
NEWS

Conference Civic Education in Times of Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Future of Civic Education and Social Science Education in the Czech Republic

On September 16, 2024, the three-day conference “*Civic Education in Times of Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Future of Civic Education and Social Science Education in the Czech Republic*” was ceremonially opened. The event was organized by the Platform of Departments for Civic Education, with key contributions from Mgr. Barbora Vacková from Masaryk University and PhDr. Ondřej Lánský, Ph.D., from Charles University. The international meeting took place at the University Center in Telč, bringing together nearly forty experts from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the United States. Following the opening remarks and welcome, the conference proceeded with the first of seven thematic sections, into which the event was structured.

In the first panel, “*Political Contexts of Civic Education*”, four presentations were delivered, focusing on issues related to civic education in connection with political developments, democracy, and citizenship. The speakers strongly emphasized the need for high-quality and innovative education in political science, highlighting the negative societal impacts caused by shortcomings in this area, including their influence on the development of active citizenship. The next section, titled “*Philosophical Foundations of Civic Education*”, explored the importance of teaching philosophical principles within civic education. A common theme emerged in most of the four presented papers: how to effectively develop critical thinking and why this skill should be actively promoted in education. The first day of the conference concluded with an engaging lecture by Elizabeth Washington, who offered a candid critique of the limitations of reformed civic education in the United States. She argued that the current system should be: “...replaced with something more democratic, fairer, and more humane.”

The second day of the conference began with two highly engaging lectures, both from the Czech academic sphere. The first lecture addressed the urgent challenges faced by civic and social science teacher educators, while the second reflected on the findings of several studies examining the views and expectations of Czech citizens regarding politics and how they “evaluate” it. The next part of the program featured a section titled “*Space and Civic Education*.” Despite appearing unrelated at first glance, the three contributions in this session highlighted unconventional approaches to civic education and explored how such approaches can help foster a sense of belonging to the places we come from. The afternoon was dedicated to two thematic blocks: “*Social Sciences and Civic Education*” and “*Empirical Research on Civic Education*.” In the first block, four presentations were delivered. The first

presented the outcomes of a project focusing on “*polarization around race, Islam, and gender.*” The following contribution discussed the use of the diary method as a tool for addressing controversial topics. The third presentation, “*Critical Pedagogy and Sociological Imagination in Teaching Civic and Social Sciences at Universities: How to Approach Values in Education,*” lived up to its title with a compelling and thought-provoking approach. Similarly, the final presentation, “*Applied Sociology as a Synergistic Factor for Achieving the Goals of Civic and Social Science Education,*” was well-crafted and insightful. The second block, “*Empirical Research on Civic Education,*” featured four contributions that presented both project outcomes and theoretical insights. Together, they offered a comprehensive overview of the current state of civic education and the challenges it faces.

The morning session of the final day of the conference focused on media education. The speakers primarily analyzed digital education, media literacy, and the pitfalls of “*journalistic objectivity.*” The following section, “*Ethics in Civic Education,*” lived up to its title. All three presentations approached the topic of moral education in civic education from a theoretical perspective, demonstrating a high level of expertise. The conference concluded with the session “*Ethics and Its Didactic Inspirations,*” which again focused on ethics, but this time with an emphasis on subject didactics.

The conference *Civic Education in Times of Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Future of Civic Education and Social Science Education in the Czech Republic* can be considered a success—not only because of the strong attendance but above all thanks to the high academic quality of the individual contributions. Moreover, the event demonstrated that civic education and social science education are capable of confronting numerous challenges and fulfilling their mission.

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