

# Citizenship education in Poland

Analysis of the current situation,  
identified needs,  
opportunities  
and  
barriers to development

Project-Partner:



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### 1. Introduction

This study was created as part of “Engage! Building together European learning material on education for citizenship” project. The project has been carried out in 2015-2016 period in seven European countries. Its objective is to create an interactive and innovative educational module in the field citizenship education, for pupils aged 8-12 and their teachers.

In order to develop educational tools beneficial for these target groups, in each of the countries participating in the project, analysis of the current condition of citizenship education in primary schools with regard to the wider educational context of each country, was conducted. Additionally, specially designed studies aimed at identifying teachers’ needs with respect to their citizenship education duties at the primary level of formal education, were carried out. Based on the research and analyses carried out, the opportunities and barriers for the development of citizenship education in different countries were established. Survey results will be used in developing educational tools, what will allow to adjust them accordingly to the circumstances and the needs of primary schools communities.

The aim of this study is to present the findings of the research and analyses carried out in Poland by the experts commissioned by the Centre for Citizenship Education. The first stage of the investigation, comprised of the analysis of the documents specifying the policies on citizenship education on national level, and analysis of research results conducted in the same educational field. Based on the findings analyses and the research questions formulated in the research concept<sup>36</sup>, survey questionnaire was prepared, and was later conducted among primary schools teachers<sup>37</sup>. The results of the desk research and of the teachers’ survey were then presented to a group of experts, in order to discuss opportunities for the development of citizenship education in Polish primary schools, and review possible course of action with the aim of enhancing such progress.

The results of the previous research on the attitudes and active citizenship of young Poles are presented in the first chapter of this study. The collected data provides us with an idea of what the current situation looks like, and indicates the importance and validity of the challenges facing citizenship education in Poland. The second chapter describes current role and the tasks of citizenship education in Polish education system against the backdrop of the European guidelines. The third chapter is based on the results of the surveys carried out as part of the ENGAGE project, and contains information about the practices and methods used in Polish primary schools. It also includes teachers’ standpoint as to the needs and requirements facing citizenship education. Chapter number four presents examples of some interesting solutions with regard to citizenship education applied in selected Polish schools. The last, fifth part of this report, illustrates development opportunities in the analysed area. Conclusions presented here are based on the experts’ opinions gathered during the panel discussion held in the last phase of the study.

### 2. Attitudes and active citizenship of young Poles

Citizenship in the political and legal dimension is perceived as the relationship that occurs between an individual and the state<sup>38</sup>. It is recognised so by the international law<sup>39</sup>, which aims to avoid situations in which the individual would be left without citizenship, and thus without the care and protection of the State, but also without duties towards it. In this sense, the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997 states in Article 34 that “Polish citizenship shall be acquired by birth to parents being Polish citizens” (and cannot be lost, except by the renunciation).

Social scientists have long noted the fact that in order for any social structures to exist and function, they need to be acknowledged by the citizens. The latter must be willing to follow imposed schemes or behavioural patterns, and share the same values. Those structures need people, who will want to maintain and cultivate them, thus demonstrating their support. It is no different, when it comes to democratic citizenship, which can be compared to religion in the need of believers observing their religious rituals, “bonding democratic political community in the same way that joining in a religious service contributes to the togetherness of the faithful”<sup>40</sup>. The most fundamental expression of confidence in the democracy is “participation in elections and referenda (...) – a basic right extending to every citizen which that citizen ought to exercise if she/he wants to somehow shape the surrounding political reality”<sup>41</sup>. For some time now, societies of Western culture, Europe mostly, have considered that people’s engagement in democratic life cannot be limited only to this basic act of participation. By adopting the concept of so-called active citizenship, it is assumed that in order to achieve the ideal state of affairs, citizens need to get involved in public life more often, be receptive to everyday cooperation with others in order to provide solutions to common problems and obstacles (for more information – see section two of this paper).

The functioning of the above presented broader understanding of democratic citizenship, still encounters substantial problems in Poland. Opinion polls carried out by various public opinion research centers, show that Poles’ involvement in civic activities is comparatively weak in comparison to Europe. The Social diagnosis of 2011 and 2013 reveal that Poles have low level of mutual trust<sup>42</sup>. Among all the respondents, 13% is of the opinion that - in general other people can be trusted, and this belief is shared by 20% of the youngest people surveyed aged 18 to 25. However, respondents do not trust the institutions of representative democracy – little over 50% of people surveyed declare confidence in the central government and the parliament, and less than half of them - in the local government units. In March 2013 nearly three-quarters of Poles (73%) surveyed by CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) poorly rated activities of the Sejm, and more than a half (56%) expressed dissatisfaction with the work of the Senate. In addition, 75% of young Poles claim that politicians serve mainly their own personal interests and benefit<sup>43</sup>.

In Poland, basically since the beginning of the political transformation (different situation prevailed only during the first free elections in the early 1990s.), the voting turnout remains the lowest among the new EU Member States of Central and Eastern Europe

(except for the presidential elections it amounts to approx. 45% of eligible voters). What's worse, it seems unlikely that the situation will change for the better. The problem doesn't lie only in the deteriorating confidence in the democratic institutions—as indicated by the survey results presented above. Also, the number of young Poles declaring their participation in election has been decreasing. According to the Eurobarometer survey of May 2013 on the participation of young Europeans in democratic life<sup>44</sup>, as compared to analogous studies from 2011<sup>45</sup>, the number of young people (aged 15 to 30) intending to partake in the elections, fell by 22% during the three years period between the surveys.

These trends are also indicated by the research undertaken by the Institute of Public Affairs published in the report "Wyborca [Voter] 2.0". Young people (aged 18-24) represent one of the most politically passive groups of citizens. Public opinion polls show that the large number of young people expresses the lack of interest in public issues. Only 14% of young Poles closely monitor political situation in the country. The largest group (40%) describes their interest in politics as moderate, and admits that they take notice of only most important political issues. For many years, the level of interest in politics among young people has remained similarly low. Numerous young adults stress the fact, that they are discouraged by politics because of quarrels and disputes among politicians and their focus on unimportant or unrelated issues. Regardless of their level of interest in public affairs, young people are not happy with constantly raising the same, irrelevant from their' point of view subjects (among matters listed were the Smolensk crash, the large cross placed in public space, legalization of marijuana or disputes over Euro 2012)<sup>46</sup>.

According to the results of both qualitative and quantitative surveys carried out for the purpose of "The European Parliament: Social trust and ignorance"<sup>47</sup> report, it is the youngest that know the least about the electoral procedures and the functioning of the European Parliament. A quantitative survey conducted amongst the youngest (15-19 years) shows, that when asked how are elected the members of the European Parliament in Poland, they are more likely than other age groups to choose "hard to say" answer (31%). Group discussions held in Podkarpacie (Subcarpathia) and in Wielkopolska Region (Greater Poland) with the youth aged 18 to 25 declaring their interest in politics, have demonstrated that these groups are particularly discouraged by politics; the interlocutors have expressed their disapproval towards quarrels among politicians and their lack of veracity and truthfulness. Especially the youngest respondents, alarmingly often raised their concerns saying that more important and better for the society is the effectiveness of governance institutions rather than democratic legitimacy.

Mentioned already citizenship in its broader sense associated with the concern and attentiveness for the common good, may be reflected in the engagement in social work, volunteering, philanthropy or other forms of self-organisation. The results of the available studies showed however, that in this regard Poles fared badly compared to most European societies, although it must be admitted that the youngest respondents performed best on this matter. In fact, in the light of the studies carried out, volunteering turns out to be activity appealing most to young people (up to 25 year of age). A study performed in 2010 by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS)<sup>48</sup>, showed that they are most active group within social organisations (foundations and associations). In vast majority these groups comprise of people under the age of 18, pupils, students and working professionals, men and residents of the big cities. Whereas, direct volunteering being no longer the domain of young persons (including direct help provided to family members), attracts more people with higher education, most of all women (mainly housewives) and economically active people aged 45-64 years. Also, according to the research undertaken by the Klon/

Jawor Association in 2013, the number of volunteer workers is higher amongst the youngest (under 26 years of age) – 21%, than amongst seniors (over 50 years) – 15%. The same applies to 30% of people with higher education (only 15% in other groups)<sup>49</sup>.

The above data may indicate that young Poles have shown slight increase in their social engagement (although the burning question remains why they are more likely to get involved in a formalized manner by undertaking cooperation with the NGO sector). Professor Krystyna Szafraniec has drawn similar conclusions, which show that initial alienation and young people's low participation in public life in the early years of newly established Republic of Poland, were a natural legacy of People's Republic of Poland (PRL)<sup>50</sup>. She has pointed out, that spurring the young generation to action required time, which with favourable conditions allowed them to grow to understand the value of democratic institutions<sup>51</sup>. The accomplishment of that process was evidenced by a spurt of young voters in 2007 elections (1.2 million young people voted for PO [Civic Platform], and 400 thousand for PiS [Law and Justice]).

However, after the elections in 2011, young people's "political disappointment and indignation" became very apparent (both radical and liberal ,Ruch Palikota [Palikot's Movement] received 600 thousand votes – one and a half times more than PO, and two times more than PiS)<sup>52</sup>. A consequence of the young generation's discouragement towards the current state of the representative democracy, appears to be their search for new non-system forms of representing their own interests, as reflected, for example, in the protests against ACTA at the beginning of 2012<sup>53</sup>. Those affairs have been accompanied by the public debate on deteriorating prospects for the future caused by the economic crisis, and affecting the young in particular. Apparent dissatisfaction with the approach of those in power towards the uncomfortable problems was exploited by the opposition and anti-establishment parties. As the result, of 1.5 million of young people participating in 2014 local elections, 430 thousand supported PiS, 415 thousand Nowa Prawica (Congress of the New Right) headed by Janusz Korwin-Mikke, and 300 thousand voted for PO (the ruling party). 130 thousand of young voters endorsed Twój Ruch (Your Movement), whereas local committees and Ruch Narodowy (National Movement) received 130 thousand votes. Having regard to some additional variables, it can be concluded that "young people are less and less interested in politics, and those who still are, usually have the right-wing views", which – especially in the case of young men, are often of a radical nature<sup>54</sup>.

### 3. Citizenship education in the Polish education system compared to other European countries

Citizenship education in Europe - as declared in various official goals and plans - is ascribed significant importance. The European Commission, defining sets of key competences required for the proper functioning of societies, identified social and civic competences as essential for democratic participation in social and civil life<sup>55</sup>. Development of such competences is the goal of education for democracy. The Council of Europe promotes education for democratic citizenship and human right education<sup>56</sup>. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has formulated a set of core competences essential for active participation in democratic societies<sup>57</sup>. The Council of Europe proclaimed 2005 the European Year of Citizenship through Education. The Council of Europe's intention was to draw attention to the importance of education - formal, informal and non-formal, in order to promote active citizenship and democracy. The European Commission declared the year 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering, and 2013 was pronounced in the European Union as the European Year of Citizens.

Polish institutions and organisations too participated in organising the celebrations in 2005, 2011 and 2013. Publications and releases of the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the OECD on citizenship education, are translated and published in Poland<sup>58</sup>. The Centre for Education Development is a national teacher training institution administered by the Minister of National Education, that in addition to publishing, also conducts training courses and conferences, organises teachers' and pedagogical councils' professional development support programmes that aim to enhance competences essential to carry out education for democratic citizenship tasks in schools. Foundation for the Development of the Education System - institution managing European educational programmes in Poland, is responsible for implementation and promotion of a number of initiatives raising civic awareness and shaping social skills, especially among young people<sup>59</sup>.

The concepts of active formation and development of social and civic competencies among young people, and the campaigns for promotion of education for democratic citizenship in Poland, are reflected in the official government strategy papers. In the „Long-term National Development Strategy – a document establishing the main trends, challenges and framework of socio-economic development of the country by 2030, the development of social capital has been described as one of the strategic objectives, and the actions aimed at fostering education for democratic citizenship have been characterised as one of the areas of intervention towards achieving the objectives in the sector concerned. In this document Poland has declared, among others:

- Preparation and implementation of the education for democratic citizenship programme at all levels of education as a lifelong learning process
- Creation and execution of education and professional development programme for teachers, to ensure proper level of readiness to educate on civic education<sup>60</sup>.

In another government document of adopted in 2013 Social Capital Development Strategy for Poland 2020, one of the objectives is “to shape attitudes and beliefs that will foster cooperation, creativity and communication”, and one of the priorities – “to support formal education through teaching and learning methods, which are conducive to collaboration, creativity and communication as well as the development of democratic school culture”<sup>61</sup>.

Over the years, changes have been introduced to the Polish formal education system that also covered citizenship education sector. In 2009, the core curriculum of the general education has been revised at all the levels. Amendments were applied to the teaching contents, working methods and the class timetables. From that moment on, greater emphasis has been placed on learning outcomes that a student should achieve upon completion of a given level of education, rather than on the organisation of the teaching process. Learning outcomes are described in language competence, which consist of knowledge, abilities and social competences. In theory, this approach provides teachers with greater flexibility of choosing working methods with students, and allows adapting lessons' organisational structure to better meet students' needs.

From 2013, a new model of pedagogical supervision has been implemented. It is based on the notion that school can alter the society, and proper state's actions can motivate and encourage schools (and other educational institutions) to engage in worthwhile educational initiatives. The state, through a system of pedagogical supervision, imposes on schools and other educational institutions requirements, which define the main goals and tasks of the education system. Those requirements do not cover all aspects of schools' responsibilities towards students and parents. They do however indicate strategic and priority fields of actions, which entail the challenges facing modern societies. The requirement

analysis, provided us with the image of school, where student's comprehensive development with regard to his/hers circumstances and individual predispositions is encouraged; school, where social standards are respected and teachers cooperate in planning and implementing teaching and learning processes; lastly- school, where parents are treated as partners and the very institution is a part of the local community where everyone is working towards mutual progress.

With regard to the core curriculum, it is already stated in the introduction that shaping attitudes and opinions, sharing knowledge and skills development, should be regarded as complementary and mutually reinforcing elements of teacher's profession. It is recommended to incorporate the wider context of education for citizenship into the school curriculum than only teaching it as a part of history or social studies. Learning content should be formulated in such a manner, as to direct attention to the development of social and civic competences.

It is concluded, that the key role of school is to develop certain attitudes among students that will be reflected in specific behaviours:

- 1) involvement in civic activities – student engages in social activities;
- 2) social sensitivity – student identifies and addresses violations of rights;
- 3) responsibility – student behaves responsibly in the community, acts constructively in a conflict situation;
- 4) feeling of kindship – student feels part of the local, national, European and global community;
- 5) tolerance – student respects others' right to disagree, different customs and beliefs as long as they do not endanger safety of others; stands up against discrimination.<sup>62</sup>

Schools are encouraged to organise their communities in a democratic manner, noting that they should ensure that students are guaranteed the following:

- 1) access to different sources of information and different opinions;
- 2) participation in forum discussions;
- 3) impact on certain aspects of school life, for example as part of student councils;
- 4) building their self-esteem in social life and confidence in others.<sup>63</sup>

Strategy papers are filled with many noble objectives. State's guidelines for schools indicate, that the importance of education for democratic citizenship in the development of school communities has been acknowledged. The core curriculum stresses the importance of fostering the development of social and civic competences. There are official means for students' democratic involvement in the processes of the school life. The international research<sup>64</sup> shows however, that while Polish students often participate in school elections for student councils or government class, at the same time they feel that they have less influence on schools' decision making processes, such as teaching contents, teaching methods, timetables or school policies. So, what is the problem?

Aleksander Pawlicki, an expert in assessing performance standards of student councils in Polish schools, proposed an interesting solution: “(...) democratic nature of institutions should be assessed based on three key elements, while in Poland we usually focus on only two of them. The first element is the correct procedures, the second - effectiveness in terms of public interest, the third is participation. We believe that when all the procedures are followed and no one is in disadvantage, there is no need to strive for more – thus

deem citizenship education primarily in terms of patriotic education, the most desired competencies for primary school pupils are - among others, respect for national symbols, sense of belonging to their homeland, appreciation of its cultural traditions, knowledge of history, and a sense of patriotic duty. As for the others who consider that citizenship education's main task is to impart knowledge on the principles of democracy, by allowing and encouraging students to become actively involved in school councils, most important competencies are tolerance, awareness about human and civil rights, grasp of democracy concept and respect for democratic principles and the rule of law. Interpreting civic education in terms of social activism and charity work is associated with working toward becoming compassionate and empathetic citizen, willingness to provide assistance to those less fortunate, being active and engaged within the community. Teachers focusing on teaching methods stimulating and inspiring children to activity, refer to competencies associated with cooperation and partnership, project-based working skills, negotiation and mediation skills and constructive criticism. Educators focused on teaching only within the area of their subject specialisation, admit that citizenship education is not important in their schools, therefore they concentrate on competencies moulded during the teaching & learning processes, such as literacy skills, reading comprehension, speaking and writing skills. There were a few among the surveyed, who while defining desirable competencies thought about the skills useful in social life in a wider community beyond the school confines, like proper assessment of the social situations, sensitivity to social problems and the ability to address them.

Furthermore, teachers' responses to the question about raising which issues is beneficial and important for citizenship education in primary schools, demonstrate what citizenship education really means to them. Their responses to this question reflect how diverse their approach to civic education is. Some of the teachers placed great emphasis on topics of patriotic nature, thus discussing Polish national symbols, national heritage, distinguished Poles or public holidays such as May 3rd Constitution Day. However, the topics that are mentioned most on the questionnaire form, are related to the "little homeland", the local and regional community, and the school regarded as a community where students are its members. In this context surveyed teachers also emphasized the importance of exploring with students issues of self-government - both at the local community level as well as within the school structures. Children are taught about the principles of a democratic country and the rule of law, electoral mechanisms, etc. Many - mainly history and social studies teachers, stress the fact, that they make an effort to explain their students about the organisational structure of their schools and about the role the student councils play in it. Student's rights and duties, children's rights -also with reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child are often discussed in the class. Tolerance, respect for privacy, social rules, democracy and the concern for the natural environment - are all part of teaching processes aimed at shaping desired social attitudes. Also, a significant number of teachers raises issues of European citizenship and the role of Poland in Europe.

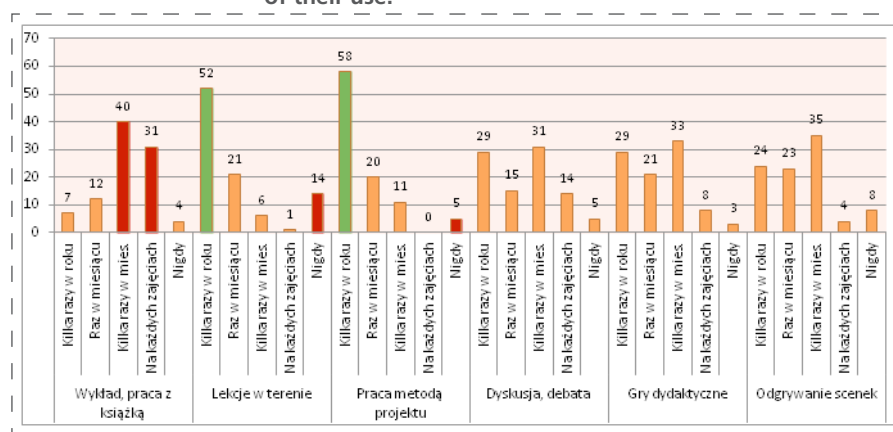
### 5.1. Teaching methods, the functioning of schools and implementation of citizenship education

It is assumed, that competencies and skill developed because of

citizenship education are mostly associated with coexisting in a community, interacting with other people and building structures allowing to deal with emerging problems and obstacles. They are closely linked to the ability to exercise one's civil rights and interact with relevant public institutions when required. These skills cannot be acquired by learning the theory only. They need to be taught through experience, through a range of activities and initiatives, which are undertaken not only within the class, but also within the whole school structure, which should be perceived as a model example of a community, guided by the principles of a society functioning as the constitutional democracy.

In order to verify, how the above hypothesis has been translated into practice, surveyed teachers were asked what kind of organisational arrangements of teaching and learning methods they use when working with students. They could also indicate the frequency with which they use these techniques. The responses obtained in this question, allow to better study teachers' system of working with students within the studied group, and to reflect upon how they can support and encourage young people's acquisition of social and civic competences. For starters, it is worth studying the responses of all surveyed teachers, presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:**  
**Organisational arrangements of teaching and learning methods used in the classroom (T=94) and the frequency of their use.**

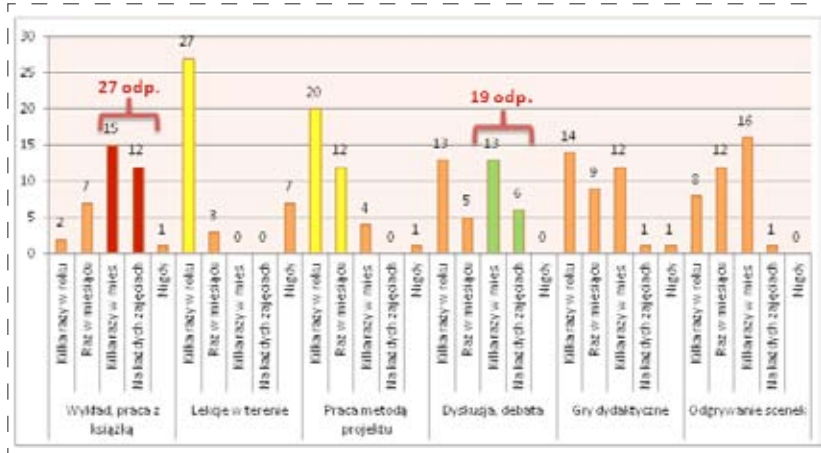


Data collected shows that traditional teaching methods, focused purely on knowledge transfer, rather than also putting it into practice and fostering development of social and civic competencies as a result - clearly dominate amongst the respondents. A majority of teachers (71 people) conduct their lesson by using lecture method or relying on textbooks more than once a month. Active forms of learning enabling students to interact with each and express their opinions are lesser used - less than half of the surveyed teachers more frequently than once a month organise guided discussions or debates (45 people), use educational games (41 people) or role playing exercises (39 people). On the other hand, teaching techniques, which enable pupils to practise active citizenship or self-organisation, are considerably rarer used in the classrooms. Almost two thirds of the respondents (58 people) admitted that they use project-based teaching techniques only a few times a year, and five people admitted to never using them at all. More than half of the teachers (52 people) conduct field classes several times a year, and 14 of them have never done it.

Amongst the study population, there were teachers with different subject specialisation - science, natural sciences, and the humanities. Each subject has its own characteristics and therefore various teaching methods can be applied. Regardless of the subject, these techniques may be more or less variegated and diversified, and thereby contribute to the development of civic competencies. The analysis of the frequency with which certain teaching

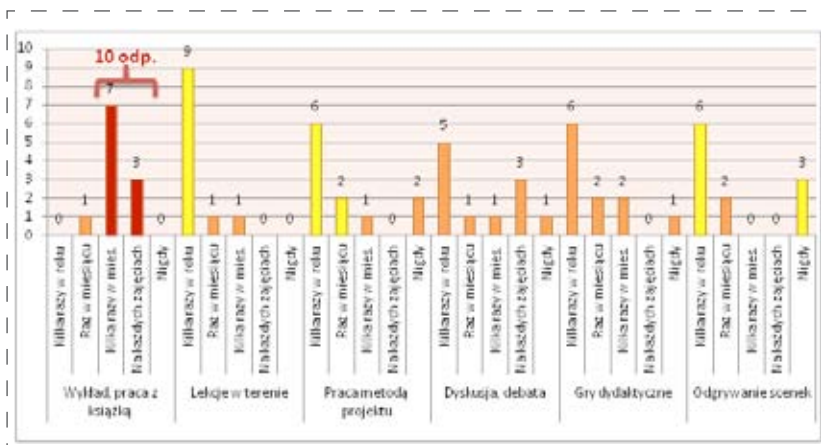
methods were used by the teachers of different subjects, indicates that there are no significant differences between the results in the overall study population, and the results of a group of teachers of the humanities in grades 4 to 6 (the study group consisted of 37 teachers of Polish, history, social science, English, German, religion, or holding positions of school counsellors, librarians, kindergarten teachers). In case of such subjects, the teaching content may be easier to present when coupled with teaching strategies activating students' involvement (like students' interactions). However, the methods of a lecture and a textbook are most used techniques also in this group, whereas field classes and project-based learning are used very infrequently. As for guided discussions and debates, over half of the teachers hold them usually on monthly basis. The accurate data is presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4:**  
Teaching methods used by teachers of the humanities in grades 4-6 (T=37)



A similar situation can be observed amongst the science teachers and teachers touching upon various aspect of cultural life (the study group included 11 educators of music, nature sciences, physical education, art, family life education in grades 4-6). This group too, was dominated by the use of lecture and reliance on textbook as primary teaching methods, whereas project based learning and field lessons – which seem to be most appropriate for subjects such as arts or natural sciences – occur very seldom. Moreover, all other didactical techniques, such as educational games, discussions, role-playing activities, are used here to a much lesser extent than of the total population of the surveyed teachers. The accurate data is presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:**  
Teaching methods used by the teachers of science, natural sciences, arts and physical education in grades 4-6 (T=11)



Development of collaboration and teamwork skills (including expressing one's opinion freely, influencing the opinions of others, persuading others to one's views, overseeing the work of the team) can be influenced by frequent use of cooperative learning or group work activities. According to survey results, the surveyed teachers by far, most commonly use the individual forms of work – almost two-thirds of interviewees (57 persons) use them during each class, and additional 28 people – several times a month. Pair work is used much less often (25 teachers use it during each class, and 56 several times a month), and group work is used even rarer (12 people use it during each class, and 65 only several times a month). The accurate data is presented in Figure 6.

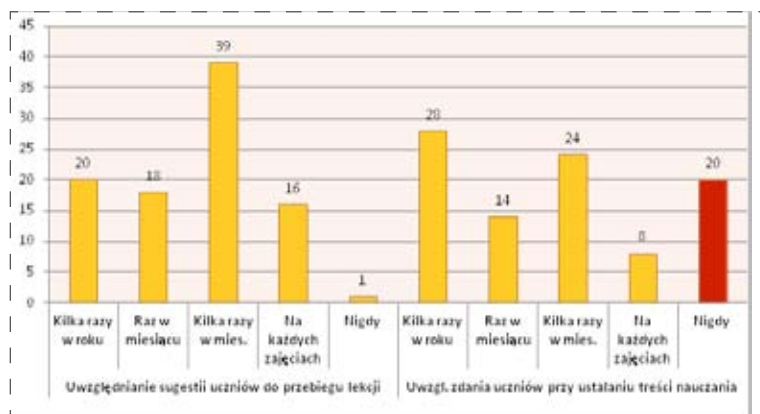
**Figure 6:**  
Methods of organising teaching and learning process used by teachers surveyed (1) (T=94):



By all means, the most comprehensive way to students' empowerment within the scope of the teaching and learning process, is to create the environment where they can contribute and have a say in what they learn and how they do it. This participatory school culture allows children to learn what the civic society should look like and how it should function, its citizens aware of their rights are a part of decision making processes, and are able and willing to influence its shape and structure. Therefore, in the last part of the same questions of the survey, teachers were asked how often they allow their students to choose teaching method and

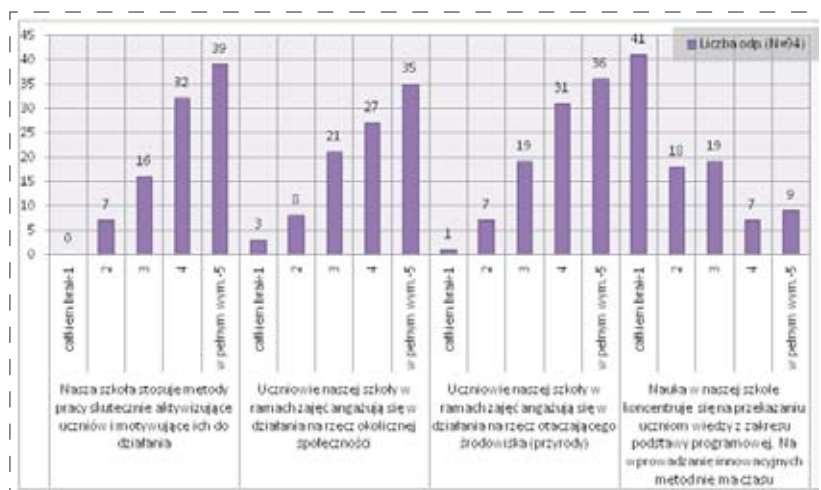
learning content they would like to explore on the next or even the following lessons of a given subject. As illustrated in Figure 7, surveyed teachers are familiar with both forms of students' involvement, however they are more likely to let their pupils decide the course of a particular lesson (e.g. choosing working /teaching method). It is also worth noting that almost 1/4 of respondents never allows students to interfere with the teaching process at all.

**Figure 7:**  
**Methods of organising teaching process used by surveyed teachers (2) (T=94):**



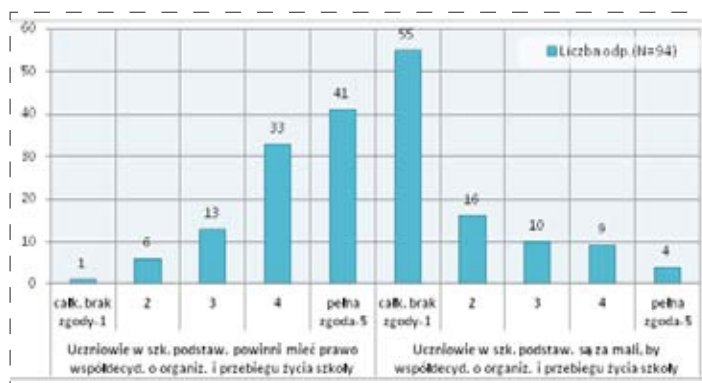
Answers outlined above, should be considered in relation to the opinion regarding the functioning of schools as a whole, and especially in the context of their role in citizenship education. Although, declared methods of working with students seem to deny it, according to the later parts of the survey, a vast majority of surveyed teachers claim, that as part of their school training, students engage in activities supporting local communities as well as the environment around (nature). On the other hand, most respondents do not concur with the opinion that learning process in their school is "focused on imparting knowledge solely based on the national curriculum", and that "there is not enough time to introduce and develop new, innovative methods". The overtone of both groups' answers on teaching techniques and the evaluation of the role of school, is clearly divergent.

**Figure 8:**  
**The level of agreement with the statements regarding school life in respondents' schools (T= 94). Responses according to a five-point rating system (1 = completely inadequate response; 5 = adequate response).**



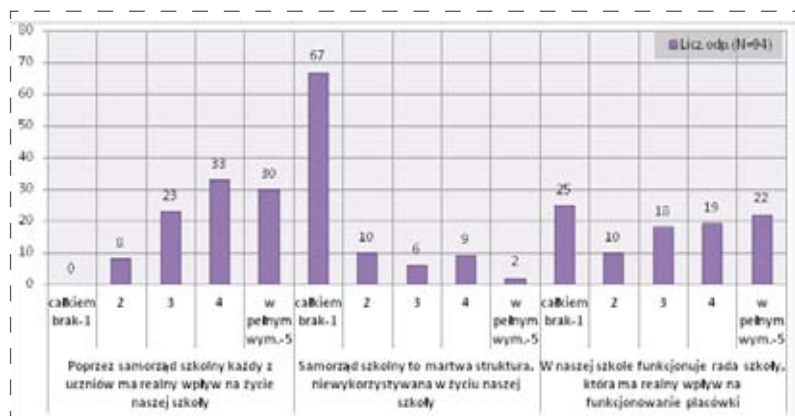
School should not be perceived only in terms of a place of studying, but also as a social environment, where young people spend significant amounts of time every week. In result, the procedures and principles guiding such society may be reflected in how ideas and values passed on to young people in the classroom, will be comprehended by them, and eventually applied in practice. Therefore, in order for the citizenship education to be effective, it is essential for young people to practice active civic behaviour in daily school life, by providing them with opportunities to influence the way school life is organised, and involving them in a decision-making process - especially when regarding their own interests. It is also important that certain institutions provided for in law (see above) aimed at promoting democratic school culture, had the real impact on the way educational facilities function. A great potential for students' greater involvement in school management and co-deciding procedures, is evidenced in explicit declarations coming from teachers taking part in the study, and expressed in a question regarding the assessment of the proposed statements, presented in Figure 9.

**Figure 9:**  
**The level of agreement of primary schools' surveyed teachers, with the statements regarding citizenship education (T=94). Responses according to a five-point rating system (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree):**

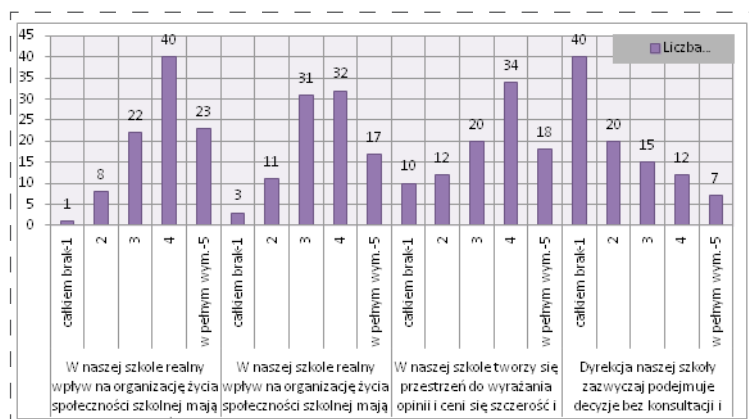


In context of presented data, it is worthwhile reviewing teachers' answers regarding how well – in their opinion – schools meet these criteria. As evident from their answers listed below (see Figure 10) the respondents view the level of schools' democratisation process rather positively. The vast majority of them, agrees with the opinion that in their schools "each student can influence school life through the school council" (63 positive responses), and clearly do not agree with the opinion that school councils are purely superficial bodies (strongly disagree). Furthermore, based on responses gathered, it can be concluded that in nearly half of the institutions in which the respondents work, school councils are present and have " a real impact on school's functioning" (41 positive replies).

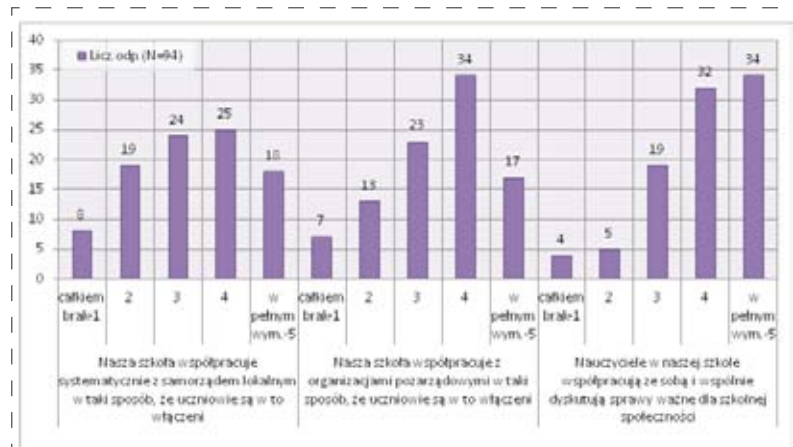
**Figure 10:**  
The level of agreement with the statements regarding school life in respondents' schools (T= 94). Responses according to a five-point rating system (1 = completely inadequate response; 5 = adequate response).



**Figure 11:**  
The level of agreement with the statements regarding school life in respondents' school (T= 94). Responses according to a five-point rating system (1 = completely inadequate response; 5 = adequate response).



**Figure 12:**  
The level of agreement with the statements regarding school life in respondents' schools (T= 94). Responses according to a five-point rating system (1 = completely inadequate response; 5 = adequate response).



School, can also be regarded as a peculiar performer so to speak, in terms of its engagement in local communities' affairs, and by showing their students how to coexist and cooperate with different organisations or institutions. Furthermore, putting citizenship education into practice, showing young people how to take actions for their local communities or take measures aimed at resolving important issues or problems (both regional and global), can be accomplished by teaming up with various non-government organizations. By incorporating students in various projects carried out by NGOs, young people can participate in civic-related activities. Figure 12 illustrates what the situation looks like in respondents' schools in light of their declarations. Data shows that a majority of teachers admit, that their schools collaborate with NGOs in a manner as to incorporate their students in the partnership (51 responses), and nearly half of all surveyed stated that their schools - including their students - cooperate with local governments on regular basis (43 responses). Unfortunately, the questionnaire form did not allow checking how students are involved in both forms of cooperation. Moreover, the number of teachers

participating in the study did not correspond to the number of schools, for we do not know how many of the respondents work in the same facilities. It should be noted though, that most of positive answers was given in relation to the opinion on active collaboration between teachers in a given school.

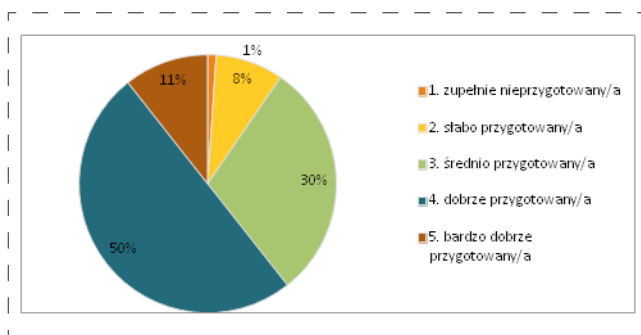


## 5.2. Teachers' preparation for the implementation of citizenship education - self-evaluation

The objective of the ENGAgE project is to support innovative educational models empowering headmasters, teachers and primary school students to “successfully achieve educational goals in the field of citizenship education, whether its integrated into stand-alone subjects or cross-curricular delivered, and through active participation in school life or by contributing to organisation of the educational process”. In order to suggest a new course of action best suited for current needs of a given community, it is necessary to identify both barriers and capacities for change within that environment. Some information regarding this matter has already been outlined in previous parts of this report. This section focuses on depicting the overall image of teachers participating in the survey which has emerged from their answers, when asked to self-evaluate the level of competence, qualifications, knowledge and professional training with regard to teaching citizenship, as well as and main obstacles to such activities within their working environment.

Most of the teachers who completed the online surveys appear to be well prepared to undertake citizenship education duties. Nearly half of all surveyed declared so, and another 11% rated their preparedness as very good. Only 9% of teachers classified themselves as unprepared for such steps. Detailed distribution of responses displayed in Figure 13.

**Figure 13:**  
Answers to the question about the perceived level of preparation for engaging in school activities in the field citizenship education (T=94).



In that respect, a better insight as to where the teachers obtain their knowledge and competence necessary to teach civics is required. According to their assertions, the most common source of information, while preparing teaching materials, is to identify the needs of students and their parents (65 responses), and drawing inspiration from their own social activity (54 responses). Furthermore, 59 people admitted, that they feel competent “to carry out their citizenship education tasks due to their individual professional experience and self-education in this area”. More than 1/3 of respondents shared the opinion, that they have already been sufficiently prepared thanks to the formal education they received. A small number of teachers (28 responses) confessed to having attending professional training, with the aim of developing skills and competence required within citizenship dimension. At the same time, a point of particular concern is the fact that 1/8 of teachers feel, that they lack skills desirable in the area of citizenship education and they are aware of it, but they do not know where to acquire relevant knowledge. Detailed distribution of responses displayed in Figure 14.

**Figure 14:**  
Teaching resources used by teachers in respect of citizenship education (T=94, multiple-choice question)



Apart from the lack of adequately trained teachers, considerable impediments in enhancing the importance of citizenship education in Poland may lie in the mechanisms affecting school environment. Teachers asked to name the main obstacles (everyone could indicate no more than three) gave answers, which can be divided into four main categories:

- “Objective”, i.e. related to teachers' working conditions – insufficient time (entire attention focused on implementing the curriculum) and lack of teaching resources on citizenship education; curriculum overload and challenging conditions for its execution, mostly due to large classes;
- related to teachers – lack of competence to teach citizenship education, lack of commitment, the latter particularly applies to teachers with long employment history (reluctant to change and innovations, limiting their duties to a necessary minimum), what dispirits young, active teachers;
- related to the functioning of schools – overbearing bureaucracy, which causes committed teachers to switch professions or become passive (they decide to “lay low”), the lack of a coherent approach to citizenship education, poor cooperation between parties involved (between teachers, teachers and school leaders, school community and teachers), focus entirely on preparing students for examinations, not allowing students' input into decision-making about how things happen in their school;
- related to parents (and through them transferred to students) - focus on individual achievements instead of cooperation and teamwork, lack of sensitivity towards others' misfortunes and to help others.

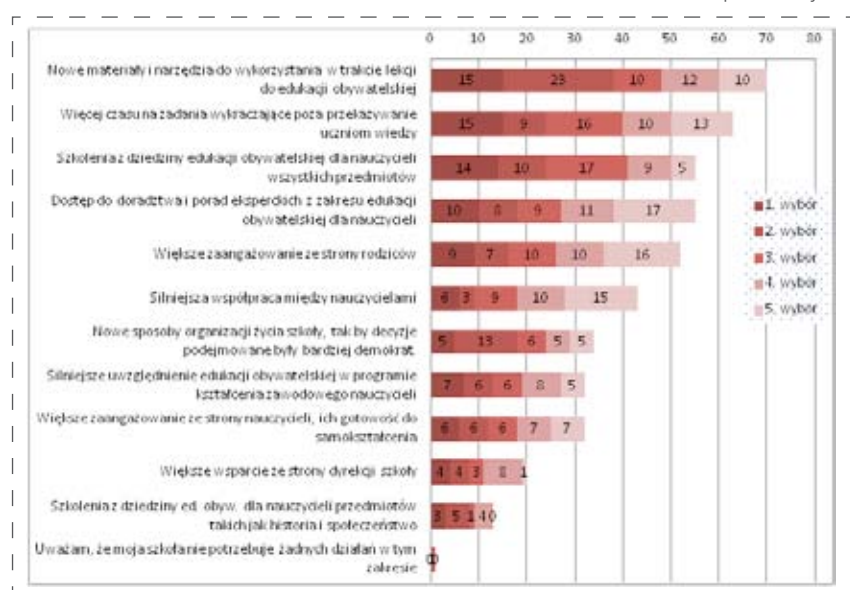
As outlined in the above compilation, some of the opinions of teachers participating in the survey, seem to contradict their previous answers – e.g. when evaluating their schools' organisational structure. It should be noted however, that before we were dealing with a closed-ended question (respondents were limited with a list of answer choices), and opinions discussed here, were presented in a form of an open-ended question. Both sets of answer should be read in a juxtaposition, as they contain supplementary and complementary information. While the closed-ended question allows evaluating the prevalence of certain opinions within the studied group, then the open-ended question helps to better recognise and understand various issues and associations that spontaneously come to interviewees' minds. Sometimes, closed-ended question also provides a better understanding of what lies behind choosing a certain answer within a list of terse answer choices. Moreover,

because of the small number of study subjects, all findings presented here, should be assessed solely in terms of recognition of certain occurrences typical in the analysed environment, and not as that environment's representative views.

### 5.3. Opportunities for development of Citizenship Education in the opinion of the respondents

At the end of the study, the respondents had the opportunity to indicate what – in their opinion – could be beneficial to the development of citizenship education in their schools. Each teacher could suggest five such actions, arranging them from most to least needed. The results are presented in Figure 15.

**Figure 15:** Forms of support, which could enhance development of Citizenship Education in schools of surveyed teachers. The choice of five key answers accordingly to a five-point rating system (1 – action needed most)



The above presented answers, can be particularly important in the context of actions planned for the implementation of the next stages of the ENGAGE project. They show that new and up-to-date teaching and learning materials, and educational tools on civic education are one of things that teachers need most. Also, many people pointed out insufficient amount of time to carry out tasks other than teaching compulsory knowledge, a need for access to professional development trainings, as well as expert advice and support on citizenship education.

In one of the open-ended questions, teachers could suggest what additional aids to support their teaching competence in the field of citizenship education they require. Their suggestions include the following:

- New educational tools and teaching materials, e.g.
- A compendium of detailed information on lessons plans and scenarios,
- Information on good practice and projects carried out in other elementary schools,
- Specific information, guidance, training courses, workshops, handbooks and teaching manuals with information on how to achieve learning objectives in area of citizenship education, plus the scope of essential citizenship teaching content, as well as information encouraging them to engaged and active citizenship,
- Access to guidance, counselling, and expert advice on civic education,

- Special training programmes, also for parents,
- The need to increase time allocation for subjects such as history and social studies, or even introduce a separate subject on civic or patriotism education BUT accordingly to some, it wouldn't be enough, because in order to successfully implement citizenship education, the entire school structure needs to be reorganised, so it can become truly democratic institution,
- A shift in thinking of some teachers and school leaders, which will inspire them to adopt a new approach towards schools' role and duties.

The last one of the points above should be complemented with the statement of one of the respondents, which in fact may become a motto of the further segments of this report, where specific changes and courses of action are suggested. This person said, "All teachers need to see that citizenship education is important, if not crucial component of education, because it is a great responsibility to educate and raise a young man well".

## 6. Opportunities for development of Citizenship Education in Polish schools – experts' opinion

Studies exploring the opportunities for development of citizenship education in Polish schools gathered in this chapter, are based on the results of surveys carried out for the purposes of this report, and on the conclusions arising from the debate held with professionals. Four teachers – including a headmaster, several representatives of various organisations promoting development of citizenship education: one person from the Centre for Education Development, two representatives of the Warsaw Centre for Socio-Educational Innovation and Training and three representatives of the Center for Citizenship Education attended the debate.

The results of the survey were presented in four thematic blocks:

- I. Factors affecting the development of citizenship education in Poland against the European backdrop
- II. The role of citizenship education in Polish schools in the eyes of primary school teachers
- III. The functioning of citizenship education in Polish primary schools
- IV. Barriers and opportunities for the development of citizenship education in Polish schools

Each thematic discussion was preceded by hosts' brief introduction and the presentation of research results relevant to the topic. After

the presentation, a discussion conducted with the help of guiding questions specially prepared for each of the thematic blocks, was held. Based on their expertise on the functioning of formal education in Poland and the role of citizenship education in primary schools, educators present at the meeting, expressed their opinions on information presented to them.

### **6.1. Systemic determinants of citizenship education in Poland against the European backdrop**

The first discussion panel began with the introduction and a reference to - continually emphasized in Europe - the need and importance of promulgating and promoting citizenship education, and to the regulations and directives on supporting development of social and civic competences, issued by the European Commission, Council of Europe and the OECD. It was also pointed out that citizenship education is an important postulate in country strategy papers, which – in the case of schools - resulted in implementing certain changes to the curriculum content, creation of a new model of pedagogical supervision or introduction of legal framework for school boards and school councils.

After hearing a brief introduction about European policy and Polish strategies and regulations on the guidelines about the citizenship education, the participants agreed that the overall policy stance and the proposed recommendations are good, but the problem lies in the fact that they remain declarations only, and are hardly ever translated into concrete action. Admittedly, the guidelines of the European directives and Polish strategies are indeed reflected in the national curriculum of general education, but for the most part, provisions concerning the citizenship education remain in the abstract.

The experts drew attention to often misguided and limited understanding of key competencies as the ones that are to help people to adapt to the labour market requirements. A different – wider and open approach would be desirable, whereby the core competencies should empower people to shape the labour market, rather than just passively adapt to the existing situation. Citizenship education in schools falls behind the stand-alone compulsory subjects with specific knowledge content to pass on, which can be easily assessed, thereby reflecting not only on students but also on teachers' competences. This conception is visible in the way the schools operate, and in its internal programme documents, such as education plans or school action plans, where citizenship education's place is quite minor. These actions are consistent with the official guidelines, but not always with the needs of the students. School boards do not meet their obligations, school councils are nothing more than just window dressing, and students' voice is ignored, even if pupils want to take action. Research shows that students in Polish school do not feel like they have a say, and they are excluded from a decision-making process regarding their own well-being. Simultaneously, the teachers filling out the questionnaire test, stated that the degree of students' empowerment is high.

Moreover, the minimum programme requirements of the official guidelines, which schools should develop and expanded accordingly to their needs, the local context, and capabilities of a given community, are often blindly adopted as the only objective to achieve. Schools don't do anything more than the required scope, they become passive in their doings, by adopting sample projects as standard course of action, and not creating their own undertakings or programmes which can be tailored accordingly to their needs.

### **6.2. The role of citizenship education in Polish schools in the eyes of primary school teachers**

During the second part of the meeting, the discussion revolved

around the role of citizenship education in Polish schools in the eyes of the primary school teachers. Presented results showed, that a vast majority of surveyed teachers consider citizenship education to be important or very important issue (see Figure 1, page 10). The findings of the study on how primary school teachers see citizenship education were discussed.

An expert judgement about presented information was that Polish teachers' attitude towards education brings to mind an image of the 19th century school model. Teachers are not inclined to engage in educational process that is based on teacher – student interactions. The latter's opinions are disregarded, and teachers take no account of students' interests and needs. Most of the educators are so focused on teaching in compliance with the curriculum content, that it seems they only need their students as their passive audience. It is very challenging to discuss the actual possibilities of achieving the objectives of citizenship education with such perception of education still in mind.

Many teachers do not really comprehend what citizenship education stands for, and what it could become. One of the participants in the discussion – a methodological consultant in the early childhood education team, pointed to the problem of teachers' underestimating the importance of assessing skills development, and belittling the importance of the learning process of these competencies: on the one hand teachers do not know how to approach this task, and on the other – they do not consider it important. This predicament is a consequence of still low awareness of the importance of evaluating development at every stage of education. Schools shape attitudes of docility and subordination. As long as they remain hierarchical, undemocratic and authoritarian institution, they will not model different qualities and behaviours. Children's perception of social relations observed and ingrained by schools shapes their idea of the relationships in the society. Teachers should be mindful, not to convey their own views and beliefs to their pupils, as the only legitimate – it is especially important for young children.

The experts believe that greater emphasis should be placed on the development of skill such as - self-organisation, self-reflection, organised workplace or metacognitive skills (thinking about thinking). The problem lies in the fact, that teachers often lack those skills themselves. In order to achieve citizenship educational goals set out in the official documents and regulations, it is essential to provide teachers with trainings, which will enable them to teach civic ways that go beyond just theoretical knowledge transfer.

### **6.3. The functioning of citizenship education in Polish primary schools**

In the third panel, the discussion centred around the research findings on various methods of working with students used by the surveyed teachers, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of different teaching techniques designed to shape social and civic competences. Experts were asked to express their opinion on which method of working with students would help most, to achieve the goals and objectives of citizenship education.

Some people suggested that effective method to develop social competence, is teaching based on the project approach. It can be applied even when working with young children, whereas skills and competencies acquired through the project-learning, permanently furnish students with abilities, which can be of use in further education and in life. Lack of the follow-up is the main problem here. While, in primary and lower secondary schools project-based learning is used, secondary schools hardly ever reach for it.

Another, valuable method in teaching citizenship is a field trip strategy, teaching outside the confines of a classroom. However, in experts' view, this technique is used not as often as it should be, what was confirmed by the research findings. The panel of

experts believed that its more frequent appliance is impeded by, inter alia, too rigid time frames of school plans and classes, and the lack of interest among the school management in changing the status quo, what would cause them, in their opinion, too much complications.

There is a whole range of various methods, which may be beneficial in teaching citizenship. Teachers know them in theory, but hardly ever practice them, as they feel uncomfortable in an unfamiliar territory. Therefore, providing trainings courses, plus other types of teacher support is essential element for teachers to become self-confident, competent, and proficient at using different teaching methods.

Ultimately, as the experts stated – it is not the method that counts most, but a new and fresh approach to teaching. Teachers should actively involve students in the learning process, its planning and implementation. The teaching method is a secondary issue. By focusing on it, teachers may limit themselves to the technical side of its implementation, and at the same time forget about the teacher-student relation. In fact, focusing on that relation, is what can significantly change the quality of learning.

One of the interlocutors suggested, that “activating methods” should be understood as something that enables children to take responsibility for their learning process, and move student’s focus from the teacher to the actual learning content. “What activates most, is what encourages independent learning”. In Polish schools there is no evaluation within the class, therefore it is hard to tell, whether the students in the classroom, actually learn.

If school is to teach citizenship, then, it should be carried out not only during a separate, specially allocated for it lessons. Citizenship education also means, taking advantage of everyday school affairs for the purpose of shaping social and civic competences. Every day in school, in the classroom social life goes on, disputes, conflicts between peers, fights for the social leadership – are all situations, which when skillfully guided or overseen by the teacher, may contribute to the development of social skills essential in life in various situations - private, social, or professional.

#### **6.4. Barriers and opportunities for development of citizenship education in Polish schools**

In the fourth part of the discussions, experts initially agreed with opinions of surveyed teachers, that the objective factors hindering achieving the goals of citizenship education are, among other, excessive workload, schools main focus on students achieving best results during exams, and thus narrow criteria for teachers’ work appraisal - their effectiveness solely based on their students’ attainments in exams. Next, someone in the discussion mentioned, that constant recourse to excessive workload and the necessity to concentrate on teaching towards another exams, for many teachers became a convenient excuse not to undertake additional activities or projects. Meanwhile, the curriculum leaves room for manoeuvre. It contains theoretical possibilities for the teachers to go beyond passive framework of knowledge transfer.

Citizenship education requires systematic approach and consistency in activity. Its aims cannot be achieved only by promotional campaigns or projects, which are very effective tool in achieving quick results; however, this solution does not work for education, where growth and skills development are of importance. Citizenship education will generate results only then, when all the teachers, together with school management and support of parents, have a common goal, which they will consistently pursue. However, if a single person attempts to introduce new ideas to environment unwilling to change, it will be very difficult to accomplish anything. Active teachers usually meet with resistance from their colleagues and management. They themselves do not have a sense of empowerment, therefore they cannot pass it on to their

students.

The main barrier hindering the real change, is the lack of cooperation within the school community. Headmasters, teachers, parents – most of them act according to set patterns which they acquired back in school. In order to change that, an open discussion amongst all the parties involved about the purpose of the education - including citizenship education, needs to take place; and a lot of work still needs to be done to change mindsets towards taking responsibility - firstly for what we do, secondly for what students could be doing. Teachers need to gain a sense of responsibility and a sense of empowerment, and not blame “objective factors” such as lack of time and overloaded curriculum.

If such a change is to actually take place, it cannot be imposed arbitrarily. School communities themselves need to see the need for the change, in order for it happen. Systemic projects are not a good solution in this particular area, as “they are good in theory, but may cause more harm than good”. In terms of schools, working towards turning over a new leaf needs to be carried out in cooperation with teachers as a group, and not as individuals, as only groups have the power to bring about the substantial changes. The attitudes of school leaders in all the institutions are particularly important. Citizenship education can only be conducted in facilities, where the headmaster is a democratic leader, who both wants and knows how to work side by side with teachers and parents.

Additionally, schools should support the development of metacognitive competence of the teaching staff, and be capable of a thorough self-reflection, which is the basis of citizenship education. Publicity campaigns, outside support cannot replace a process of thorough self-reflection.

People and institution that are in any ways connected to education are simply insufficiently involved in creating and shaping the education process. Citizenship education should be dynamic and engaging. Parents need to see the benefits of it, and realize that individual success is not the only important thing, but teamwork and collaboration are what count even more. An important step towards the goal, is to invite local communities to cooperation and engage them in school life, so local institutions (e.g. organisations, companies) can see the advantages of close liaison with schools. Citizenship education should also be understood in terms of a process in which, all members of school community work together from beginning to end, learning a valuable lesson in the process. Yet, most teachers expect to be given ready-made solutions, easy answers, or educational tools ready for immediate use. It is true indeed, that primary schools lack teaching aids and educational resources on citizenship education, but this is not – in experts’ point of view – the greatest need of Polish schools.

## **7. Summary**

The findings of the study and analysis of data deriving from other sources presented in this report, indicate that the situation of citizenship education in Poland is ambiguous. Presented results provide a partial explanation for discrepancy between comparative international studies (e.g. mentioned earlier ICCS) where Poland ranks high in the rankings on citizenship education, and practice – where young Poles evince a low level of interest in social activity and political commitment.

The analysis of the core curriculum shows that it does indeed cover citizenship education. Also, Poland has devised many educational materials and teaching aids on citizenship education (however the primary level is the least equipped in this regard). What’s more, teachers seem to understand – as can be inferred from their questionnaire responses - that citizenship education is a very broad concept in terms of its role and teaching & learning strategies. Discrepancies arose when teachers were asked about the goals of

citizenship education. Different perceptions of its role, entail defining different competencies it needs. Based on their replies, it can be concluded that teachers are aware of what conditions need to be met for schools to function in accordance with democratic principles.

Situation looks different, when we move on to the analysis of the teaching methods. It appears, that the use of activating techniques is not so common, whereas individual work, textbook and lecture methods still prevail. It should be noted though what the experts stressed - the teaching methods themselves are not the most important aspect of citizenship education. Neither group work, nor the field trip strategy will contribute to the development of social and civic competences, when incorrectly implemented.

The analysis of responses to the open-ended question on perceived barriers to the development of citizenship education in schools indicates some additional negative factors affecting citizenship education in Poland. The panel of experts confirmed, that all the obstacles listed by respondents, are in fact present in many educational facilities. Everything revolves around the fact that staff in many schools are still averse to change, because they grew up and developed in times of highly hierarchical approach to education. They are unsympathetic towards alterations, which they do not understand. When young and active teachers find themselves in such environment, as newcomers they are either quickly socialized into standards in force, or marginalized. Parents' passive consent of the status quo does not support the change in the situation. The role of school councils or schools boards is often purely superficial in cases of such institutions. According to some of the experts participating in the panel, school boards are actually the remnants of the previous political system. It seems though, that certain decisive actions of the central authorities aimed at, among other, implementation of the country strategy papers presented in this reports earlier, could go a long way to change the situation. The experts however, were very skeptical about the prospects of executing these actions.

The realities outlined above, do not mean by no means that the citizenship education in Polish schools is doomed to failure. To accomplish the goals of broadly understood education, is not enough however, to just keep developing more teaching materials. We need to seek to create new attitudes open towards change in respective educational institutions. For this purpose, the best solution would be to restructure school rules and principles towards greater democratization of schools and empowerment of students. Teachers too, need to gain a sense of professional empowerment, because only the teachers who truly believe that school is a means to achieving important goals, and allows to develop and grow, can convey this belief to their students. It is a goal of a great significance, but difficult to achieve and requiring time.

In the meanwhile, in order to initiate concrete changes, it is well worth training people in respective schools, so they could become prime movers of the change. It might also be a good idea to seek parents support and cooperation, as within that group lies a great potential, which could be beneficial for the citizenship education of the entire school community.

The overall conclusion of the research is the evident need for discussion within the school community about what citizenship education is, what it could be, and what it should be. It is worth impressing on teachers that broadly defined objectives of citizenship education are possible to achieve mainly by means of thorough self-reflection and a sense of empowerment of both teachers and students. Using different teaching methods definitely entails many advantages, especially the project-based learning or field-trip learning, but they need to be conducted in a correct manner. Daily school life is full of opportunities, which can be used to affect and polish up social and civic competences. Reflective approach

to emerging problems and disputes may support students' growth way more than any other theoretically best method – applied unthinkingly. Training modules designed to prepare teacher how to fulfill their educational tasks in the field of citizenship education, should include that approach.