K4D | Knowledge, evidence and learning for development

Fostering A Democratic Culture: Lessons For The Eastern Neighbourhood

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Question

What are key components in developing a democratic culture and how have donors supported this process? Greater focus on the Eastern Neighbourhood – and Eastern Europe, more generally.

Contents

1. Summary

Political culture is the values, beliefs, and emotions that members of a society express about the political regime and their role in it (Pickering, 2022, p. 5). Norms, values, attitudes and practices considered integral to a "culture of democracy", according to the Council of Europe, include:

- a commitment to public deliberation, discussion, and the free expression of opinions;
- a commitment to electoral rules; the rule of law; and the protection of minority rights;
- peaceful conflict resolution.

The consolidation of democracy involves not only institutional change, but also instilling a democratic culture in a society (Balčytienė, 2021). Research on democratic consolidation in various countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) finds that a key impediment to consolidation is the persistence of old, authoritarian political culture that undermines political and civic participation.

This rapid review looks at aspects of democratic culture and potential ways to foster it, focusing on educational initiatives and opportunities for civic action — which comprise much of the literature on developing the values, attitudes and behaviours of democracy. Discussion on the strengthening of democratic institutions or assistance to electoral processes is outside the scope of the report.

The diffusion of norms and values

Scholars have argued that societal groups can be powerful actors, contributing to the social recognition and diffusion of democratic norms and values. These groups include civil society organisations (CSOs), diaspora associations, mass media, and grassroots movements (Baltag & Burmester, 2022). Societal actors can seek to advance democracy by informing the public debate; representing citizens' interests; participating directly in governance; organising protests and other activities; and implementing specific projects in support of democratic processes and outcomes (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021). To contribute to building a culture of democracy, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) has often worked with CSOs to promote the benefits of democracy to citizens (IFES, 2021). Societal actors can also seek to strengthen citizens' democratic knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviours through involvement in their activities that encourage civic action (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021).

Active citizenship

Active citizenship is the willingness of citizens to get involved in the community or larger society and participate in public life (Andersone & Helmane, 2021). Political culture can influence the degree and way in which citizens participate and engage in political and civic life (Pickering, 2022). In turn, such participation and engagement can influence the consolidation of democratic culture, through experience and practice. Thus, while it is essential to continue raising awareness of democratic norms and principles, it is also very important to provide diverse opportunities to practice various norms of democratic citizenship (Sianko et al., 2022).

Active citizenship involves not only knowledge of and participation in civic and political life, but also being respectful of those who have differing beliefs, views, cultures and lifestyles (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021). Fostering trust is important in promoting support for democracy: people who trust one another are considered more likely to form associations, which in turn supports the

stability of democratic rule (Balčytienė, 2021; Ishiyama et al., 2018). Research on civil society participation and trust-building in the Eastern Neighbourhood finds that the existence of a fairly well-developed network of CSOs — and opportunities to engage in voluntary organisations — has contributed to higher levels of social and institutional trust in Georgia (Ishiyama et al., 2018).

While much literature and donor programming on democratic consolidation focus on formal organisations and institutional conditions, recent research argues that in the case of CEE, attention needs to be given more to activists, citizens and informal networks (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022; Loda, 2017; Ekman et al., 2016). Activism in the region is often driven by concrete, everyday concerns of citizens and the use of more informal modes of mobilisation and spontaneous "bursts" of civic activism (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022). Research on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), for example, finds that citizens are most likely to participate in civic action when it concerns everyday social problems, rather than more abstract, political issues (Pickering, 2022).

Education and learning

Civic or citizenship education in schools can play an important role in teaching core democratic values; encouraging citizens to learn more about political and civic society; and helping them to become more engaged, cooperative, and trusting (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022; Akin et al., 2017). Such programming is the most common form of democratic promotion efforts targeted at youth in post-Soviet countries, with the expectation that participants will become more positive about the democratic process and more willing to question authoritarian values (Pospieszna, 2022). A recent study of a civic education programme in CEE finds that youth participants were more likely to: show greater support of democratic institutions; hold democratic attitudes; and perceive themselves as having political efficacy[1] (Pospieszna et al., 2022). Intercultural citizenship education (ICE) also incorporates teaching on democracy, human rights and social justice in foreign language classes (Martin et al., 2021). This has extended to involve intercultural service learning, whereby students learn a foreign language while working together on a civic project — experiencing that they can make a difference in their community (Rauschert & Byram, 2018).

Lived experience — or "lived curriculum" — can be central to the learning process (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022). Research on educational programming in the Baltic States finds that having opportunities for students to participate in organisations, clubs and groups can be more effective in fostering democratic values and civic engagement than specific civic education courses (Stevick, 2019). Donor programming can help teachers to adopt child-centred teaching methods and to develop classroom management skills that exemplify democratic norms; and support school directors in developing approaches to school management that manifest the rule of law norms and democratic processes (Stevick, 2019; Akin et al., 2017).

Educational programmes outside the home country and in established democracies where participants can see and experience democracy first-hand could also be beneficial in helping to develop a culture of democracy among participants, who can then become agents of democratic diffusion in their home country (Pospieszna et al., 2022; Stevick, 2019; Chankseliani, 2018).

Media

[1] "People's attitudes towards their ability to influence and engage in political life." OECD (2021). Political efficacy and participation. https://www.oecd.org/gov/political-efficacy-and-participation-4548cad8-en.htm

Recent research on media systems in Southeast Europe finds that they fall short of achieving democratisation and remain in a transitionary state (Peruško, 2021). Media assistance to countries in transition often involves support for the diffusion of democratic norms and values, such as media freedom (Galus, 2020). Research on Polish media assistance in Belarus and Ukraine finds that media interventions can contribute to the emergence of new media outlets that can facilitate democratic debate (Galus, 2020). The presence of alternative options (outside of mainstream media) provided by various digital spaces has created opportunities for people to express their opinions on important issues; engage in active citizenship; and foster a more diverse, inclusive society (Peruško, 2021; Fairey & Kerr, 2020; Trifonova-Price, 2019). In Bulgaria, for example, Facebook was used widely during the 2013/2014 social protests to express discontent with the social and political system; and to convey information and exchange ideas. This contributed to the development of new communities; democratic public deliberation and debate; and placed pressure on politicians (Trifonova-Price, 2019).

2. Background

Political culture is the values, beliefs, and emotions that members of a society express about the political regime and their role in it (Pickering, 2022, p. 5). The consolidation of democracy involves not only institutional change, but also instilling a democratic culture in a society. This means that people "share and accept democratic principles and values which guide their behavioural patterns, perceptions and attitudes" (Balčytienė, 2021, p. 81-82). The Council of Europe places much emphasis on the term: "culture of democracy" in their discussions of democracy, indicating that democratic institutions and laws, while essential for a democracy to exist, cannot function unless they are grounded in democratic norms, values, attitudes and practices (Council of Europe, 2021). These include (Council of Europe, 2021, p. 15):

- a commitment to public deliberation and discussion;
- a willingness to express one's own opinions and to listen to the opinions of others;
- a conviction that differences of opinion and conflicts must be resolved peacefully;
- a commitment to decisions being made by those who have received the greatest share of the votes or seats in an election;
- a commitment to the protection of minority groups and their rights, including the rights of those who do not support the policies of the elected government; and
- a commitment to the rule of law.

The mentality of politicians and citizens can take a long time to change. Thus, even if a new political system is implemented, the old political culture can linger, which can be an obstacle to the consolidation of democracy (Mijo & Danaj, 2017). In Albania, for example, the lack of democratic political culture has been noted as one of the main problematic areas of democracy (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022; Mijo & Danaj, 2017). In Serbia, the dominant political culture is generally seen as authoritarian, collectivistic, and patriarchal, which has undermined political participation (Damnjanović, 2019).

Research on democratic consolidation in Ukraine finds that a key impediment to consolidation is lingering post-Soviet "informality" — behavioural practices, such as tolerance of informal governance, the use of informal connections, the exchange of favours, and corruption (Terzyan, 2020). While it may be possible to introduce new legislation to counter corruption and to implement reforms, it can take a long time to counter a "culture of corruption" (Terzyan, 2020). A

study on Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia also finds that while the three countries now have pluralistic civil societies that are more pro-democratic than Russia, clientelist networks remain entrenched, corruption remains widespread, and civil society is not strong enough to help offset these conditions (Pospieszna et al., 2022). In such situations, where political efficacy is low, young people may feel powerless to influence political outcomes in their countries — which dampens political participation (Pospieszna et al., 2022).

3. Diffusion of values and norms

The diffusion of norms is a process during which international and domestic actors interact — and contest, interpret and translate norms (Baltag & Burmester, 2022; Delcour, 2021). A norm is seen to be internalised when there is a change in local discourse, values and behaviour (Baltag & Burmester, 2022; Delcour, 2021). Although the broader image of the EU as a model of democracy is largely accepted in the Eastern Neighbourhood at the societal and even the elite level, the general public do not necessarily embrace or internalise many liberal-democratic values such as equal rights for sexual minorities (Dandashly & Noutcheva, 2022; Terzyan, 2020; Kakachia et al., 2019). This is due in large part to a mix of socially conservative mores and attachment to traditional gender roles (Delcour, 2021).

Case study: Armenia

Research on anti-discrimination norms in Armenia finds that these EU-promoted norms coexist with Russia's narrative of traditional values in the country (Delcour, 2021). There has been a greater acceptance of the EU's human rights value frame among Armenian political elites after the 2018 Velvet revolution[2]. This is confirmed by the adoption of key documents envisaging further steps to prohibit discrimination (Delcour, 2021). The promotion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex and queer (LGBTQI) rights, considered to be as an integral part of the global human rights agenda, faced political elite resistance initially, but has since received greater acceptance among the elite (Delcour, 2021). These developments signal emerging spatial identification with Europe (Delcour, 2021). It is yet to be seen, however, whether the interaction between elites and various societal groups will impact the views of the latter, who still tend to be less supportive of LGBTQI rights (Delcour, 2021).

Societal groups

Scholars have argued that societal groups (e.g. CSOs, diaspora associations, media, and grassroots movements) can be powerful actors, contributing to the social recognition and internalising of external norms (Baltag & Burmester, 2022). If they form a critical mass of society, they can demand change from the national political elite (Baltag & Burmester, 2022).

Recent research on civil society and democratisation in Armenia and Georgia identifies the external and internal effects of civil society on the state and the general public. External effects of civil society refer to the ability of CSOs to advance democracy by informing the public debate; representing citizens' interests; participating directly in governance; organising protests and other activities; and implementing specific projects in support of democratic processes and outcomes

[2] This popular movement led by journalist, former political prisoner, and MP Nikol Pashinyan peacefully overthrew the semi-authoritarian regime of President Serzh Sargsyan. Foster, K. (2019). Armenia's Velvet Revolution: Lessons from the Caucasus. Harvard International Review. https://hir.harvard.edu/armenias-velvet-revolution/

(Stefes & Paturyan, 2021). Facilitating public deliberation and drawing public attention to issues such as human rights abuses and government accountability, is a key democratic function of civil society and CSOs (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021).

Internal effects of civil society refer to the ways in which CSOs seek to strengthen citizens' democratic knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviour through involvement in their activities (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021). By providing spaces for people to meet and decide on common issues, civil society can expose the public to diverse opinions and experiences; encourage respect for diversity; and develop habits of cooperation and opportunities for collective action (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021). Internal effects may be less visible, and take longer to materialise, than external effects of civil society on the state (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021).

To contribute to building a culture of democracy, CEPPS has often worked with CSOs to promote the benefits of democracy to citizens and, in some cases, to train civic leaders on the effective dissemination of democratic values and the importance of civic participation (IFES, 2021).

Case study: Moldova

Research on the internalisation of the anti-corruption norm in Moldova finds that societal groups in the country made use of bottom-up societal pressure to empower the EU-promoted norm (Baltag & Burmester, 2022). In Moldova, many genuine reformers are societal actors. Thus, a norm needs to be embedded at the societal level to then be transposed into policies, and to become internalised (Baltag & Burmester, 2022).

The most active CSOs and media organisations supportive of the anti-corruption norm became norm promoters by raising awareness and participating in policy-making processes (Baltag & Burmester, 2022). Further, a key reformer in the country is the current president, Maia Sandu (2020), whose election is seen by many as a turning point in the rise of the anti-corruption norm as she has openly supported the norm in her attitude and behaviour (Baltag & Burmester, 2022). Sandu's efforts to fight corruption have been undermined, however, by the dominant political elites' contestation of the norm. In order for a norm to become fully internalised, the whole of the political elite — not just a minority — needs to adopt its behavioural prescriptions. The role of CSOs as norm promoters has also been hampered by political elites' gatekeeping, preventing their participation in the policy-making process; and by the deteriorating state of media freedom in the country (Baltag & Burmester, 2022).

4. Active citizenship

Active citizenship is the willingness to get involved in the community or larger society and participate in public life — in order to achieve a common good (Andersone & Helmane, 2021, 26). It can entail political and civic engagement and participation, formal and institutionalised action (e.g. voting); and informal and non-institutionalised action (e.g. protests, social movements, use of social media, and ad hoc participation) (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022; Andersone & Helmane, 2021; Akin et al., 2017).

Political culture can influence the degree and way in which citizens participate and engage in political and civic life (Pickering, 2022). A study on the relationship between democratic political culture and civic activities in CEE finds that political participation, membership in political organisations, and activities within voluntary organisations were less frequent in CEE than in western Europe (Marchenko, 2016). Civic activists were described as "dispassionate, but

interested" (Marchenko, 2016). More recent research also finds that neither membership in groups and organisations nor participation in public activity in the last twelve months is very high in CEE, with the exception of the Czech Republic (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022). Recent research on civic engagement in BiH argues that citizens who prioritise the outputs, rather than the norms and processes, of democracy and expect others to solve their problems are unlikely to participate civically (Pickering, 2022).

Case study: Belarus

A study on democratic culture among adolescents in Belarus, based on surveys (2016-2017) of rural and urban public school students in grades 8 through 11, finds that certain democratic values have taken root among this younger generation (Sianko et al., 2022). In particular, adolescents in Belarus demonstrate a relatively high level of commitment to norms of conventional democratic citizenship – and have expectations of taking part in civic and political life (Sianko et al., 2022). The study also finds, however, that youth attribute low levels of significance to some norms of conventional democratic citizenship, which can be detrimental to fostering democratic culture (Sianko et al., 2022). For example, only one in five teens indicated that joining a political party or engaging in political discussions were important for a democratic citizenry — likely due to widespread perceptions of electoral unfairness (Sianko et al., 2022).

4.1 Trust and cooperation

Active citizens should have a sense of responsibility; respect for individual differences and diversity; and a willingness to cooperate with each other — which, in turn, plays an important role in building social capital and trust (Andersone & Helmane, 2021; Akin et al., 2017). Participation in voluntary or community associations and activities can contribute to more social and institutional trust; and help to create strong social and political institutions (Ishiyama et al., 2018). Higher existing social trust can also be an important indicator of agency: people who trust one another are more likely to form associations (Balčytienė, 2021; Ishiyama et al., 2018).

A study of trust among students from countries at various stages of democratic development finds that students with higher levels of trust were more likely to be involved in civic and political activities than those who were less trusting (see Sianko et al., 2022). The study also supports claims that individuals from countries with durable and stable democratic have higher levels of trust than those from aspiring democracies (Sianko et al., 2022). Research on agency in CEE finds that perceptions of social trust is significantly lower among citizens of the region, along with low confidence in the performance of democratic institutions (Balčytienė, 2021). While perceptions of institutional and interpersonal trust and confidence are growing, they are not considered adequate yet to foster social change (Balčytienė, 2021).

Research on civil society participation and trust-building in the Eastern Neighbourhood finds that the existence of a fairly well-developed network of CSOs and opportunities to engage in voluntary organisations has contributed to higher levels of social and institutional trust in Georgia, in contrast to Armenia and Azerbaijan and other countries in the former Soviet Union (Ishiyama et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there has been an erosion of social and institutional trust over time, which raises concern over the staying power of Georgian democracy (Ishiyama et al., 2018).

Thus, while it is essential to continue raising awareness of democratic norms and principles in countries in transition, it is also very important to provide diverse opportunities to practice various norms of democratic citizenship (Sianko et al., 2022). Schools could foster open classroom

discussions and other strategies that address students' mistrust of political and societal institutions and create ways to foster greater trust (Sianko et al., 2022).

4.2 Limitations to an organisational approach to analysing and fostering civic activism and political culture

While much literature on active citizenship focuses on formal organisations and institutional conditions, recent research argues that civil society development in CEE needs to be analysed from the perspective of actors — activists and citizens — and the concrete concerns that motivate the varied forms of their civic activism (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022). Further, if unconventional forms of participation are considered (e.g. grassroots activism), the extent of political participation in areas deemed to have low political and civic participation may be higher (Ekman et al., 2016).

Research on CEE highlights a rise in recent decades in the actions of ordinary citizens that have challenged the political order through grassroots movements, mass protests, demonstrations and diverse forms of mobilisation (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022; Marchenko, 2016). It is often "bursts" of civic activism — which occur when citizens come together and organise around imminent threats from political elites and important social issues (e.g. women's reproductive rights in Poland; political corruption in the Czech Republic; or police corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina) — that should be taken into consideration when examining the robustness of civil society (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022). These forms of engagement by ordinary citizens are often unconventional or non-institutionalised, but can have an immense social impact; can strengthen civil society and social capital; and can prevent democratic backsliding (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022; Ekman et al., 2016; Marchenko, 2016). The research also suggests that citizens in CEE have positive expectations of more informal civic engagement, viewing it as an important norm of citizenship (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022).

The traditional focus in academic literature on formal organisations extends to donor approaches to civil society and fostering democratic culture. The EU approach in post-Soviet countries has been criticised for focusing predominantly on non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are not necessarily representative of the population at large; and for paying inadequate attention to spontaneous civic activism and informal civic networks (Loda, 2017). It is thus recommended that the EU and other external donors give more attention to local spontaneous forms of civic activism and indigenous informal networks (Loda, 2017).

Research on Georgia finds that NGOs are considered to represent a social elite, rather than genuine civil society (Loda, 2017). Other research on Georgia also finds that Western donors did not provide much incentive for civil society development, resulting in a civil society that was subsequently co-opted by the new leadership and not deeply committed to democracy (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021). Some research on Armenia finds that NGOs are not necessarily representative of the wide population or directly linked to democratisation (Loda, 2017); whereas another study argues that since Armenia's civil society did not receive as much funding for democracy promotion as Georgia, its civil society was able to develop in a more genuine fashion with closer connections to the larger public, and without co-option by the political elite or an agenda directed by donors' preferences (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021).

4.3 Everyday issues

Recent research on civic activism in CEE also finds that citizens tend to trust civil society actors when they address important societal issues (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022). Activism in the region is often driven by concrete, everyday concerns of citizens and the use of more informal modes of mobilisation and "bursts" of civic activism (discussed above), rather than reliance on professional activists (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022).

Case study: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Studies on BiH have recently pushed back against characterisations of citizens as passive, particularly after the 2014 mass protests and plenums, that were driven by everyday socio-economic problems, rather than abstract political ideals (Pickering, 2022). Citizens in BiH have often expressed scepticism of foreign-funded CSOs, preferring to engage in less-institutionalised, horizontally organised activities (Pietrzyk-Reeves & McMahon, 2022). The mass protests, which were organised by non-institutionalised actors across ten cities, called for social justice and class-based solidary, rather than ethnopolitical divisions. They were successful in forcing socio-economic issues onto the political agenda (Pickering, 2022). The plenums allowed people who had withdrawn from public life as a result of war to have a say about everyday matters that concern them, which diverged from the liberal democratic values advocated by Western-supported local NGOs (Pickering, 2022).

Research on BiH finds that citizens are most likely to participate in civic action when it concerns everyday social problems (Pickering, 2022). Active respondents were most often motivated to participate by helping those considered vulnerable, improving social services, and addressing particular local concerns (Pickering, 2022). Such activism has helped to solve concrete problems and, in some cases, brought about policy change at the local and sometimes regional levels (Pickering, 2022). This type of involvement has, in turn, boosted the views of Bosnians about the legitimacy of civic activism (Pickering, 2022).

5. Education and learning

5.1 Citizenship and civic education

Active citizenship and other aspects of democratic culture can be fostered through education. This requires three types of learning (Akin et al., 2017):

- Knowledge (cognitive) – learning the facts about democracy, politics, and democratic and political institutions; and concepts related to active citizenship.
- Skills (pragmatic) – learning basic skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving and conflict resolution. This may entail getting involved in society and mastering citizenship through personal experiences (see "lived curriculum" below).
- Values (affective) – learning and developing the particular values, behaviours, and attitudes which help individuals get attached to the societies to which they belong.

Civic or citizenship education programming is considered to be a key source of value change, influencing the formation of political values, attitudes and behaviour (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022). Such education in schools can play an important role in teaching core democratic values; encouraging citizens to learn more about political and civic society; and helping them to become

more engaged, cooperative, and trusting (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022; Akin et al., 2017). Individuals may also be encouraged to work together on community-wide issues since they learn better about democratic practices in a participatory and collaborative manner (see the following section on “lived curriculum”) (Akin et al., 2017). Such programming for youth is considered particularly pressing as there has been growing evidence that young people globally are disinterested or lack the capacity to engage in civic duties, with declining levels of civic engagement demonstrated among youth (see Akin, 2021).

While research indicates that youth in post-Soviet contexts still exhibit weak democratic values, the new political generation is no longer (or to a much lesser extent than prior generations) socialised into the political culture of the Soviet era (Pospieszna et al., 2022). As such, donors and civil society actors have frequently targeted this successor generation for civic education programmes that include training on the protection of important civil rights (e.g. freedom of speech and association, and an active and independent media); and promote a view of civil society that is engaged, diverse, and vibrant (Pospieszna et al., 2022). Civic education programmes are the most common form of democratic promotion efforts targeted at youth in post-Soviet countries (40% of all youth assistance programmes) (Pospieszna et al., 2022). Specific activities included support to schools through the provision of learning materials; teacher training; organisation of workshops; summer schools; internships; scholarships; and exchange programmes (Pospieszna et al., 2022).

The expectation is that youth who complete such programming will become more positive about the democratic process and will be more willing to question authoritarian values (Pospieszna, 2022). Involvement in the programmes may also promote political efficacy and encourage young people in post-Soviet countries to broaden and strengthen their civic engagement, for example, by helping participants to see what is possible and has already been achieved in other contexts (Pospieszna et al., 2022). It can provide youth with the tools needed for social organising, such as creating a network of like-minded peers to enable action (Pospieszna et al., 2022).

Case study: Study Tours to Poland

The civic education programme, Study Tours to Poland for Students, has provided training to around 200 students (ages 18-21) annually from Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. The main goals include: (1) supporting the development of civil society in Eastern European countries; (2) promoting democratic values and support of democratic changes in the region, through the belief that broader societal changes are bottom-up; and (3) promoting knowledge about Poland’s own transition to democracy and joining of the EU (Pospieszna et al., 2022). It provided information in the form of lectures about democracy as a political system and its fundamental values; and provided a safe forum for students to speak freely about their own political systems. The programme also sought to deliver skills by teaching young people how to take advantage of opportunities for civic engagement and participation in their home countries, (Pospieszna et al., 2022). A recent study of the programme finds (based on 2014-2018 data) that young citizens partaking in the programme were more likely to: show greater support of democratic institutions, hold democratic attitudes, and perceive themselves as having political efficacy. The changes in attitudes were not substantial, however, which could be due to such programmes attracting already politically and socially active youth (Pospieszna et al., 2022).

Case study: Latvia

STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education can be considered essential for being an actively engaged and responsible citizen, with the knowledge, skills, competencies and values that enable active citizenship (Andersone & Helmane, 2021). STEM programming, however, has often taught science (including mathematics) in a way detached from societal implications (Andersone & Helmane, 2021). A study of the mathematics curriculum in Latvia (Grades 1-12), based on data from 2013 and 2020, finds that it has specifically incorporated transversal skills, including civic participation, in the learning outcomes (Andersone & Helmane, 2021). The curriculum contains references to social and moral responsibility, including learning to behave responsibly towards others; contributing to a safe environment; and respecting social perspectives and different points of view (Andersone & Helmane, 2021). It also seeks to foster the skills to experiment practically with democratic principles, working alone, and in small and bigger groups (Andersone & Helmane, 2021).

5.2 Lived experience and curriculum

Lived experience — or "lived curriculum" — can be central to the learning process, allowing for the continual reshaping of notions, thoughts and ideas (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022). In the case of the rule of law norms, for example, recent research finds that the most promising avenues for advancing such norms come not from additional reforms to traditional instruction (e.g. civic education courses), but from direct experiences of civic participation, including within the classroom and school (Stevick, 2019). These experiences enable youth to connect to society and real life (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022).

Surveying educators and civic education specialists across the Baltic States, research finds that having "real democracy" in the organisation of schools — and opportunities for students to actively participate in organisations, clubs and groups — can be more effective in encouraging democratic values and civic knowledge and engagement among students than civic education courses (Stevick, 2019). Other research on active citizenship finds that extra-curricular activities enable students to develop an active citizenship perspective; social accountability; intercultural awareness; awareness of democracy and human rights; thinking and research skills; and interaction and intrapersonal skills (Akin et al., 2017). Active participation of students in solving community problems can further foster in-school democracy (Akin et al., 2017).

Donors can support programming that aims to improve communication and collaboration, incorporating collaborative problem-solving and multiple perspectives — all of which can contribute to cultural change (Stevick, 2019). In the case of schools, such support can include helping teachers to develop classroom management skills that exemplify democratic norms; and helping school directors to develop approaches to school management that manifest the rule of law norms and democratic processes (Stevick, 2019). Such skills development could be promoted in "model schools" that become centres for pre-service training (Stevick, 2019).

Case study: Turkey

Studies of educational practices in Turkey reveal that teachers largely apply authoritarian and teacher-centred approaches to citizenship education, such as direct explanation, question and answer method, and narration techniques, which undermine active citizenship education (Akin et al., 2017). Instead, effective citizenship education requires the promotion of inquiry and action, with the aim of fostering attitudinal and behavioural changes. This could be encouraged by providing students with opportunities to practice active citizenship in real life, through the use of teamwork, role-playing, activity-based scenarios, problem-based learning, school trips, and case

studies (Akin et al., 2017). There are, however, few opportunities to form student clubs, which hinders the creation of a democratic school atmosphere (Akin et al., 2017).

The country's Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has sought to change the notion of citizenship education from raising "good" citizens to raising "active democratic" citizens. This has involved projects geared toward examining and improving the decision-making processes of students, regarding democratic issues and obligations (Akin et al., 2017). They have also sought to develop necessary skills among students, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, cooperation, and negotiation (Akin et al., 2017). The project: "From School to Community: Children and Students as Change Agents in their Community" (FS2C) (co-financed by the EU and the Turkish government) was implemented to help foster democratic culture among students — by learning and exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens at school and in their community (Akin et al., 2017). Students were expected to take the initiative in improving their environment — engaging in a series of activities to: determine the priority issues and problems related to democracy and human rights in their community; develop solutions for them; take actions; and evaluate their actions (Akin et al., 2017). Data collected on the project indicate that the activities were effective in helping students to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in support of active citizenship (Akin et al., 2017). Many studies point out the need still, however, for school curriculums and textbooks to become more compatible with the notion of "democratic and active" citizenship (Akin et al., 2017).

Case study: Albania

A recent study on education in Albania emphasises that education policymakers, school directors, teachers and other stakeholders have the responsibility to foster the appropriate conditions for students' experiences of fairness in schools, given that inequalities in society are mirrored in schools (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022). Similar to other studies, students' fairness experiences were influenced in large part by assessment of achievements and interaction with the teaching staff (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022). The research finds that positive experiences of fairness in educational institutions — and the development of a proper understanding of fairness among youth — has the potential to contribute to social stability and to impact the quality of the political culture of the country (Çekrezi & Sogutlu, 2022).

5.3 Exchanges

In societies transitioning out of authoritarian rule, educational programmes outside the home country and in established democracies, where participants can see and experience democracy first-hand, could be beneficial (Pospieszna et al., 2022; Stevick, 2019). Citizens in post-authoritarian contexts who have the opportunity to be immersed in another culture often learn these lessons quite powerfully and become agents of change at home (Stevick, 2019).

The number of degree-mobile students from post-Soviet countries to Europe and the US has been steadily increasing since the 1990s (Chankseliani, 2018). A study on student mobility and the democratic development of post-Soviet Eurasia finds that former Soviet countries with higher proportions of students studying in Europe or the US have achieved higher levels of democratic development; whereas countries with higher proportions of students studying in Russia have reached significantly lower levels of democratic development (Chankseliani, 2018). It may be the case that countries with higher levels of attained democracy have a larger proportion of individuals who choose to study in Europe or the US. However, this research argues the reverse — that studying in countries with high levels of attained democracy can promote the democratic

socialisation of individuals; the development of their civic consciousness; and the transformation of political culture (Chankseliani, 2018). In turn, migrant returnees can be agents of democratic diffusion in their home country (Chankseliani, 2018).

5.4 Intercultural learning and empathy

Active citizenship involves not only knowledge of and participation in civic and political life, but also being respectful of those who have differing beliefs, views, cultures and lifestyles (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021). Being an active citizen is thus related to competencies of empathy and perceiving value in socio-cultural diversity (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021). Skills such as empathy and acceptance of differences need to be taught in school, which in turn can foster democratic life and active citizenship (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021). Teachers who possess these skills themselves are considered to be more effective in moulding students into active citizens who value democratic culture (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021). A study of schools in Turkey finds that prospective teachers that have high levels of empathy and acceptance of differences are also more likely to be skilled in communication — all of which can improve their ability to foster empathy in their students. This, in turn, can improve their success in raising active citizens (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021). Students who experienced a global curriculum also had a strong likelihood of exhibiting attitudes and values in support of social justice and tolerance (Altay & Gülersoy, 2021).

Intercultural Citizenship Education (ICE) combines foreign language education and education for (intercultural) citizenship (Rauschert & Byram, 2018). ICE that incorporates education on democracy, human rights and social justice is considered to be essential, particularly with shortfalls in national education policies in Europe that enable students to detect and critically examine populist and anti-democratic discourses (Martin et al., 2021). English as a foreign language classes at a Spanish public university, for example, has as its published transversal competences: “a commitment to work towards gender equality, to respect people’s fundamental rights and appreciate the value of contemporary society’s multiple composition” (see Martin et al., 2021). A study on these classes finds that the use of literature with themes of equality, respect for other cultures, empathy, social justice, social action and protest in their teaching is effective in triggering discussion that promotes the development of intercultural citizenship competences (Martin et al., 2021).

Intercultural service learning has also been combined with ICE in foreign language teaching. The intercultural citizenship education project, “Green Kidz”, for example, links young people aged 10–14 who are all learning English as a foreign language, virtually, some of them in a school in Denmark and some in a school in Argentina (Rauschert & Byram, 2018). The project has four stages (Rauschert & Byram, 2018, 362):

- Stage 1 – discover about ‘us’ and prepare for ‘them’.
- Stage 2 – present ‘us’ to ‘them’ and compare.
- Stage 3 – work together – in ‘us and them’ groups.
- Stage 4 – focus again on ‘us’ and acting in our community.

Through such projects that promote intercultural relations and jointly taking global responsibility, young students are able to exercise their language skills in a meaningful way, while experiencing that they can make a difference in their community (Rauschert & Byram, 2018).

5.5 Teacher training

In order to effectively develop active citizenship characteristics in students, teachers also need to be equipped with active citizenship skills (Akin et al., 2017). However, pre-service teacher education programmes in many countries, such as in Turkey, where top-down teaching methods dominate, tend not to include democratic citizenship and human rights courses that would help to develop these skills (Akin et al., 2017). This can make it challenging for teachers to develop students' critical and analytical thinking skills, values and behaviours. Teacher education programmes should incorporate topics of children's rights; child-centred teaching and learning methods; democratisation of instruction; and democracy education (Akin et al., 2017).

Case study: Turkey

Research on teachers and active citizenship in Turkey finds that the majority of teachers surveyed emphasised the important role that participation in community service practices and experiences plays in encouraging their active citizenship characteristics (Akin, 2021). Engaging in community service helped to foster civic knowledge, civic skills and civic attitudes and values in relation to active citizenship (Akin, 2021). Specifically, such practices and experiences encouraged prospective teachers to develop a sense of usefulness; social awareness; and responsibility to group members and the larger society (Pospieszna et al., 2022; Akin, 2021). In addition, they provided teacher candidates with the opportunity to collaborate and cooperate not only with each other, but also with local and larger community members, such as the student clubs, university administrators, NGOs and other organisations. This enabled them to develop effective collaboration, cooperation, communication and deliberation skills (Akin, 2021).

6. Media

Recent research on media systems in Southeast Europe finds that they fall short of achieving democratisation and remain in a transitionary state (Peruško, 2021). In particular, the media system continues to be subject to media capture and asymmetric parallelism. Asymmetric parallelism occurs when even mainstream media is owned or controlled by the government and independent media is minimal (Peruško, 2021). Media capture refers to "undue influence of the state over the media and its democratic role" (see Peruško, 2021, p. 40). Media systems in the region thus exhibit weak development of the media market and low media freedom, which can, in turn, undermine the development of a democratic culture (Peruško, 2021).

Media assistance to countries in transition often involves support for the diffusion of democratic norms and values, particularly in contexts where the media play a critical role in shaping dominant narratives (Galus, 2020). This can include programming that promotes media freedom, rather than a pure focus on the development of technical media infrastructure (Galus, 2020). Donors have also supported their own international broadcasters as a core component of public diplomacy aimed at external audiences (Galus, 2020).

Research on Polish media assistance in Belarus and Ukraine finds that media interventions can contribute to the emergence of new media outlets and new media frameworks, which can facilitate democratic debate (Galus, 2020). The presence of alternative options provided by various digital spaces and initiatives — including new online platforms and forms of social media — has improved access to news content and information, creating opportunities for people to express their opinions on important issues; to engage in active citizenship; and to foster a more diverse, inclusive society (Fairey & Kerr, 2020; Trifonova-Price, 2019; Howell, 2015). Recent

research finds, however, that compared to other European audiences, CEE and South European audiences demonstrate less active online participative practices of blogging, posting comments, and joining groups in social networks; rather, news consumption of traditional media in online settings and social media practices tend to dominate (Peruško, 2021). Nonetheless, there are still examples of successful online activism. In the case of Bulgaria, for example, Facebook was used widely during the 2013/2014 social protests to express discontent with the social and political system; to convey information and exchange ideas, which placed pressure on politicians. The organisers of the Facebook protests posted comments designed to encourage users to get involved in online and offline activities (see Trifonova-Price, 2019). Such social networks allow the public to bypass mainstream media in order to foster new communities; pressure politicians; and contribute to the democratic public sphere (Trifonova-Price, 2019).

Case study: Western Balkans

The use of hashtags has gained prominence in the growing phenomena of online memory activism in the Western Balkans (Fridman, 2021). Memory activism involves addressing and commemorating contested pasts by activists, who seek to open up dialogue, influence public debate, and foster social change (Fridman, 2021). Online memory activism has the potential to support widespread active citizenship and inclusion, both important aspects of fostering a democratic culture. Young memory activists throughout the former Yugoslavia have protested the return to the region of ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) convicts who had completed their sentences and reclaimed roles in public life. In addition to in-person obstruction, resistance has taken the form of a regional social media hashtag campaign — #NisuNašiHeroji (#NotOurHeroes) — adopted by members of the regional Youth Initiative for Human Rights. Their activism emphasises that although they are too young to remember the wars, these ICTY convicts are *not* the heroes of *their* generation (Fridman, 2021). In 2017, when the ICTY was closing, the group posted a composition of five pictures of their activists standing in well-known public locations in the capitals of five Western Balkan states, holding banners with their hashtag #NisuNašiHeroji (Fridman, 2021). By adopting the same message and the same hashtag in their online and onsite actions, these youth activists highlight that theirs is not only a national struggle but a regional one — and one that transcends ethnonationality (Fridman, 2021; Fridman & Ristić, 2020).

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