

“THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY -  
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS  
Psychology to support of the civic education”

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*(Review by Prof. Sava Djonev)*



It takes a lot of courage, dedication and calling to undertake and carry out such a large-scale project as the justification and organization of civic education. The addressee of the monograph - the mature generation - is a community with established principles and attitudes, with resistances that are difficult to change and form initially. The problem requires a complex approach in which sociol-

ogy, political science, political psychology, social psychology, didactics meet. Therefore, I want to share my satisfaction with the erudition with which the author handles these transitions and the ease with which she conducts her dialogue with the reader.

The work has a volume of 205 pages - scientific text and 282 literary sources (classics and modern authors). It is made up of three parts that build on each other: “Problems on the way to democracy”, “And now where? A matter of approach.”, “Topics of socio-psychological knowledge relevant to civic behavior on the road to updated democracy”.

The first part - “Problems on the way to democracy”, which is dedicated to the main categories of the theoretical construct “civic education”, outlines the limits of the problem in a cognitive aspect. On the one hand, these are basic concepts in political psychology, which prepares the reader for a deep and comprehensive scientific analysis. On the other hand, these are topical topics that concern society every day and significantly: democracy, justice, information and trust, motivation and demotivation for participation in the electoral process, coalitions, polarization, radicalization, anomie and alienation, conspiracy theories. Each of these categories hides deep content related to social relations and drama inherent in social fate. It is written with in-depth knowledge of the issues, the literature

on the issue, the practices and most of all fascinating and attention-grabbing. The latter is an important merit of the work, given its purpose as a foundation upon which to build civic education.

The concepts of Thomas More and Plato, Niccolò Machiavelli, Joseph Stiglitz, Wolff, and many modern researchers are analyzed in an overview plan. The conclusion is inevitable: "the state of democracy is not satisfactory". The question also: "Isn't it time democracy was put aside, at least for a while?"

The analysis of the world demographic situation also raises concerns - the arrival of tens of millions of immigrants from Asia and Africa, which threatens the "European way of life" and provides grounds for far-right political groups.

Transferred to Bulgaria, this analysis also reveals other defects of democracy - "corruption, lack of transparency, "mutren" presence, low incomes, a sense of injustice in society, caused by the functioning of the judicial system." And, of course, nostalgia for the "strong hand", the fascination with nationalist parties and "one-day parties".

Fundamentalist, extremist and religious movements have also been described as fueling closed, corrupt and repressive political systems.

Alarming values of the Gini coefficient, which characterizes the distribution of goods in a society, the difference between the well-being of the poor and the rich, are cited as statistical proof of the failures of democracy.

This multidimensionality of evidence - validity in the classics, in the analysis of modern times and in the statistical data convinces and instills confidence in the author, which further turns into a sustainable relationship with the reader. At the same time, this analysis demonstrates a level that goes beyond political psychology and is on a par with political sociology and political science.

The conclusion that "unfortunately, there are historical examples of societies moving backwards from democracy to dictatorship, such as Germany in the 1930s, sounds ominous." Threatening, but motivating for the reader to seek other points of view, proving

the vulnerability of democracy and, perhaps, giving rise to hope.

And they are not missing in the monograph:

In the chapter "Perception of justice and the citizens' alternative ideas about the functioning of democracy", justice is placed on the scales. In this part, the socio-psychological analysis of the genesis of the sense of justice prevails. Results of own research on differences in justice motives between different ethnic groups are presented.

The theory of utility, the theory of judgment or choice (Tyler), the economic model were analyzed. Their inadequacy has been demonstrated, to which psychological theories are opposed - the Relative Deprivation Model, the Model for evaluating the honesty of political actions.

The conclusion is that "in a very large proportion of cases in which public opinion supports or does not support a certain politician - the assessment of injustice is dominant over the real, pragmatic assessment of personal gain." Apart from its purely cognitive contribution to the nature of human motivation, this conclusion also has an important advisory value that it is time for psychology to enter politics and management, where its place is unfilled and where its absence is felt.

The problems of democracy are numerous. Subsequently, in the chapter "Cognitive capacity and awareness (disinformation) in conditions of democracy" the effects of globalization on power, the manipulation of public opinion, and the competence of citizens are examined. The latter imperceptibly places the main subject of discussion for the work - "civic education".

The demotivation of citizens to participate in the political process is analyzed psychologically and with numerous supporting examples, to which a separate chapter is dedicated.

The problems of coalition governments also contribute to disenchantment with democracy. Arising as a desire to pool resources to achieve a certain goal, they give rise to conflicts in the sharing of benefits...

By the end of this part, a number of other categories have been added to the territory of

the problem, with a reflection on democracy: polarization in modern democracy, political radicalization in modern democracy, phenomena such as anomie and alienation. Analyzed comprehensively and objectively, they give density and comprehensiveness to the study, necessary for the further development of the exposition.

In their analysis, the opinions of a number of researchers with recognized contributions to the field have been drawn upon. As we noted at the beginning of the review, the Bibliography contains 282 sources (classics and modern authors).

This part ends with "Problems Related to Conspiracy Theories". Here, Fukuyama's theory of the historical triumph of liberal democracy is discussed, and the contrasting abundance of conspiracy theories explaining world processes by "the collusion of multiple actors colluding and attempting to achieve an illegal or malicious hidden goal" (Zonis and Joseph, 1994)". A 2021 study with 1,003 respondents on belief in conspiracy theories is cited.

The second part of the monograph, entitled "And now where? A question of approach", with the subtitles "First, second, etc. supporting columns", continues with a layering of arguments about the problems of the democratic process and the search for alternatives. Liberalism and conservatism are analytically compared in terms of benefits and losses to society. The conclusion of this comparison is that "whatever form of development takes place, its basis should lie in the development of human potential, the result of the joint effort of the family, the school, through civic education and the state, which succeeds in coordinating the efforts to achieving the goal". This conclusion opens up space for the development of the methodology to ensure the realization of this goal:

The topics considered in this part as the didactic background of civic education are: political socialization as a specific form of socialization; political culture as a derivative of society's culture and its transformations in our country in the age of transition; the humanistic approach as a philosophy to overcome the defects of democracy through civic education;

the development of critical thinking as a mandatory result for further independent reflection on one's own behavior and social order after the intended training.

In the work, they are structured substantively and methodically as four principled approaches:

The first approach is based on the indicators of a democratic society, examined through the prism of political psychology, education and the necessary conditions for their realization - Moghadam. The work recalls the classic statements of psychology, about the two-level level of construction of the functions of thinking - first at the interpersonal level, and then at the intrapersonal level (Vygotsky). Here, however, the emphasis is on political socialization, Easton and Dennis (Easton and Dennis, 1969), McIntosh and Youniss (McIntosh and Youniss, 2010). The approach is built following the methodology of situated learning, the importance of support from adults and perceptions of perspective. The subjects of political socialization are indicated - the family, the school, the organizations in the community

The second approach involves understanding political culture as the result of society's culture. In this part, a connection is made with the dimensions proposed by Heert Hofstede in the evaluation of cultures. A transition has been demonstrated for Bulgaria from the previously established cultural identity - from collectivistic in the past, to individualistic with a vertical cultural orientation. The conclusion of the methodology is that "cultural orientations can change with the change of political institutions". In addition, "the political development of citizens through civic education must correspond to the values of the culture, so that there is no divergence between the education of adolescents and the beliefs of parents"

The third principle underlying the approach to overcoming the defects of democracy through civic education contains the solution to the dilemma for the future - liberalism or conservatism. It is solved in the spirit of the humanistic paradigm as a social actualization of the personality. (Maslow, Rogers,

etc.). Essential parts of Rogers' methodology for building a fully functioning personality are presented. To the conclusion of this part - "The main purpose of democratic education should be to help the understanding of human communities and the development of potential." - I would specify "and the development of the individual potential of the person".

The fourth foundational principle stated in the work consists of "developing critical thinking and the ability to express positions". Here, the analysis focuses on three skills: "empathetic listening", "Critical thinking and identification integration" and "constructive and open response". It is noted that they are not a priori given in politics and discussion. Special attention is paid to Monroe's theory to explain the influence of the situation on thinking and its criticality. For the analysis of the influence of the situation on criticality, the experiments of Zimbardo and Milgram with the experimental prison and with the authority figure, respectively, were used. Monroe's concept of situational identity, the importance of others in this process, etc. are presented. Ultimately, both the role of the individual and the role of significant others in shaping critical thinking and free expression are affirmed.

This part successfully describes the atmosphere of civic education to which the monograph leads us.

I am impressed by the headlines "And now where? A Matter of Approach", with the subtitles "First, Second, etc. Supporting Columns", which are in a fictional style and, as it were, anticipate the future development of the monograph into a teaching aid. I suggest replacing it with "Approaches" and "First Support Principle" etc.

The third part is dedicated to the thematic constitution of civic education and has the value of a completed project for the content of a training program, a project for the thematic orientation of future trainers. The topics covered are topical and close to the political everyday life of citizens - i.e. intriguing and creating cognitive interest:

Social identity is the first of these. There is an extensive literature on the subject in both personality and social psychology. The differ-

ent categories of identity are reviewed so that when they enter the process of civic education they gain meaning and significance in evaluating events, making decisions and regulating behavior. "Role identity," "group identity," "civic identity," "national identity," etc., are concepts whose handling sheds light on both individual behavior and group and institutional relationships. The chapter ends with a list of guidelines for the knowledge and skills to be mastered.

Political tolerance is the other topic that raises the strategic question of whether to adopt multicultural tolerance or to adopt the course of cultural assimilation. For its answer, the assistance of emotional intelligence, significant psychological factors for the manifestation of tolerance, and cultural traditions were sought. This chapter also ends, like the rest of this part, with a list of guidelines for the knowledge and skills to be mastered.

A special place in political socialization falls on the resolution of conflicts. The skills of not provoking conflicts, preventing them, solving them, mediating their resolution is a tool equally valuable both in the domestic plan and in the political arena, where calls to overcome aggression in school stand in stark contrast to political practices. I welcome the inclusion of this topic in civic education and look forward to its professional development in future guidance.

The part "Justice and moral thinking - a necessary element of democratic development" is based on the statement that "Democracy does not work well when people are not engaged in the political process, but also when they do not know their laws, rights and obligations." A comprehensive overview of the theories on the issue was made - Kohlberg, Bauman and Skitka (Bauman and Skitka, 2009), Hight and Joseph. The levels of moral reasoning (Kohlberg) are reported, but also the thesis of moral intuition (Haidt and Graham, 2007), evolving in parallel with cultural institutions and practices. One of the tasks of civic education can be seen in tying justice to the moral norm.

Voting as an act of civic power is the subject of the penultimate part. The topic is exam-

ined in the light of several theories that have been used as a key to the methodical guide for voter activation in the electoral process. The Theory of Reasoned Action, The Theory of Planned Behavior, The Motivation-Information-Behavioral Skills Model are offered as a basis for developing behavior change programs.

At the end of this part, the focus is on “Media and development of the democratic system”. The ascertained distancing of the media from its intrinsic informative function and its replacement with its transformation into a country that manipulates public opinion, mediatization (linking to politics), betting on conflicts leads to a refusal of people to be informed by them. These truths must crystallize in a selectivity in their use, which should be ensured in civic education.

Thus, mastering the categories of civic education - social identity, political tolerance,

group stereotypes as a catalyst for political conflict, justice and moral reasoning, voting, media and the democratic system, etc. create the belief that with such a toolkit, people will acquire and correct assessment of political reality, and critical thinking about it, and attitudes for correct reactions.

I concur in this judgment, and rate the work highly as equally useful to both adults and adolescents. There are still several adaptation options to go before the work reaches its intended recipients. Rapid development of programs for different age groups and guides for trainers is needed to bring the ideas of the monograph to social practice. The work is analytical, theoretically supported and confirmed with examples from our political everyday life, presented sincerely, moderately, not populist. It speaks with the language of an expert who knows the problems deeply and has the solutions for them.

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Signature:

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