCO, education should lead to peaceful activism that criticises and confronts the power structures that disrupt or prevent shared truths about a possible future. The authors therefore describe the transformations in civil disobedience (CD) and theoretical reflections on CD that appreciate its importance and potential for promoting pro-climatic measures. They also present other civil approaches and examples of addressing the climate crisis, specifically examining the democratic limits and positive aspects of the concepts of environmental and ecological citizenship, deliberative democracy, and eco-modernism. They then present the concepts of civic education and offer answers to the question of what parameters responsible civic education should meet. First, they show the current interdependence between the subject of civic education and climate change. They then present Westheimer's models of civic education in relation to sustainability and the deepening of democratic processes. Here, the model of a justice-oriented citizen is presented in relation to the concept of responsible citizenship, where responsibility is extended to that of taking action for the benefit of society as a whole.

Keywords: civic education, climate change education, mitigation, adaptation, civil disobedience, responsible citizenship

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Efforts to prevent the planet from warming by more than 1.5–2°C by reducing CO₂ emissions and achieving carbon neutrality (the EU by 2050, China by 2060) are accompanied by economic and technological challenges that are addressed in political processes in either democratic or authoritarian ways depending on the regime in which they are implemented. The states of the 'Western' world, to

✉ Slavomír Lesňák: lesnak@ped.muni.cz, Radim Štěrba: sterba@ped.muni.cz

which the Central European countries also subscribe, prefer social and economic transformation in accordance with the values they have been adhering to for decades (democratic mechanisms enshrined in constitutions, human rights, accepting responsibility for inherited cultural and natural heritage in cooperation with the family of other nations in the world) [see the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012, etc.)].

The ongoing changes in the climate are affecting societies around the world, and their mitigation and adaptation are common goals set out in agreements reached between states at several climate conferences (mainly Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Kyoto in 1997, and Paris in 2015). We could say that this is a new social contract for the future, which considers education on (in)justice and the future as a common good. The UNESCO report *Reimagining Our Futures Together* defined among the new challenges for education the need to overcome the old forms and approaches to education leading to fragmentation into subjects and disciplines, but also the paradigm of competition in favour of solidarity and working towards a common future (2021). Curricula should be transformed in a direction where the acquisition of knowledge is seen as part of the common heritage of humanity and the collective creation of new knowledge and new possible futures. The authors of the report call for changes in education with an emphasis on the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic well-being with the non-human world, with an emphasis on communities and marginalised groups of the poor, women, and minorities, who are the ones who most feel (will feel) the consequences of climate change, and finally an emphasis on literacy as a tool for combating disinformation based on accurate knowledge and democratic participation in shared truths. The last-mentioned requirement involves ensuring further respect for inalienable human rights and authentic (local) ways of revealing, criticising, and confronting the power structures that suppress them and other diverse groups (based on gender, race, indigenous identity, language, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.). The transformation of education should be reconfigured to increase pupils' attachment to the future by strengthening the relationship between teachers and pupils in the spirit of care and trust in all its architectural, procedural, and content breadth (UNESCO, 2021). It is in this context of transformative challenges that our study focuses on examining specific forms of civic engagement and identifying parameters and methods of civic education that can support these systemic changes.

The state of research on civic and climate education

Over the last six years, researchers have recorded the following obstacles to effective education on climate change in the context of civic education: the persistence of hierarchical education (Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020), the institutional limitations of curricula and the institutional affiliation of teachers (Ardoin et al., 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2024; Trott et al., 2023), field isolation (Kranz et al., 2022), the dominant position of the natural sciences in environ-

mental/climate education (Aeschbach et al., 2025; Arbués et al., 2025), the inadequate content of textbooks (Radzi et al., 2022), the lack of readiness among teachers (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Radzi et al., 2022; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020), the poor effectiveness of assessment tools in education (Adamou et al., 2021; Aeschbach et al., 2025; Arbués et al., 2025; Ballard et al., 2024; Hadjichambis et al., 2022), the attempt to change attitudes through a fear of catastrophe (Jorgenson et al., 2019; Kranz et al., 2022; Monroe et al., 2019; Trott et al., 2023), the detachment of schools from reality (schools and teachers do not represent the best interests of the young generation) (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Kranz et al., 2022; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020; Trott et al., 2023), and the lack of discourse on social, environmental, (Hadjichambis et al., 2022), climate (Kranz et al., 2022; Muccione et al., 2025), or intergenerational justice (Trott et al., 2023).

A number of studies have drawn attention to the focus of education on changing pupils' attitudes in their private life (the reduction of consumption, individual responsibility) instead of focusing on supporting collective political and civic activities aimed at systemic political and economic changes (Jorgenson et al., 2019; Kranz et al., 2022; Monroe et al., 2019; Muccione et al., 2025; Nepraš et al., 2022; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020). It is this last observation that we have identified as a gap in research and an important challenge of civic education: exploring the possibilities of moving from privatised behaviour to political and collective competence so that students are supported in engaging in the public sphere (mainly Jorgenson et al., 2019; Kranz et al., 2022); making education transformative (Adamou et al., 2021); and helping future and current citizens to become agents of change (Adamou et al., 2021; Hadjichambis et al., 2022; Nepraš et al., 2022) who have 'transformative competence', understood as knowledge of transformative action (Adamou et al., 2021), transformative social participation (Arbués et al., 2025), and political and social action readiness (Muccione et al., 2025; Tian et al., 2024).

Although climate, environmental, and ESD education is currently massively and intensively implemented, it is still not sufficiently effective in terms of systemic social transformation, except for the pre-climatic private life attitudes of citizens. Moreover, according to studies around the world, research is concentrated in Western and mainly English-speaking countries (Nepraš et al., 2022). The authors Kranz et al. (2022) and Trott et al. (2023) state that since formal education is not sufficient for effective transformation, which requires collective civic action, students must look on the go for modes of transformative actions themselves (and they even have to unlearn already established patterns of behaviour). But which transformative actions are responsible and which are counterproductive? Civic education researchers (Levy et al., 2023) prefer the so-called political engagement of enlightenment, which will lead to the transformation of a society based on knowledge and democratic principles.

In the following text, we therefore consider it important to clarify the benefits and risks of individual forms of civic engagement within civic education (both because of UNESCO's insistence on the importance of confronting power

structures, and because of the absence of collective civic actions in the educational content of climate and civic education), and to support the discussion of questions about the social responsibility of political-civic collective involvement (in this way, we will also support the introduction of new contexts into the discussion of a false myth – that education is a neutral political space) (Wilson et al., 2019).

Methodology

This study is methodologically designed as a qualitative theoretical analysis that combines a systematic review of the literature with a critical-philosophical examination.

To assess the current state of research, the authors searched for publications in the indexed WoS and Scopus databases based on keywords (climate change and education, climate change and civic education, climate education). This literature review was then verified and supplemented using the academic AI tool *elicit.com*. The selection of articles was narrowed down based on other keywords (responsible citizenship, civic engagement). The authors only drew on articles written in the English language.

We selected studies that used a variety of methodologies (big data, mixed system, narrative and synthesis overviews). This inclusive approach was chosen to strengthen the analytical depth of our overview by integrating diverse research perspectives.

Through our review of articles mapping climate and civic education, we identified a research gap. This gap relates to the repeated recommendations and summaries on climate education and the lack of a political dimension in this education in terms of supporting collective systemic social change in education (Jorgenson et al., 2019; Kranz et al., 2022; Trott et al., 2023). This article aims to partially fill the research gap by offering a theoretical review of political philosophy, ethics, and didactics of civic education from an interdisciplinary perspective. To achieve this, we address two research questions: (RQ1) Which forms of civic engagement enable a systemic transformation that is responsible for the future, while weighing the risks posed to democracy? (RQ2) What parameters and methods of civic education support such responsible transformation?

We take seriously the challenge of a team of authors who despair that civic education does not address what the young generation of citizens needs: to examine and identify responsible collective action, and to name and identify its risks and advantages at a time when time is scarce (Trott et al., 2023). This research concerns not just formal civic education for the young generation of citizens, but also the creation of helpful content for the civic education of older adults who are equally affected by collective actions. We are aware that our theoretical work will not fill the gap completely, but we see it as the beginning of the next necessary investigation.

The article employs the method of normative reconstruction (Honneth, 2018) to examine the challenges facing civic education in the 21st century. The authors highlight the contrast between the international goals of social transformation set in response to the climate crisis (interstate climate conferences and treaties) and established democratic ideals (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2012), on the one hand, and the reality of insufficient political and economic transformation, on the other. The paper then presents and critically examines the institutions of citizenship and civic education and their potential for realising shared values.

In the first part of the text, we deal with ecological, environmental, and climatic civic activism as the aforementioned act of confronting power structures that insufficiently implement adaptation and mitigation measures. We mainly work with the example of transformations and theoretical reflections on civil disobedience (CD), which is significantly on the rise. In the second part of the article, we deal with the issue of education for responsible citizenship, which we perceive not only as teaching soft civil competences, but also as an aid in obtaining information (about shared truths), in their independent and cooperative verification, in appreciating their varied importance, and, finally, in their enforcement.

Civic activism is necessary now – after the outbreak of the catastrophe, there will be no time for justice

In his book *Climate Change as Political Catastrophe: Before Collapse* (2024), political philosopher Ross Mittiga describes the research of the Ik tribe in northern Uganda, whose members experienced drought and famine in 1965–1966. Mittiga presents the retreat of social ties or the loss of solidarity as an example of the consequence of extreme conditions, which he likens to a return to the Hobbesian original state, when the war of all against all was raging. Political earthquakes or disasters resulting from drought, crop failure, and high food prices are a demonstration of what the world can expect if the climate crisis does not slow down. Once moral inhibitions are lost as a result of the catastrophe, the above-mentioned Hobbesian scenario concerning conflicts over limited water and food resources may occur. A significant assumption is that in the future society discussions on justice will be put aside because of the time pressure. Therefore, the time for these discussions and implementing justice is right now, as today's actions may be (un)fair, depending on whether or not they lead to a future state of emergency (Mittiga, 2024).

Although states and their political representatives have pledged to reduce emissions several times since 1992, emissions have, on the contrary, increased even more. According to Mittiga, this means that we cannot rely on the ideals of justice but must turn to the non-ideals of necessity. Inaction is often rationalised through appeals to justice, the need for economic growth, or the fact that people will be significantly richer in the future and will have better technologies at their disposal (Mittiga, 2024).

Changes concerning the climate are irreversible, and better technology may not help future generations. In the event of such a catastrophe, discussing justice in the future might no longer make sense. The requirement to act as fairly as possible is what is important. One of the tools for doing so is to declare a state of emergency (which, however, poses a risk in the form of curtailing democracy). It is imperative to create barriers to possible abuses of this in the direction of authoritarianism (Mittiga, 2024).

Disaster prevention by civil and non-civil disobedience

Another tool is the use of CD in its traditional and new forms. Citizens articulating concerns about the future (about future generations and living in areas affected by climate change, where the effects are most felt by the poor, the elderly, women, or other groups of people dependent on their care; Lee 2017) and about the stability of the planet and other living beings (mass extinction) come together in pressure groups that engage in CD.

According to Arendt, CD arises

when a significant number of citizens become convinced that either the normal procedures leading to change do not work and their complaints will not be heard or will not be acted on, or that the government is preparing for a certain change, for which it has adopted and continues to promote ways of acting which can be seriously doubted from legal and constitutional point of view (Arendt, 2024, p. 71).

Although disobedient individuals (or groups) seem at first glance to be acting in disagreement or contradiction with the majority, in fact (maybe) they are acting consciously in its interest. One of the signs of this CD, after the expression of disagreement with and defiance of the established authorities, is the acceptance of punishment that both 'confirms' respect for and submission to the whole, arouses public sympathy for the martyr's act, and can motivate other citizens to promote solidarity and, ultimately, to change the unjust law against which disobedience was directed (Arendt, 2024, pp. 72–73; Hanyš, 2016). The directness of CD as a principle for communicating the goals of public disobedience is also emphasised by Michael Walzer: it should be public, as the goal is to reform an unsatisfactory public law (as opposed to disobedience on the basis of conscientious objection) (see also Bulman-Pozen & Pozen, 2015; Walzer, 1967).

According to J. Rawls, the publicness of the act of CD is important, as well as its non-violence and awareness that the intention is to change laws or government policy. However, this emphasises the contractual basis of CD: appealing to the majority through disobedience while respecting the principles of justice, which allows cooperation between free and equal people (Rawls, 1995). It is about referring to the principles on which the state's laws and institutions are based and about the intention to harmonise laws in the spirit of its original starting points. It is not about referring to the personal morality of the actors, but to political princi-

ples, especially to 'the generally shared concept of justice, on which the political order of society is based' (Rawls, 1995, p. 217).

An interesting and useful aspect of Rawls' understanding of CD in the context of the climate crisis is his reflection on the rejection of conscription (military service) in the event of an unjust war (if war is not conducted properly, it leads to human rights violations or unreasonable interference in the internal affairs of another state, thereby leading to mutual inequality). International law (e.g. agreements and treaties) is a social contract and since an unjust war is inconsistent with it, disobedience in refusing conscription is just. International obligations related to climate are also a form of social contract (treaties), so their violation can be seen as analogical to an unfair war (leading, e.g., to human rights violations, direct or indirect interference in the affairs of other states, etc.). This means that CD can concern both the internal law of states and the non-fulfilment of its international obligations, which is actually currently happening. But what if society is not dominated by a shared sense of justice? What if the majority does not care about/see the inconsistency between the ideological vision of laws and international agreements and the real (in)action of the state? In such a case, according to Rawls, engaging in transparent public CD in order to appeal to the majority makes no sense: 'We must therefore recognize that justifiable civil disobedience is usually only a reasonable and effective form of dissent if society is largely dominated by a sense of justice' (Rawls, 1995, p. 228).¹

Given that the appeal to CD did not fulfil its function, since the 1970s the justification(s) for CD has/have undergone further development. Gradually, the insistence on punishment has been abandoned (Delmas & Brownlee, 2024; Lefkowitz, 2007), violence against property is now also not always considered violence (Mittiga, 2024), and the effect of nonviolence is also compared and questioned (violence sometimes causes less damage) (Bulman-Pozen & Pozen, 2015). CD that tries to prevent future suffering or current climate damage instead of communicating the significance of change is referred to by theoreticians as non-communicative disobedience or impolite disobedience (Delmas & Brownlee, 2024; Lai, 2019; McKinnon, 2022; Mittiga, 2024).

Disobedience focused on 'performance' instead of communication is termed preventive disobedience by Mittiga, as it is primarily about preventing future damage. Activists do not always seek to avoid prosecution, because they hope that the courts will recognise their arguments about the need for intervention

¹ If we return to our main question in the first part of the article – what is responsible citizenship in a time of responsible transformation? – we can see that in both Arendt and Rawls civil disobedience leads to an improvement in the laws of a democratic state. However, at the same time both (Arendt and Rawls) outline the affection that the persons engaged in disobedience have for their vision of change – ideas that inspire democratic laws, the spirit of laws, the spirit of justice. This is the ambivalence between the ideal, desired vision of the state and the legislation and practices of the state in reality, the transgression of which is justified if the aim is to achieve that vision, but without seeking to fundamentally or permanently undermine democracy or the social contract.

and thus create a legal precedent for preventive disobedience. The disobedient do not deny the communicative function of their action, but it is not their primary goal. They are no longer interested in gaining public sympathy, but in changing the laws, and for this reason they may even be displeased if they do not end up in court (Kyllonen, 2014; Mittiga, 2024). Climate organisations promote this argument for the legal defence of activists in guidelines on their websites, and they also justify it by the fact that the laws have changed little in a decade and that voting in democracy has not helped, so they need to approach the defence of the planet directly and try to change the laws in this way (Lesňák, 2023).

Mittiga (2024) does not favour CD as the main tool for achieving change, but recognises its positive effects (a non-zero power preventive effect – preventing specific damage; getting closer to the goal of climate justice and neutrality; achieving social turnover; psychological effects – maintaining hope/faith for change, etc.).

According to Candide Delmas, it is necessary to rethink traditional concepts of CD, as they fail to encompass many historical forms of disobedience that have proven beneficial (such as the suffragettes in Britain, whistleblowing, street campaigns, graffiti, vigilant self-defence, violence against property, and hacking). Traditional definitions typically require public conduct, subordination to the law, the acceptance of punishment, and non-violence; when these criteria for defining CD are not met, activists are often criminalised or simply labelled immoral (Delmas, 2020). If CD outside its traditional forms disrupts civil coexistence, it is, according to Delmas, a symptom of the problem rather than its source. The problem, conversely, can sometimes lie in obedience itself, which allows the continuation of an unjust state (persistent obedience to injustice can also have a distorting effect on the emotional and rational elements of the personality of the obedient) (Lai, 2019). The motive to fight injustice through illegal forms of resistance or to show solidarity with those affected by injustice forms the moral and political principle and essence of so-called principled disobedience. To act is even considered a duty. To maintain one's own dignity and to express support and assistance to those in need is also at stake. (Delmas, 2018; see also Sutor, 1996). Principal disobedience does not have to be civil if it violates traditional notions of decency or politeness (Delmas, 2018).

Another form of non-civil disobedience is non-civil obedience, where activists demonstrate the senselessness of a law by strictly adhering to it (so-called subversive legalism). An example of this is when a group of California drivers in 1993 strictly adhered to the exact speed limit on the highway to show its contentiousness (Bulman-Pozen & Pozen, 2015). While CD (generally) leads to an apparent violation of the law, non-citizen obedience leads to an apparent hyperbolic compliance with it. Both, however, demonstrate the intention to change the law. While the disobedient citizens tend to be polite in order to win the sympathy of the public, the obedient but non-civil citizens tend to provoke and disrupt conventions through legal formalism, thereby outraging the rest of the public. While non-civil obedience can go unpunished if it is 'not violating' public law, it is punishable when it violates private law (e.g. strict adherence to the instructions of a supervisor at work can also lead to termination) (Bulman-Pozen & Pozen, 2015).

In the literature, we can also find a definition and description of digital disobedience, which involves the creation of a free Internet, hacking, DDoS attacks, digitally sharing images of police brutality, crowdfunding for jailed disobedience activists, file sharing in opposition to copyright restrictions, the creation of open-source software, protesting the digital trail by investing assets in decentralised cryptocurrencies, etc. (Delmas & Brownlee, 2024). We can also observe calls for disobedience in the sphere of employment (e.g. digital design creators and programmers who could be involved in controversial projects to develop weapons, transfer stereotypes to applications, etc.) (Bowles, 2021).

Democratic and non-democratic approaches to solving and rejecting the climate crisis

In its traditional, but mainly performance-based – preventive or principled – non-civic form, CD raises concerns regarding the risk of civic activism violating the law from the point of view of equality (e.g. the moral superiority of the motive over the law, which in some cases is difficult to discuss due to the biocentric setting of activists), in terms of the risk of activism escalating into violence (due to unprofessional state intervention or clashes with interest groups that fear decarbonisation), or in terms of the fear of a more permanent weakening of the rule of law or even democratic structures (Brisbois-Cantoni, 2025). These are also reasons why it could be a beneficial (or ideally a natural) part of responsible citizenship to verify the legitimacy of disobedience (or other civil activities) by considering various ethical aspects, such as the consequentialist aspect (considering the consequences – social, the degree of environmental damage, or the degree to which they have a preventive effect), deontological (considering the prevention of human rights restrictions, considering the issue of the legitimacy of disobedience when the result is ineffective), and from the point of view of the ethics of virtue (creating patterns for possible imitation by sympathisers, etc.) (Bassham, 2020). Ethical tools to help with decision-making are used and developed in the professional ethics of professions with a high degree of autonomy (teachers, doctors, managers, etc.) and could undoubtedly be a good civil tool to prevent the distortion of democracy or other counterproductive consequences (Lesňák, 2023). This, however, requires a certain knowledge and skill, which make it a suitable example of civic education for responsible citizenship, which we deal with in the second part of the text.

Divisions in society over concerns about the scale, speed, or sufficiency of its transformation due to the climate crisis may lead to a democratic or even authoritarian solutions from both sides of the issue (authoritarian tendencies on both sides may even be relevant in the present day: the opponents of action on climate change are often on the side of the disinformation scene and populism; supporters, in turn, articulate the fear of a lack of time for a democratic solution to the crisis). While green political parties (with an anthropocentric approach to the world) operating in liberal-democratic regimes (UK, Germany) believe that the

transformation of society can still take place within the established institutional framework and its improvements, radicals, who are often inclined towards an eco-centric view of the world, operate outside the established institutions (for example, the Extinction Rebellion movement, Fridays for Future, etc.) and strive for the abolition or deep transformation of these institutions (radicals often espouse the ideas of A. Leopold's eco-centrism or A. Naess's deep ecology, who demanded a change in the political and economic system of society in accordance with the recognition of the intrinsic values of non-human beings) (McKinnon, 2022).

Democratically-oriented theorists see the climate crisis as an opportunity to improve democracy, e.g. through deliberative processes. These are more inclusive than the aggregative form of democracy, as they allow for more local contexts to be introduced into politics. Another advantage of the communication of engaged citizens with experts is the prevention and resilience of citizens against the manipulation of elites seemingly declaring their proposals as green or democratic. An example of deliberative efforts is, for example, organising the so-called days of the future, where citizens can discuss their visions (intergenerational justice, achieving a global constitutional convention, etc.) (McKinnon, 2022). Critics of ecological deliberative democracy draw attention to the importance of the design of deliberation, the difficulty of the communication process, ethical-psychological aspects (it requires the virtue of prudence and respect among citizens), the problem of excessive individualism, the political apathy of citizens, and the potentially undemocratic nature of the system (e.g. participation in the mini-public is closed to the general public, fear of manipulation by elites, etc.) (Jacquet, 2017; Lepori, 2019). There are also reservations concerning participatory civil processes (the interests of participants are not always in line with environmental protection) (Pickering et al., 2020).

Research has shown that democratic approaches to solving the environmental and climate crisis help to protect the environment more than non-democratic and authoritarian ones (democracies with a higher quality of democracy, e.g. with less corruption, also show better results in protecting the environment than those with a lower quality of democracy). Pickering et al. also observe positive environmental effects on public participation, the participation of non-governmental organisations, and the introduction of environmental rights into the constitutions and laws of states (New Zealand, Bolivia, Belize, India, etc.) (Pickering et al., 2020; Vomáčka, 2015). Populist departures from pro-environmental and pro-ecological policies in the United States (under D. Trump) and Brazil (under J. Bolsonaro) in connection with questioning multilateralism and democratic institutions appear to be a symptom of a dysfunctional democracy rather than a product of democratic processes (Pickering et al., 2020).

Whether in a deliberative democracy or in its more classical forms, the transformation of society as a result of climate change cannot avoid relying on science and experts who reach conclusions on the basis of professional, customary, and recognised methodological procedures in individual fields. The importance of professionalism was demonstrated in contrast to disinformation and populism at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it is also commonly apparent in the en-

forcement of pro-climate measures. Reliance on experts, on the other hand, can also undermine democratic legitimacy by (seemingly) devaluing citizens' knowledge and experience in examining and questioning the values on which experts' claims are based (Pickering et al., 2020). The diversity of experts and the multitude of disciplines that are required for the development of adaptation and mitigation measures show that there are multiple value approaches and that they can be more or less in line with democratic values, whether or not they correspond to the lessons learned from the tragic experiences of the 20th century (adherents of eco-modernism who rely on crisis management and use advanced Western technologies and seek to address the crisis through universalizing abstractions, i.e. detached from actual social systems and identities; adherents of non-growth with anti-colonial attitudes who respect the diversity of eco-social worlds and non-human beings; adherents of green capitalism who embrace the ideal of homo economicus and aim for further economic growth, etc.) (Librová, 2016; McKinnon, 2022; Paulson, 2024). Civic education also proves to be important for these issues as it provides individuals with knowledge (human experience with the ideologies of the 20th century, the history and consequences of colonialism), skills (acquiring the higher cognitive skills required to evaluate a situation), postmodern value orientations as a way to prevent the risks of modernity, such as valuing diversity and pluralism in society (Welsch, 1993), and the preference of living beings over immortal ideas (Bělohradský, 2013), which will prove helpful in considering and implementing the democratic aspects of the shaped future (Lesňák, 2019, 2023).

Environmental and ecological citizenship

Civic activism refers to both more radical and moderate reform currents, which can also be distinguished in the naming and definition of ecological (a more radical ecocentric setting) and environmental citizenship (anthropocentrism). While environmental citizenship is focused on decision-making in the spirit of environmental values, inclusive discussion and governance processes (Carrick et al., 2023), liberal rights, and a state-guaranteed neutral environment open to diverse visions of a good life, ecological citizenship asserts a vision of life that above all respects non-human beings (or nature in general), and thus ceases to be a pluralistic, liberal, neutral space. Ecological citizenship 'exceeds' the traditional notion of citizenship as attached to the set boundaries of the state, and it does so both in how it monitors the consequences of the ecological footprint of the individual across the world, and in how it recognises the ecological citizenship of those who live in the monitored location regardless of nationality (Bourban, 2023; Eckersley, 2020). The engagement of ecological citizens is motivated by their inner conviction (also manifested in their private life), a positive aspect of which is that they are persistent in their efforts (McKinnon, 2022). The advantage of such citizenship is its benefits for other citizens, the community, and the environment. The disadvantage is the extensive time and psychological burden, especially for women caring for dependent persons and the household, minorities, etc. However, ecological

citizenship is not a status but a civic attitude, an idealised model of an ascetic, tireless dissident or martyr, often limited by its eco-centric attitudes when it comes to cooperation with others. It thus confronts the limits of democracy (transcending the public and private spheres, deepening gender inequality, slipping from ecology into ecologism, or adopting an unconventional understanding of the political community of citizens (Binka, 2008; Dobson, 2006; Hayward, 2006; McKinnon, 2022). The advantage of enviro-minded citizens is that they belong to a procedurally-proven political tradition, which, however, has its limits in terms of the limited motivation to exert pressure on elected representatives; another advantage is the anthropocentric view of the world grounded in an established cognitive tradition, where pro-climatic action is based on a plurality of values and ways of life without prioritising any one of them, etc. (McKinnon, 2022).

Both civil approaches are a legitimate orientation, and both require civil competences based on knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes. Civic education can contribute to slowing down climate change by leading pupils to adopt the pro-climatic attitudes necessary for environmental and ecological civil understanding. In both cases, this is based on emphasising the democratic orientation of pupils. Since we can expect that with the waning of time to solve the climate crisis, more intense civic activism may emerge moderate but mainly more radical forms (and this radicalism proves to be legitimate, and to some extent even desirable, as a way of preventing the Hobbesian war) (McKinnon, 2022; Mittiga, 2024), the importance of making prevention of the deformation of democracy a component of civic education is growing.

Civic education in times of climate change

Civic education is currently becoming an important tool for the education of topics related to climate change. This coupling can be found in connection with the definition of the key civil competence in the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union, where the need for sustainability awareness in relation to climate change is emphasised at the level of the knowledge component. In the area of skills, it is the emphasis on the development of effective communication related to sustainability. This subject also includes the attitudinal component of this competence, which alludes to the promotion of a sustainable lifestyle and a responsible approach to the environment (Council Recommendation, 2018). Thus, we can see that this topic is comprehensively represented in all the components of the key civil competence, i.e. knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Let us recall that the ideological basis for the implementation of civic education in education systems was the aforementioned UNESCO document – *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education from 2021* (UNESCO, 2021). As we have already mentioned, this is a report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, which calls for the creation of a new social contract on education with a view to 2050. Among the things that such education needs to highlight is support for active citizenship and democratic participation,

which is associated with the ability to listen to others. Let us add that when there are others whose views differ from ours, we are talking about pluralism of opinion, where

the teaching itself must evaluate diversity, dissimilarity and pluralism as a starting point and enable students to face fanaticism and discrimination directly. No single individual or perspective can have all the solutions to the complex and multifaceted problems that the planet is facing (UNESCO, 2021, p. 53).

Based on the above, we will also try to answer the question of whether civic education, in this case connected with environmental issues, can lead students to support social transformation and at the same time deepen democratic processes. In the search for an answer, it should be noted that there are different models of civic education. We will not focus on all of them here but will only concentrate on those that have the potential to solve the outlined problem. The basis for our reflection in this area will be the seminal study by Kahne and Westheimer (2004), which distinguishes three types of citizens who can be cultivated through civic education. Personally responsible citizens as the first type, participatory citizens as the second, and citizens oriented towards justice as the third. Cultivating the first type, personally responsible citizens, involves building an individual's moral character and sense of personal responsibility. It focuses on developing the individual's self-discipline, integrity, and honesty. A personally responsible citizen abides by the law, diligently participate in elections, contributes to charity, and becomes involved in volunteer activities (Kahne & Westheimer, 2004). In the sphere of environmental issues, personally responsible citizens sort their waste, conserve water, and participate in tree planting. Although this type of citizen goes to the polls, they vote for parties within the system – those that, for example, strive to protect the environment, albeit within the established rules and legal standards, or those that are not seeking a fundamental social transformation. According to Westheimer, this type of citizen would also be desirable for a totalitarian society. Individuals who are conformist observe the laws, respect the rules, and comply the norms. Obedience and loyalty can counteract independent critical thinking (Westheimer, 2015). Students must learn to ask questions and seek constructive criticism. After all, the idea that only a truth passed down by a leader or a group of elites is a sign of a totalitarian society. Westheimer adds that challenging so-called truths, asking questions, and engaging in discussion are a part of democracy (Westheimer, 2019).

Participatory citizens are already citizens who not only participate in volunteer activities but also try to organise such activities themselves. Therefore, they need sufficient procedural knowledge to understand how government and other institutions work and to be able to actively participate in community life at the regional and national level (Kahne & Westheimer, 2004, also Westheimer, 2015). Thus, a participatory citizen is more likely to organise an event to sort waste or plant greenery in their community or develop a strategy to capture rainwater. The important thing here is that everything happens within the existing system

and legal rules. They do not seek the structural transformation of society or the transformation of the foundations of the system.

The last type is a citizen oriented towards justice. This type shares with the participatory citizen the need for active work in communities, but goes much further in their involvement. Compared to participatory citizens, justice-oriented citizens use critical thinking in an effort to discover the causes of problems and to strive for systemic change (Westheimer, 2020). It is essential then that students learn how to analyse and compare, examine a problem from several different points of view, and take on rather than avoid controversial topics (Westheimer, 2019). The essence of freedom is the existence of a plurality of opinions, the clash of opinions in a discussion, and the search for the optimal solution. This type of citizen can, for example, use petitions to seek a change in legislation on the protection of forests, speak out against greenwashing, and promote equal access to drinking water.

In this context, Westheimer emphasises that teaching true democratic citizenship is crucial. Citizenship requires critical thinking on policy and the role of the citizen in local and global political and economic structures. It surely cannot be about indoctrination: 'In fact, those who prepare justice-oriented citizens for life in a democracy do not try to inculcate a fixed set of truths or criticisms regarding the social order.' (Kahne & Westheimer, 2004, p. 5) Last but not least, teaching democratic citizenship involves encouraging different points of view on problems and engaging in efforts to find solutions to them, while finding a balance between following the rules and thinking about their meaning (Westheimer, 2020).

According to Westheimer, plurality of opinion is particularly important. Education in a democratic society must be based on diversity of opinion, which, in turn, forms the basis for finding solutions to the problems affecting society. Westheimer mentions controversies or controversial topics to which meaningful solutions are sought through a confrontation of different points of view in mutual dialogue. Addressing controversial topics and discussing them are characteristics of democracy. However, such discussions should be based on adequate familiarity with the topics being addressed and on an in-depth political, economic, social, and historical analysis of the topics. There is also a need for critical empathy, empathy for the other, which is also associated with understanding the context (social, cultural, historical) behind the formation of a different opinion. The appeal to use skills for the benefit of the society as a whole and not just for personal satisfaction can also be considered essential (for civic education) (Westheimer, 2020).

In our view, it is citizens oriented towards justice who have the potential to implement social transformation through the development of democracy. Educating citizens to be oriented towards justice develops their ability to engage in free critical thinking based on relevant knowledge and on freeing themselves from inculcation with one correct opinion – indoctrination. By addressing controversial topics, this education develops plurality of opinion in efforts to find the best possible solution to a given problem. At the same time, this solution should not only be directed at a specific individual, as it should also take into account

the wider society. The concept of a citizen oriented towards justice thus updates, or revives, the three basic principles of democratic civic education, which are known among civic education scholars as the Beutelsbach Consensus.

The Beutelsbach Consensus was the result of a longer-term process of defending democracy in what in the 1970s, when the consensus was formulated, was West Germany. At that time, there were intense and ideologically heated debates, challenges from the extra-parliamentary opposition in the streets, and heated discussions about the content of civic education. Although the consensus was never officially adopted, it gradually influenced educational policy and framework documents. Subsequently, it was translated from German into other languages, but its influence outside the German context remained limited (Christensen & Grammes, 2020). The consensus contains three simple points: the prohibition of indoctrination; the need to present controversial topics from several different points of view; and enabling students to analyse social problems from the point of view of their own interests, while looking for ways to actively participate in solving them (Reinhardt, 2016). A broader social dimension was later incorporated into the third principle, so that it was concerned not only with the individual's own interests, but with respect for others as well, i.e. it included the trinity of the individual, the inclusion of others, and a critical reflection on the system (Reinhardt, 2016).

Westheimer's justice-oriented type of citizen fosters civil engagement and purposefully works towards social transformation. It is clear from the above analysis that for this model to be effectively implemented and taught in schools a number of assumptions must be taken into account, and several preconditions must first be met. In this context, we will discuss the competence model for responsible citizenship, which could enable the practical fulfilment of the aforementioned preconditions. The model of responsible citizenship (Štěrba, 2018) is based on concepts introduced by Müller (2006) and especially by Krammer (2008) and draws on the principles of civic education (presented above) (Reinhardt, 2016). Müller presents and describes three gradually developing levels in the development of political competence, which slowly grows from a basic knowledge of the political system or environmental issues to an understanding of the wider context, which leads to the creation of students' independent judgement and to their eventual involvement in democratic processes (Müller, 2006). Political competence is therefore a systemic concept that results in active participation based on a critical assessment of acquired knowledge. Krammer then operationalises this taxonomy into specific competence outputs that include four components (Krammer, 2008). The first two are a professional competence that represents an understanding of political categories and concepts, and a methodical competence that includes the analysis and interpretation of political messages. The third component is the competence to form one's own opinion, the core of which is the critical assessment of political attitudes, decisions, problems, and controversies, and the formulation of one's own viewpoint. The last component is the competence to negotiate, which entails the student's active involvement in solving the problems raised (Krammer, 2008; Štěrba, 2018).

It should be emphasised here that these competences develop so-called working knowledge, which is a summary of facts, concepts, and generalisations that are related to a problem (e.g. relating to climate change) that students try to solve. Understanding knowledge and its critical assessment are among the key foundations of this model. This is consistent with Westheimer, who writes about the need for a deep understanding of the essential points of the topics addressed (Westheimer, 2020). In other words, active action towards social transformation must be based on an understanding of problems and their causes and consequences.

The competence model is built on a broader concept of responsibility than that presented by Westheimer's model of a personally responsible citizen. It draws inspiration from the definition of civic responsibility put forward by O'Shea, who does not understand it as conformity but associates it with the practice of democracy. This practice goes beyond mere electoral voting – it involves participation in the democratic process at all levels, including discussions, combating prejudice, questioning inequalities, and acting for the development of society' (O'Shea, 2003, p. 20). The competence model for responsible citizenship thus creates the prerequisites necessary for students to move towards responsible social transformation on a practical level. However, it should be emphasised that neither the model itself nor its implementation prescribes or guarantees this social transformation. The aim of the model is to provide students with space to make free and responsible decisions about whether they want to actively contribute to changing society or not. The possibility of transformation should be allowed, not forced.

Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to present the current challenges facing civic education and training in the context of ongoing climate change. These challenges include: emphasising the importance of acting in the present for a future that will enable a shared vision of justice; emphasising education as a means of increasing civil competencies that will enable students/people to confront the powers that deny or ignore a shared vision of a just future; educating constructive civic activism and its current forms (civil and non-civil disobedience in the context of the aforementioned shared vision of justice for the future); emphasizing democracy as a principle of balancing the risks of civic activism; and examining the friction between democratic principles and a shared vision of a just future in order to enable and apply both at the same time.

It is becoming clear that education must be based on a broader concept of responsibility that is anchored in democratic principles. When civil responsibility is understood in this way in the educational process, it leads its participants to a deeper understanding of social and environmental contexts. On this basis they can participate meaningfully in social transformation leading to an improvement in the quality of (not only human) life. It is therefore important for civic educa-

tion focused on the development of responsible citizenship to become a priority component of education policy. In conjunction with other components, not only political and environmental, but also media education and ethical education, it represents a direction that is not limited to describing reality, but that can also actively contribute to its co-creation.

Recommendations for civic education creators

During the research, we noticed that the challenges for civic education arose not so much from within, but from the creators of climate and environmental education, who lack both a qualified 'civic dimension' and an understanding of the meanings of civic education topics. Climate education as an interdisciplinary educational project aimed at supporting change needs civic education to avoid counterproductive individual and collective activities, and vice versa, to contribute to responsible transformation. It is an opportunity to explore and apply educational content, competences, and attitudes in an old-new context that citizens are interested in, which is the dream of every educator. A social demand is now being created that wants not only to maintain order but also to change the world. Therefore, even civic education must change the usual modes of regional and isolated thinking and expand the offer of ethical orientation in engagement, which citizens yearn for (otherwise the CE may lose its 'clients' and its meaning).

Established institutional values and goals (climate conferences and treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, 2012; UNESCO, 2021) that are not yet reflected in practice, can and should be worked towards with the aid of civic education. However, civic education should also contribute to their further updating through immanent criticism and confrontation with power – factors that must be taken into account in the training of teachers and other actors in civic education.

SLAVOMÍR LESŇÁK is an assistant professor in the Department of Civic Education at the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University, where he focuses mainly on environmental ethics and civic education.

ORCID: 0000-0003-3525-0475

RADIM ŠTĚRBA is an assistant professor in the Department of Civic Education at the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University, where he focuses mainly on the didactics of civic education and upbringing.

ORCID: 0000-0001-8644-7919

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