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THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN CIVIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

Civic education plays a crucial role in shaping responsible citizens in any society. While schools and formal educational institutions have traditionally been the primary providers of civic education, libraries also play a significant role. It is undeniable that libraries remain vital information centers and play a role in disseminating civic education. Civic education is essential for societal development as it promotes critical thinking, encourages the active participation of citizens in democratic processes, and fosters thoughtful engagement. Through civic education, there is a continuous effort to create active and informed citizens who contribute to the development of their communities in various ways. Libraries offer access to information, meaning they provide access to a wide range of books, journals, and online databases. The library supports learning and research by enabling users to access their collections. By offering diverse materials on topics related to politics, history, social issues, and more, libraries stimulate individuals to educate themselves on civic matters.

Keywords: education, civic education, libraries.

Introduction

Civic education achieves and imparts new knowledge and teaching related to understanding the society and the world. Through this knowledge, skills and values of humanity, responsibility, cooperation, and so on are developed, and necessary in the democratic society we live in. By learning and practicing these values, individuals improve themselves as personalities, thereby enhancing the environment around them. It is well-known that ancient Greece had an excellent educational system, through which the famous Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many other renowned philosophers, who laid the foundations of civic education and knowledge, were educated. This education included important and necessary sciences that formed the basis of civilization. The ancient Greek educational system endured for many years throughout the human history.

Civic education refers to the teaching and learning of the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the citizens in the society. It is an educational process that helps individuals to learn, and at the same time encourages them to become active and engaged participants in their communities and democratic relations as a whole. Civic education covers various topics such as government issues, political processes, human rights, social justice, and civic engagement. It supports the development of the individuals, the educational system, and the lifelong learning. This leads to the formation of informed, responsible, and active citizens.

Every person faces the challenge of accepting themselves with all their values, opinions, attitudes, and needs on the one hand, while on the other hand, every individual feels the need to belong and be accepted within their environment and surroundings.

Libraries, as centers of knowledge, have always supported and consistently tracked the progress of science. In the past, access to libraries was limited to specific categories of citizens, usually those from wealthier segments of society. Today, every interested citizen, researcher, writer, pupil, student, etc., has access to libraries. Thanks to the libraries and the open access to their collections, citizens are enabled to stay informed and actively to contribute and participate in the democratic processes.

Concept and Definition of the Civic Education

The civic education is defined as continuous learning of the fundamental concepts and values that form the foundation of the democratic political community (Petrovski, 2012). The success of the civic education is measured by the empowerment of citizens, their education, and understanding of their

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rights and obligations. Civic education is an educational process that enables the development of individuals. Education can shape young minds and can be consciously used to shape society.

Education is a human right, a public good, and a public responsibility. Education represents a pedagogical process through which knowledge is acquired. Education (from Latin educatus, *educate*, meaning *to bring out*, and *ducere*, meaning *to lead* or *educate*) denotes a process of personality change towards a desired direction through the acquisition of various contents depending on the age. Education transmits knowledge, skills, values, and abilities from generation to generation.

The goal of education since ancient times has been to cultivate good people, good citizens, good speakers, honest, brave, and moral citizens, and thereby good rulers. As the culture progressed, the goals of education focused more and more on learnedness, honesty, morality, and the formation of a balanced and harmonious personalities.

Today's education faces challenges, caused by multiple factors, most notably the high technology, the migrations, the flow of information, and the information society. Consequently, the students and scholars have the responsible task of changing the state of our society and creating new policies to foster democratic and cultural-educational traditions. Education is a process, always developing and seeking new and better solutions, ensuring quality in schooling and teaching. The educational system presumes its creation within the framework of the schooling system, which is a formal organizational blueprint, framework, and technical ideas, within which, the planned, organized, and programmed process of education and upbringing is carried out. Its general principles of operation are defined and approved by laws and other public legal acts, decisions, and documents. (Mijatović, 1999).

The educational system is organized within educational institutions established by law. These comprise primary and secondary schools and universities. In our contemporary conditions, the educational system consists of formal, non-formal, and informal systems. The formal institutional schooling system comprises preschools, primary, secondary, vocational, and higher educational institutions. Non-formal education often takes place outside of the traditional institutions, such as adult education centers aimed at qualifying or re-qualifying adult persons. The informal education includes various forms of learning outside of the formal and non-formal education, such as learning within families, through media, and from other influences in the environment. This means that the educational process occurs within the institutional education system, encompassing organized educational institutions. Each country typically has its own educational system. Different European countries approach civic education differently, with some EU countries having compulsory civic education programs while others not.

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed January 24th as the International Day of Education.

Civil Identity

The civil identity encompasses the sum of all needs, characteristics, values, goals, and behaviors that individuals practice, recognize, and accept as their own. The concept of citizenship is part of civic education, which pertains to the creation of a citizen, possessing good civic qualities and virtues necessary for living in a democracy. This includes empathy, trust, generosity, solidarity, collective spirit, inclusiveness, and more.

Civil identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging, connection, and dedication to their community or society. It emphasizes the importance of individuals identifying themselves as active and engaged members of their community and taking responsibility for its well-being and progress. Developing civil identity involves inclusion, understanding, and acceptance of norms, values, and principles that define a particular community or society. This includes recognizing the rights and responsibilities that come with being a citizen and actively participating in activities that contribute to community improvement.

For example, someone with a strong civil identity may volunteer for local organizations, participate in community events, or express their opinions on important issues. Involvement in various

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civic initiatives, joining community groups, advocating for positive changes, etc. are examples of developing civil identity. Building a strong civil identity is crucial because it fosters a sense of belonging, promotes social cohesion, encourages individuals to actively participate and contribute to their community's well-being, and helps in creating a sense of collective responsibility and achievement of common goals.

The development of civic identity refers to the process through which individuals develop a sense of belonging and responsibility towards their community. Civic education plays a crucial role in this process through several aspects:

- Knowledge and awareness: Education provides knowledge and fosters awareness of democratic principles, rights, and civic responsibilities.
- Sense of belonging: It helps in cultivating a sense of belonging to the community and adopting an identity as a citizen.
- Learning and development of proper values and ethics: It promotes learning values such as respect for diversity, and honest and respectful behavior towards others.
- Developing empathy and critical thinking: It nurtures empathy towards others and critical thinking to understand complex issues and challenges.
- Active participation: It encourages citizens to be active participants in their community, to be engaged in decision-making, and to promote common interests.

These aspects of civic education significantly contribute to shaping civic identity and its ongoing development. Furthermore, civic identity can be developed through various factors and experiences, including education, family, and broader community and dialogue.

Library - term, and definition

The library is defined as a curated collection of printed, written, and other duplicated materials such as books, pamphlets, newspapers, and other documents accessible to the population for the purpose of information, research, education, and cultural enrichment (Petrovski, 1996). Libraries have always been and continue to be the primary source of knowledge. Over time, libraries have evolved, improving conditions for their uninterrupted operation and functioning.

Libraries are places where books are stored, processed, professionally curated, stored, and made available to interested citizens. A library is understood as a working organization that ensures the permanent and organized completion of library collections, their professional processing, and dissemination of content, aimed at transmitting information and meeting the needs of education, science, research, culture, and other spheres of societal life (Petrovski, 1996). Libraries house numerous books, periodicals, journals, and anthologies, covering almost all social areas such as science, philosophy, religion, law, ethics, psychology, sociology, history, mathematics, medicine, architecture, and more. Additionally, libraries store and provide books for the needs of primary and secondary schools, thus generously supporting education and the educational process conducted in educational institutions. The primary goals of libraries include (Library Law, Official Gazette of RM)

- To procure, research, collect, professionally process, study, protect, preserve, publish, inform, present, and make library materials available for use.
- To provide conditions for scholarly and professional research on library collections.
- To promote and affirm the library holdings of the Republic, through exhibitions, literary readings, lectures, various seminars, workshops, and similar activities.
- To publish catalogs, professional publications, and other informative materials.
- To conduct bibliographic and informational activities and other related tasks.

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Civic education in libraries - examples of good practice worldwide

Civic education can be applied and implemented in all types of libraries regardless of their classification. In the past, it was known that the migration of birds was negatively affected by the light from the lighthouses. An American ornithologist wanted to research how lighthouse light affects bird migration in practice. However, it was almost impossible to conduct the research alone. Therefore, he sent a letter to all the lighthouse keepers, asking them if they could gather data by noting which birds were involved. If they didn't know the exact species, they were asked to describe their feathers. Most lighthouse keepers agreed, and they began to communicate with each other. Based on all the collected data, the ornithologist analyzed and processed the information, and ultimately, all the data was published in a scientific journal in 1870.

The National Library of Austria is highlighted as a great example of a national library that has organized a project titled "Österreich aus der Luft" in 2018, which translates to "Austria from the Air." This project was created to garner mass support from citizens. For this project, the national library digitized 10,000 historical photographs of Austria from the period before the war, specifically from the 1920s and 1930s. All the photos were featured on the portal crowdsourcing.onb.ac.at, allowing interested individuals to participate. After registering, the participants were tasked with activities such as categorization, tagging, geolocation, quality assurance, and reviews. More than 2,000 citizens and researchers joined this activity and by 2022, over 4,700 photographs had been processed. Throughout the project, the National Library of Austria communicated and exchanged data and information electronically, organizing meetings as well. All the collected data and photographs were presented in the catalog, and the top three active participants received public recognition and medals. Through this project, the National Library of Austria digitized part of its collection and enabled open access to it.

One more example of a national library actively involved in civic education is the National and University Library in Zagreb. Specifically, on an old postcard from Zagreb, various plants were depicted.

The National Library of Zagreb called upon all interested citizens to participate in a civic education project by recreating the images. With the help of the PlantNet application, they identified the plants in collaboration with the Faculty of Agriculture.

The Central Library in Zurich, Switzerland, possesses numerous geographic maps. Its engagement in civic education involves the participation of the general public, or citizens, in geolocation tasks. Citizens were required to locate where a place is today on a map. Prior training was provided to citizens for precise geolocation. Additionally, a scoring scale existed to enhance motivation.

Involving public libraries in civic education can provide an alternative learning experience that together with increased social cohesion can create new perspectives for public libraries, where knowledge is not only shared, but collectively built. The accessible literature indicates that public libraries, not only locally but globally, promote civic education by bringing scientific research closer to the local community.

A project to promote civic education in North Carolina took place from 2016 to 2019 and involved multiple institutions, including 63 public libraries from North Carolina. The project aimed to observe and study the behavior in wildlife. Public libraries participated by providing project participants with cameras placed in specific locations. After 2-3 weeks, scientists studied the recorded animals and identified them using the eMammal application. All the collected data were classified in digital format.

In this case, the public library in North Carolina was not the main organizer of the project but rather a collaborator and participant in the organization, playing an important role in distributing the necessary equipment for conducting citizen education. The library motivated its users to participate in the project, thereby confirming the closeness of public libraries to the community.

School libraries are physical spaces within schools where reading, thinking, researching and creativity are crucial for transmitting information and knowledge to students and their personal and cultural development. The school library of a high school in Virginia, together with George Washington University, collaborated on the "Healthy Lifestyle and Mood" project. The school library participated

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in the project by providing students with a learning space and sources of information, while librarians assisted students in searching for literature. In this case, librarians played a role in imparting their knowledge to students through information literacy. Thanks to their participation in the project, students had the opportunity to learn how to search databases such as PubMed, Science in Context, and others.

University libraries are active partners in learning and knowledge creation, playing a crucial role in lifelong learning processes. University libraries participate in popularizing science, functioning as hybrid libraries. Data management is one way in which a university library can contribute to promoting civic education. Given its unique position in higher education, it is closely connected to the scientific community, and listening to the needs of this community can help create projects for civic sciences. Among their roles, university libraries also fulfill the information needs of their users, including students and academic staff. A notable example is the case of the university library in Kyiv, Ukraine.

In 2011, the university library led a project that involved creating a dictionary containing 68,000 words. Students supplemented the dictionary with additional information, illustrations, photographs, and videos related to specific words. Over 8,000 students participated in the project, processing about 12,000 words. The significance of this project lies in its promotion of cultural heritage, teamwork, and active student participation in scholarly pursuits.

Another example of active participation by university libraries in civic education is the project "Scribes of the Cairo Geniza," which represents a multilingual initiative aimed at classifying and transcribing fragments from medieval manuscripts from Cairo, Egypt. The Cairo Geniza is the most famous *geniza* worldwide (a storage place within a Jewish synagogue or storage area in the synagogue where old and damaged books were kept), where valuable papyri dating from the 9th to 13th centuries were discovered. Several university and college libraries participated in this historical project, including 28 libraries from the University of Oxford, libraries from the University of Pennsylvania, Manchester University, and others. The discovered manuscripts were digitized by the participating libraries, enabling easy access, availability, and visibility to the wider public.

Specialized libraries focus on development and research in specific areas rather than general public service, targeting specialized fields and sciences. The State Archive in Amsterdam, Netherlands, with the assistance of its specialized library, conducted a project related to civic education in 2015. Specifically, this project focused on birds. Experienced bird experts identified the various bird species possessed by the museum.

Part of the project took place in the museum's library, involving over 40 scientists who defined the different bird species in the museum. This example highlights the opportunity to utilize internal resources and add value by involving the community in scientific goals, thereby enriching the catalog of the specialized library in the Amsterdam Museum.

How Libraries Support Civic Education

Libraries play an important role in promoting civic education, primarily by providing access to information, programs, and resources that encourage knowledge. Additionally, libraries offer a safe space for people to engage in discussions, various societal processes, and activities. In this way, individuals learn from each other and contribute to the improvement of the conditions, methods, sectors, and the environment in which they live. A significant percentage of library users visit libraries to meet their educational needs. The largest group of users includes students and children from elementary and secondary schools. This is ample evidence that libraries are essential and important factors that participate in and aid the educational process. The library professionals working in these institutions have the serious task of directing users to the correct sources of information so they can satisfy their needs.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) regards the role of librarians in initiatives related to open educational resources as serious and highly important. This role is associated with finding, ensuring access to, collecting, preserving, and facilitating easy access to

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open educational resources for interested citizens. The professional staff in libraries must continuously learn and upgrade their skills to be able to respond to the diverse needs of users. Continuous learning for librarians entails a series of educational activities through which the librarians stay updated with the latest developments in the literature and the science. This is a practice observed in many countries worldwide and should be implemented in our context as well. Modern demands in higher education imply flexibility, creativity, lifelong learning, and similar attributes. Libraries play a significant role in the educational process by researching, teaching, and mediating between the knowledge, and the cultural heritage from the past and the present. Libraries participate in educating users on accessing, exchanging, and using information. The need for the existence of libraries is indisputable because they stimulate and nurture education to make citizens active and informed. Libraries enable:

- Access to numerous books, e-books, materials, professional literature, readings, newspapers, and proceedings from scientific conferences related to history, politics, sociology, etc., thereby encouraging citizens to learn, explore, make informed decisions, and actively participate in the democratic process.
- Providing a quiet and conducive environment for learning and research.
- Introducing users to the library's collection and services.
- Actively participating in the development of reading and learning habits.
- Offering information services such as information source searches, interlibrary loans, and assisting in increasing information literacy.
- Encouraging students to use accurate sources of information and search library collections.
- Providing opportunities for informal and lifelong learning.
- Offering online access to library collections.
- Providing opportunities to use modern communication models.
- Facilitating the development of communication skills and protecting against potential negative influences from media.

Open and free access to information is of great importance for civic engagement because the involvement of citizens in democratic and other processes promotes societal development. When people are well-informed, there is a greater likelihood that they will participate in various discussions where they can express their opinions or viewpoints.

Citizens need civic communities where they can share their ideas, concerns, interests, needs, and demands. Therefore, there is a need for real or virtual spaces for the exchange of ideas related to civic engagement and society. Informed citizens play a crucial role in guiding civil society, which provides the social capital necessary to achieve national sovereignty.

In this regard, libraries function as community institutions that support knowledge and the realization of important societal needs and ideals. Through libraries, knowledge, ideas, and information are made accessible to all citizens. Libraries serve as public sources of information, where citizens learn, stay informed, and satisfy their cultural and educational needs. With the existence of libraries, citizens can develop independent thinking and critical reasoning, thereby improving their knowledge, which in turn enhances societal development as a whole.

In the libraries, citizens develop various skills and have access to information of all kinds, contributing to effective civic action. There are various initiatives for civic engagement in schools, local communities, academic institutions, and other civic communities. The libraries are among the best examples of promoting civic literacy and civic information. Many libraries are oriented towards different programs that encourage more active citizenship and inclusion of citizens in societal events and processes.

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Additionally, libraries and their professional staff assist citizens in teaching them to identify and use information for making right decisions and thereby expanding opportunities to them for reflection and dialogue, which is crucial for making important societal decisions.

Conclusion

Civic education is important because it helps individuals and citizens understand their role in society and the environment in which they live and work. Civic education helps citizens actively participate in political and other societal processes. It promotes critical thinking, provides problem-solving options, and helps develop communication skills, crucial for effective citizenship.

Civic education represents a cornerstone of the democratic society. In promoting civic education, libraries play a crucial role by providing open access to wide range of resources, including books, newspapers, journals, compilations, catalogs, scholarly papers, and online databases. Additionally, libraries offer numerous services, programs, and opportunities that foster community involvement, such as educational programs, reading promotion clubs, workshops for children, meetings with writers, discussion groups, and idea exchanges. Libraries and civic education share common ground in facilitating access to information, increasing knowledge, and creating learning experiences through direct participation and engagement.

Libraries have the potential to implement civic education projects at local and regional levels, by connecting researchers, readers, and scientists. The role of libraries in the civic education process is unquestionably significant. Libraries facilitate learning of fundamental values related to civic education, culture, democracy, and societal processes, thereby promoting their further development. Well-informed citizens are key drivers of the society, influencing the quality of life, decision-making processes, problem-solving, and overall societal improvement.

Projects related to civic education can be implemented in various ways across all types of libraries. While differences among libraries may exist in terms of their end users and collections, their commonality lies in supporting users by assisting in acquiring new knowledge and skills, exchanging ideas, and promoting science and education. Libraries serve as spaces for learning and creation in physical or virtual forms, and educational programs that promote education should be integral to every library's offering. Diversity in library offerings is a key element in promoting civic education. Libraries play a crucial role in building bridges between science and the public, and the civic education in the libraries should be practical, relevant, and applicable within the communities they serve.

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