

History Education and Civics in the Context of the Education System of the Czech Republic¹

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Abstract

The paper presents an analytical insight into history education at primary and secondary level schools in the Czech Republic. History education is analyzed in the context of the Czech educational system. Though not having a particularly strong formal position within teaching subjects, together with civics, history education is a socially widely expected field of education with somewhat excessive expectations regarding its impact on the creation of democratic culture.

The domestic Czech discourse on history education is summarized using the perspective of teachers, scholars, and politicians. The main concerns include the fact that modern history seems to overshadow all other periods in terms of the preparedness of innovative teaching tools and the attention of the wider public, the gap between the largely traditional transmissive practice and contemporary theory, which is partially reflected in the National Curriculum, as well as the blurry lines of civics and history education due to lack of systematic studies with an insight into the practice on the ground. History education has the potential to become weaponized, and some attempts to exploit this potential have already appeared, although they are still not decisive.

Keywords: Czech Republic, History Education, Civic Education

Introduction

The Czech Republic is a middle-sized member state of the European Union. With its population of 10.9 million as of 2023, it has recently become slightly less homogeneous than the whole post-1945 period, facing a migration wave from Ukraine of over 400,000

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people between 2022 and 2023 (Czech Statistical Office, 2024). The Czech Republic is an industrialized, urbanized, modern country with a highly equal distribution of incomes in Europe. It has a relatively large public sector compared to the Central and Eastern European region, and its GDP (PPP) is at 80% of the average of the EU (Eurostat, 2024). The educational system is highly decentralized and complex with fragmented governance (Dvořák, 2021). Graeber's concept of interpretive labour is used. In the Czech Republic, from the very first days of the Velvet Revolution (November 1989) and there are large regional disparities (OECD, 2020).

Historical roots of the current educational system

The Czech Republic was established in 1993 as one of the two successor states of Czechoslovakia. It builds on the tradition of Czechoslovak statehood and the traditional entity of Czech lands that enjoyed sovereignty as the Kingdom of Bohemia within the Roman Holy Empire between 1212 and 1526 and no autonomy during the following period of the Habsburg rule in the Holy Roman Empire, Austrian Empire, and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which continued until 1918. In 1918, multi-ethnic Czechoslovakia was formed. The politically dominant self-declared Czechs (6.7 million in 1921) were followed by Germans (3.1 million), Slovaks (about 2 million), and Hungarians (700,000). Czechoslovakia was dissolved in phases in the pre-WWII crisis and was reunited in 1945. After a limited democracy till 1948, seeing the expulsion of most Germans and Hungarians, Czechoslovakia entered the "socialist camp" to become a Soviet satellite country until 1989. The communist period was characterized by thorough centralization, a nearly unparalleled nationalization of the economy, and heavy ideological influence in most public life venues (Kornai, 1992). After the fall of the communist rule in 1989, the country liberalized its economic system, opened competition between political parties, and introduced the rule of law. In 1992, the political elite dissolved Czechoslovakia, then a federation into two sovereign successor states.

The historical roots of the current educational system in Czech lands lie in the period of the arrival of Christianity by the turn of the first millennium. The first university was established in Prague in 1348, but education was restricted to a small elite of aristocracy and clergymen for the upcoming centuries. Compulsory education was introduced through the educational reform by Maria Theresa in 1774 for children between the ages

of six to twelve, and the goal was to learn “trivium,” which consisted of reading, writing, and arithmetic. This historically contributed to a sharp increase in literacy, reaching an almost full success in the nineteenth century (Průcha, 2007).

The main modern reform to the educational system before the advent of the communist system was the interbellum introduction of eight years of compulsory schooling. The system remained highly selective due to a stream of gymnasium (or so-called *reálka*) that comprised not more than 10% of the age cohort from 11 years. Entrance was based on talent but also heavily on the cultural capital of the parents, and generally, upper secondary schooling was a matter of privileged minority (Průcha, 2007).

Mediocrity and the centrally set unified structure of state-run schools with a detailed and heavily ideological curriculum (“osnovy”) and a socially engineered selection based on class and loyalty were the main characteristics of the communist educational system. The Marxist-Leninist ideology was removed from curricula and textbooks, where history, geography, and civics were particularly heavily influenced by the Marxist ideology (Průcha, 2007).

The current system largely builds on the tradition of the Austrian-Hungarian system and its innovations in interwar Czechoslovakia, which included prolonging the mandatory schooling period to eight years and undertaking nation-building endeavors. Other elements, such as multiyear gymnasiums for the talented, private, and denominational schools, were also reintroduced.

General description of the education system

The Czech Republic’s general education system is dominantly public-run and highly decentralized, and it has not undergone major changes in the last two decades. There were 4,261 basic schools with 1,007,778 pupils and 1,294 upper secondary schools with 463,200 pupils as of 2023 (Ministerstvo školství, 2023). The cultural and ethnic homogeneity remains relatively prevalent in most regions. When it comes to foreigners, Ukrainian children make up 5% of pupils on average in basic schools (Slovaks and Vietnamese only about 0.5%) and all non-Czech only 3% on average, but the proportion of foreigners in both basic and upper secondary schools are distributed unevenly with way higher share in Prague, where the shares are 16% of non-Czech in its basic schools and over 6% in the upper secondary ones. Czech Roma form the largest cultural and ethnic minority,

with an estimated 250,000 people and about a 3% average share in schools. However, the school share for children with special needs is uneven (PAQ Research, 2023).

The pre-primary education starts at the age of 3, while younger children's facilities (creche) are considered to be "care" and fall under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. Alternatively, children from the age of six months until five years of age may become members of the so-called children's groups. The last year of the pre-primary education at the age of five marks the start of compulsory education. It is followed by compulsory school attendance from six to fifteen years of age. Basic education structure includes primary (ISCED 1) and lower-secondary (ISCED 2) education (for more see Table 1 in the Appendix). It lasts for nine years and overlaps with compulsory schooling, i.e., till age 15. However, the range of ages for which at least 90% of the population are enrolled is longer than the period of compulsory education and goes from the age of 5 to the age of 15 (OECD, 2020).

Most people acquire basic education in basic schools; only roughly 10% leave basic school for gymnasium. These are divided into the first stage (years 1 to 5), where each class has limited, unspecialized teachers, and the second stage (years 6 to 9), where teachers specialize in particular subjects, including history. As the postponement of the entry age into primary education is high, with about a quarter of the age cohort entering only at seven, preparatory classes set up by the basic schools have become common.

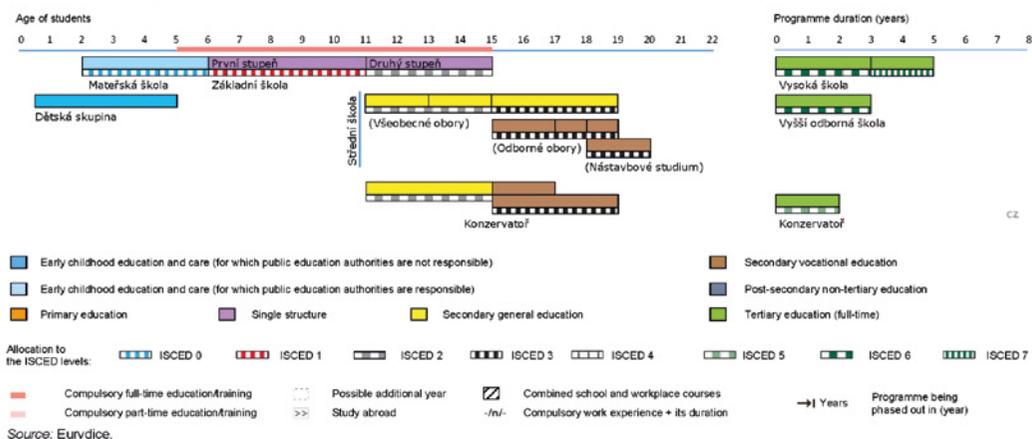
A highly selective stream of education might start at the fifth or seventh year with multi-year general schools (eighth or six years) after meeting the criteria of the admission process set for the state level in mathematics and Czech language and literature. Up to 10% of the age cohort enters this selective system, with a larger proportion being held in larger towns and cities (CSZO, 2023).

According to the current Educational law, which has been in force since 2005, Czech basic education should help pupils acquire essential learning strategies and foster their motivation for lifelong learning. It should also encourage creative thinking and problem-solving in children, help them learn how to communicate and collaborate effectively and teach them how to protect their physical and mental health, as well as cultural values and the environment. Furthermore, basic education should encourage them to be considerate and tolerant of other people and different cultural and spiritual values, and help them to recognize their abilities, possibilities, and limitations and apply them when deciding their future career path (Česká republika, 2004).

General or vocational high schools provide upper secondary education (ISCED 3), and most of the age cohort enters it. It usually starts at the age of 15 and lasts four years. Students might complete the study either with a "Maturita" examination (Abitur-type final exam) that qualifies them to enter the tertiary educational level or with a VET certificate. There are two types of upper secondary schools with maturita-secondary general school (gymnázium) and secondary technical school (střední odborná škola). The secondary vocational school (střední odborné učiliště) offers a VET certificate.

Figure 1: The structure of the educational system as portrayed in the ISCED classification

Czechia – 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice (2024a)

In 2021/2022, 31% of the age cohort was in general gymnasium-type general education, even though the demand is much higher. The nearly 70% share of technical and vocational training is very high in EU comparison, where the share is less than half on average (Eurydice, 2024a). The section on curriculum shows the extreme ramifications of the non-gymnasium programs.

Entrance into multi-year gymnasiums and upper secondary schools is conditioned upon completion of basic education at the relevant level and meeting criteria set by the school. As a national rule, at least 60% of the emphasis must be on the standardized Math, Czech language and literature examinations, which a state agency provides.

The Czech Curriculum

For the longest period of Czech general education history, there was what Greger and Walterová call “the traditional curricular model.” This model includes “transmission of cultural experiences, national values and patterns of behavior usual in the domestic social environment. Centrally developed time plans and uniform syllabi were implemented compulsorily in every school. Teachers mostly played the part of transmitters, while the implementation of the unified curriculum was controlled by the schools’ inspectorate.” (Greger & Walterová, 2018, p. 26).

The traditional model underwent several changes after 1989, but a major reform only occurred in 2004-2006. It consisted of changes in the curriculum towards its decentralization and turning it towards a skill-based model. The new curriculum model consists of three levels: the national level set by the National Framework Programs (later National Curriculum), the school educational programs, and the actual curriculum fulfilled by the teacher implementing operationalized school educational program by teaching according to his/her teaching plans.

The most general National Curriculum set aims that should be met by pupils acquiring and developing key competencies within content areas. Content areas integrate traditional teaching subjects into larger sets defined by societal processes and demands (Greger & Walterová, 2018). The subject areas also set a group of expected outcomes compulsory in every school curriculum. Still, the national curriculum is rather general and sets only main aims and some limits. For instance, in civical education, one of the specific expected outcomes is to “assess and use examples to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation among people in addressing specific tasks and fulfilling goals in the family, at school and in the community” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 46)

School educational programs are much more detailed documents that also describe the content of the teaching subjects. The power of schools and individual teachers to model their detailed curriculum is vast. In theory, it is limited only by the supervising power of the Czech School Inspectorate, but in practice, it is limited by the school culture, and the expectations of the parents, etc.

The National Curriculum for basic schools and lower stages of the multi-year gymnasium is defined by the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education (Jeřábek &

Tupý, 2007). This document provides detailed goals for education. For instance, in the Medieval Europe and Christianity subject, one of the expected outcomes is to “describe the Great Moravian Empire, the internal development of the Czech state and these states’ positions within the European context” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 44). In the case of the upper secondary school, there is a single national curriculum for gymnasiums. There are 283 programs for technical and vocational schools, each specifically designed for the technical specialization. This is seen as an unwanted feature that decreases the governability of the system (NPI ČR, 2024).

School providers, educational governance, and its funding

The dominant providers of basic schools are municipalities with about 95% share of the cohort of pupils. These are followed by a 2.5% share of private schools and less than 1% of denominational schools run by a church or denominational association. A larger share of institutions (7% and over 1% of schools, respectively) reveal that private and denominational schools are smaller on average. In the case of upper secondary schools, the dominant providers are regions with 81% share, followed by private providers (15%) and the Church (2%) (Ministerstvo školství, 2023).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) centrally governs and monitors the Czech education system. They are responsible for creating relevant educational policy documents and the National Curriculum. MoE also allocates funds to regional authorities. Local municipalities set up preschool education, basic schools, and facilities, while regional authorities establish secondary and tertiary professional schools. At the upper-secondary level, private and denominational schools are mostly represented and are set up by their founders. The Czech School Inspectorate independently controls the quality of every school at levels 0-3 (ISCED), regardless of the status of the school. Public schools are free, while private schools charge fees and receive funding according to a special regulation. Denominational schools receive subsidies directly from MoE. All schools’ funding was based on the per-pupil method until 2020 when a new system of the amount per pedagogical worker / one education staff member was introduced for public schools. This means the state guarantees the extent of teaching in teaching hours. Private and denominational schools remained within the per-pupil method of financing (Eurydice, 2024a).

Educational spending sharply increased from 2016/2017, now fluctuating around 5% of the GDP (Eurostat, 2024). However, a comparative view of the wages of teachers in parity of purchasing standards at the primary and secondary level across the EU reveals that Czech teachers' largely egalitarian state of payments is higher than that of most Central and Eastern European countries but still very low compared to that of most Western counterparts and teachers in the Baltic states (Eurydice, 2024b).

History Teaching in the Czech Republic

Due to a new teacher acquisition crisis and the aging of the teacher population's, a large, one-time survey was conducted in 2019 at all the basic and upper secondary schools. There were 5,531 history teachers at basic schools, with 16,93 full-time equivalents. The average age was 46. Upper secondary schools had 2,249 history teachers with 777 FTE (full time), and their average age was even higher, 48 (Ministerstvo školství, 2019).

The period of compulsory history education depends on the track chosen by a pupil. The basic school period consists of two years at the primary level and one to four years of history education at the lower secondary level. In the generally oriented gymnasium, it is typically four years, while the more technical the school is, the less history education it offers. The school leaving exam in history education has a singular level. Unlike the Czech language and literature (compulsory for everyone), foreign languages, or Math (it is compulsory to choose from these), no specific guidelines are set centrally.

History education is a part of Humans and Society, a broader educational area the content of which is organized according to the National Curriculum document. Apart from history education, this area also includes civics/social studies. Regarding its position towards other subjects, history education and most of the other content-defined subjects should include cross-cutting themes that include Educating Democratic Citizens, Personal and Social Education, Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts, Media Education, and Multicultural Education for all levels up to upper secondary one (Janík et al., 2020).

Teachers and schools select textbooks for history education. The basic school can buy only textbooks certified by the Ministry of Education. Still, textbooks are optional at the basic and upper secondary levels. The certification procedure for the approved

textbooks consists of a series of reviews. Apart from the quality, it checks its unity with the principles of the general curriculum and especially its “expected outcomes,” and it must be renewed every six years. The process is centralized, often quite formal, and the textbook development is mostly not evidence-based (Greger, 2005, p. 117), which lowers the expected standards on the reviewers’ side. However, recent controversy and political pressure on the renouncement of the certification of modern history textbook by Fraus Publishing House (Pinkas, 2022) has proven the system to be robust and driven by expertise (CTK, 2023). The upper secondary level enjoys no such central regulation because textbooks at the upper secondary level are not subsidized, and the level is no longer compulsory.

In practical terms, the textbook market is very diverse. Even at the lower and upper secondary levels, there are over seven options. The leading publishing houses include SPN, FRAUS, DIDAKTIS, Nová škola, Fortuna, Scientia, and Fragment. Apart from these complex textbooks, several digital education tools and services with Memory of Nations educational activities (Vzdělávání Paměti národa, n.d.), HistoryLab online learning environment (HistoryLab.Cz, n.d.), “Moderní Dějiny” [Modern history] educational database (Sdružení Pant, 2024) or the recent Digitální pracovna [Digital Workshop] (Multikulturní centrum Praha, 2023). Most of these initiatives aim at modern Czech history and are initiated and run by NGOs.

The Czech National curriculum generally covers all periods of the past, from pre-historic ages theoretically to the present day. The ambition of the general curriculum is to cover both domestic and global history and should include multiple historical perspectives, including political, social, economic, cultural, and others. Still, political history remains prevalent. The multifocal approach is only partially becoming a norm. The upcoming general review of the National Curriculum aims to strengthen such multifocal aspects and stress historical literacy, focusing on different perspectives of historical actors. One example of a frontrunner is a Czech, inquiry-based textbook for the ninth year of basic school (Pinkas, 2022; Sixta, 2023). The textbook that was awarded the BELMA prize in 2022 (Belma Awards, 2022) is heavily influenced by the historical thinking approach by Peter Seixas and his colleagues (Najbert, 2020; Seixas, 2015; Seixas & Morton, 2012).

The usual endpoint for history education is around the end of the 1990s. This period includes significant events such as the division of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU and NATO. Some textbooks may even cover recent events such

as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent “war on terrorism.” The creation and development of the European Union and the Czech Republic’s joining it are mandatory topics in history, with particular attention paid to them in civics.

The curriculum is mainly customized to the region, but sometimes it is presented from an ethnocentric and non-historical perspective. For instance, the position of the Czech lands in the Holy Roman Empire is often described oppositionally using the adjective “German.” Similarly, the Baroque culture is sometimes seen as alien and non-Czech despite its profound influence on the current Czech cultural landscape. The level of global context covered depends on the educational level. Primary education mainly focuses on regional and European contexts, while lower and upper secondary education expands on global contexts, with particular attention paid to them in civics. This is based on the principle of the zone of proximal development.

The taught curriculum mainly focuses on regional topics but sometimes presents them from an ethnocentric and ahistorical perspective. For instance, the Czech lands’ position in the Holy Roman Empire is often viewed as oppositional to the German identity. Similarly, the baroque culture, which has profoundly influenced the Czech cultural landscape, is often overlooked. The extent of the global context covered depends on the educational level. However, this is not a matter of the National curriculum but rather the traditional identity-related content and approach on the side of the schools and teachers, contradicting the conception of the National curriculum to some extent. Primary school pupils mostly learn about regional and European contexts, while lower (still basic school) and upper secondary school students are expected to cover European and global history per the General Curriculum.

Hungarian history is dealt with occasionally, with these notable exceptions being a regular part of the curriculum: Early Middle Age Hungarian conquest, St. Vojtěch’s (Adalbert) contribution to Central Europe, the Arpadian Kingdom, coexistence during the Habsburg era, WW1, confrontation during the division of Austria/Hungary, WW2 - Stalingrad, the Communist era, including the 1950s political trials of Rajk, the 1956 Uprising, and the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion, are regularly included in the curriculum.

The curriculum aims to foster national identity but in the sense of patriotism, and it is rather a matter of civics. According to its national curriculum, pupils should be able to “distinguish manifestations of patriotism and nationalism” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 50), and the expected outcomes should cover “our country – the concepts of homeland and

patriotism; interesting and commemorative sights, what has made us famous, prominent personalities; state symbols, national holidays, significant days “(2007, p. 50). Alois Ecker concluded that the Czech curriculum fulfills some nation-building goals and is, to some extent, built upon 19th-century historiographical concepts (Ecker, 2018). That is in sharp contrast to the National curriculum stating that history education should “cultivate the individual’s historical consciousness and to maintain the continuity of historical memory” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 42)

The general part of the National Curriculum (Humans and Society) sets a skill-based concept of history education: “Students are led to realize that history is neither a confinement of past times nor a conglomeration of facts and final answers. History is rather based on posing questions through which the present inquires about the past to learn about its nature and its possible future” (MŠMT, 2017, p. 43). However, the curriculum implemented by history teachers is often content-heavy. In contrast, history education remains the most frontal, transmissive subject both according to the Czech school inspectorate’s reports (Činátl et al., 2021) and academic scrutiny (Labischová & Gracová, 2016).

The systematic presence of digital technologies and the fostering of digital literacy did not have any particular concept and were not incentivized. The National Curriculum was amended in 2021 with a new concept of ICT education that impacted all subjects, including history education (and civics). History education should now “develop students’ digital competence by:

- “guiding pupils to select and make effective use of appropriate digital technologies when planning, implementing, and evaluating activities with digital historical resources, sources, and programs;
- introducing pupils to different ways of communicating activities and results of work with digitized historical realities through different digital technologies and tools for communication and sharing;
- emphasizing safe and effective communication, teaching students to behave responsibly in the digital environment” (NPI ČR, 2024a).

However, the reform is mandatory for all basic schools only from the school year 2022/2023 of primary and 2024/2025 of lower secondary. Hence, the effects of the impact have not yet become measurable.

The National Curriculum is very general, meaning that on the one hand, it does not even set chronologically ordered teaching plans. On the other hand, implementing the

National Curriculum faced some resistance and was partially formal (Straková & Simonová, 2005). In other words, some proportion of school educational plans are formal documents closely following textbook contents.

The only comparable data on history education (knowledge, skills) comes from the Youth and History project in the mid-1990s (Borries & Angvik, 1997; Klíma, 2001). Despite the lapse of time, at least one characteristic seems to persist—a relatively bad relationship between pupils and teachers in the sense of appreciation and respect. This applies not specifically to history education but to all subjects (Boudová et al., 2023).

The Position of Civic Education in the Czech Republic

As mentioned above, civics share the “Humans and Society” educational area and thus have some common set aims and principles with history education. Civics are compulsory both at the basic school and upper secondary one. First, the education starts with an integrated subject of Vlastivěda (roughly “Local history”) in the years 4 and 5 of the primary part of basic school. Civics like občanská výchova ensue till year nine of basic school. All the educational programs of upper secondary education include civics to some extent, named Základy společenských věd [The Basics of Social Studies Education]. In 2019, there were 886 FTE civics teachers at the lower secondary education level of the basic school (about half of the history teachers) and 1168 FTE at the upper secondary school (150% of history teachers).

Civic education has suffered due to its subservient position in the communist system and indoctrination with Marxist-Leninist ideology. It has become a compromised subject, especially regarding its potential to indoctrinate students or even to contribute to forming opinions. As a result, as Hoskins et.al (2015)civic republican and critical/cosmopolitan models of citizenship. The results indicate that social justice values and citizenship knowledge and skills of students are facilitated within the Nordic system that combines a stable democracy and economic prosperity with a democratically based education systems in which teachers prioritise promoting autonomous critical thinking in citizenship education. In contrast, medium term democracies with civic republican tradition, such as Italy and Greece gain more positive results on citizenship values and participatory attitudes. This is also the case for some recent former communist countries that retain ethnic notions of citizenship. In a final step we go on to argue that the Nordic

teachers' priority on developing critical and autonomous citizens perhaps facilitates 14 years olds qualities of cognition on citizenship and the values of equality but may not be the most fruitful approach to enhance participatory attitudes or concepts of a good citizen which may be better supported by the Italian teachers' priority on civic responsibility. Crossref suggest, as a key to most ex-communist countries, the subject was sanitized and turned into a detached transfer of unbiased information about, for instance, the constitutional system.

Unlike history education, where no recent comparable data on stances, knowledge, and skills are available, civic education is scrutinized by the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. However, the Czech Republic has yet to participate since its first participation in 2009. Though outdated, this has reflected the wobbly character of civics, the detachment of youth from formal political participation, and the generally lowest level of what Hoskins et al (2015) call civic competence.

It is thus with no surprise that the key actors in the field agree on the key problem in civics: stress on transfer of information "without giving sufficient attention to developing skills and forming opinions" (Horák, 2022; cf: Nosková, 2023), or as Květina puts it, Czech schools should aim at "teaching democracy" instead of the current "teaching about democracy" (Květina, 2022, p. 37).

Dilemmas on history teaching

One of the long-term features of history education in the Czech Republic is the gap between the high expectations of parents, media, and society and its actual capacities and ambitions. Charged with the state of civic virtues, resilience towards disinformation, or level of patriotism or nationalism, it seems that with only little exaggeration, history education (and to some extent civics as well) are seen as the root of much of the anti-democratic moods and stances today (Ripka, 2018). However, such an alarmist attitude and associating the results of historical education with the state of democracy is not new at all, specifically in the Czech Republic (cf. Wineburg, 2018). This section thus approaches the problems and dilemmas of history education rather analytically from the position of observation, not activism. Different angles are used, and the main issues identified by these perspectives are summarized. First, it is the view "from below", i.e., teachers and their problems as detected from their semi-organized activities online.

Second, key issues identified by the academic community of the so-called didactics of history. Finally, one issue in which history education recently became a matter of political debate is briefly described.

Let us, however, start with problematic conditions in which the debate on Czech history education unfolds: a blurred picture of the state of history education. Pinkas (2023) identified the insufficient availability of studies that give insight into the situation in schools as one of the key problems of the current curriculum. Even in most researched areas within history education, modern history, researchers face inaccuracy of empirical data, intentional use of surveys for ideological purposes, and marketing (Ripka & Hoření, 2017). This blurred or even misleading picture is periodically amplified by mass media, which persistently use a narrative about history teachers and schools avoiding teaching modern history on purpose due to their inability to organize and their fear of controversy. However, this narrative does not have any backing in systematic empirical research (Pinkas & Ripka, 2012).

A representative set of problems in history education identified “from below” could be found through Facebook self-help groups of history teachers (Najbert, 2023). Najbert has identified three approaches to the problems of history education in the three most prominent specialized online communities on social media based on the analysis of their online activity. These are commemorative history with a focus on the commemoration of personalities and events as well as the promotion of values; interesting history that aims at a playful and enjoyable experience for students; and literacy-based history where students don’t just learn historical facts but learn to think like historians by answering more challenging historical questions directed at cognitively higher dimensions of knowledge (Najbert, 2023).

We might use Najbert’s analysis to draw some lessons on the contemporary interests of teachers as reflected in their online activity. A major rift seems to be between the functions of history, where commemorative history education aims at - what Levesque (2009) calls History-Memory - and has a strong attachment to the nation-building process. The adherents of Interesting History are not specific. The history education aspiring to foster historical literacy is focused on non-modern history. The relatively good supportive net of tools, activities, and textbook-like material in this manner tackles modern history almost exclusively.

The full treatment of the set of key problems defined by the scholarly community extends beyond the scope of this article, and it got some coverage in the works of Gracová,

Labischová, Beneš, and Pinkas (Beneš & Gracová, 2015; Gracová & Labischová, 2012; Labischová & Gracová, 2016; Pinkas, 2023).

According to systematic studies, a great obstacle in realizing the skill-based part of the current history education curriculum and introduction of inquiry-based learning methods to foster historical literacy is the gap between the theory of inquiry-based learning and key competencies and its implementation (Černý, 2018; Činátl et al., 2021; Havlůjová & Najbert, 2018). The problems with this gap were especially pronounced in implementing inquiry-based learning and other active learning methods in a large recent experiment. The first experiment piloted the implementation of alternative curriculum at the gymnasium level and generally found relatively low interest of pupils in these new approaches when about half of the (pupil) treatment group preferred the traditional teaching methods (Labischová & Gracová, 2016,). The second experiment, Dějepis + [History +], ran in 2021/22 and 2022/23 aimed at developing critical historical thinking and research work with sources of historical information (Hubatková et al., 2021).

The key finding is that in the short term, even having a full spectrum of didactic tools ready to be used and a supportive net of learning communities might not be enough to bring about change in a single year of particular pupils' education. However, historical literacy has proved to be a legitimate educational objective that motivates children to see history and history education as relevant to their lives. Moreover, the project has shown that inquiry-based learning toward historical literacy works in different types of schools with talented and disadvantaged pupils (Münich et al., 2023). In the upcoming years, the supportive net might (Nosková, 2023), and according to Pinkas (2023) should be improved by advancing the definition of subject-specific skills directly in the revised National curriculum. These largely overlap with the History + concept of historical literacy.

There is a framing of historiography and history education that, in recent years, appeared in politics, mass media, and even from within the intellectual community: security concerns and hybrid warfare waged by Putin's Russia. The narrative of labelling part of the historiographical community as so-called neo-Marxists and the fifth column of Moscow was present for many years. It coincided with some methodological, or to be more precise, epistemological cleavages in the historiographic community, mainly positivism and proneness to the hagiography of anti-communist heroes versus postpositivism and stress put on a methodological frame of research (cf. Činátl et al.,

2017; Ripka & Sýkorová, 2023). One manifestation of an impetus for such a centrifugal polarization on this cleavage was the annual intelligence report of 2018, which identified these dangers within history teaching (Eberle & Daniel, 2023). This weaponizing approach to history and history education is feared by a part of the political spectrum but supported only by an intellectually minor group within the historiographical community and by none within the pedagogical scholars (Eberle & Daniel, 2023; Křístek, 2019; Perknerová, 2019).

The aforementioned controversy regarding the modern history textbook based on inquiry learning methods (Pinkas, 2022) and the role of students and the traditional canon runs roughly along a similar cleavage. Not only the robust system of reviews by the Ministry of Education (Černý, 2023) but also the consensus among the expert community in education (Belma Awards, 2022), both domestically and on the European level, prevented this attempt at political intervention (*17. března 2023 - Interview ČT24- Pavel Žáček*, 2023; *ZPRÁVA*, n.d.) into the educational system.

Despite the relative fringe happenings in this regard, combined with the War in Ukraine in 2022, this sentiment of weaponization of history education and its use for direct party-political purposes might gain momentum and indirectly impact the taught curriculum. Still, the more impactful factor is how the problems are felt and communicated at the levels of teaching and scholarly communities, mainly the gap between theory and practice and the lack of supportive nets.

Conclusion

Czech history education and civics form a common educational field. Neither subject enjoys a privileged position in schools. Especially with civics, the damage done by its highly ideological status during the communist regime between 1948 and 1989 brought about skepticism towards its non-fact-based components. The current social standing, however, is increased by its presumed social function of preparing democratic citizens. This is associated with the allegedly low profile of modern history teaching in history education. More post-communist countries share these traits, but these seem even more pronounced in the Czech Republic, as we have shown based on some examples of international comparative studies.

The current National Curriculum is not problematic in these two subjects as an ob-

stale, but rather as a feeble support for the actual, taught curriculum. The upcoming curricular reform aims to improve the supportive role and should be more competence-based while providing particular best practices from schools and educational programs. Its implementation plan remains to be seen since the delivery may need to catch up, as in the case of the previous reform from 2006 onwards. Despite all skepticism, a consensus on the constructivist, inquiry-based learning style of teaching has recently been accomplished. Principles of evidence-based policy-making in these curricular reforms may reconcile the theory and the situation in the field.

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Appendix

ISCED Level	Educational Stage	Age Range	Description	Czech School Name
1	Primary	6-11 years	Basic elementary education that provides fundamental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.	Základní škola - první stupeň (ZŠ)
2	Lower Secondary	11-15 years	Intermediate education that builds on primary education and prepares students for upper secondary education.	Základní škola - druhý stupeň (ZŠ)

2	Lower Secondary	11-15 years	Alternative pathway to lower secondary education.	Osmileté gymnázium (1. až 4. ročník)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	General or specialized education that prepares students for higher education or vocational training.	Střední odborná škola (SOŠ)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	General secondary education preparing for university entrance.	Gymnázium
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	Vocational training that prepares students for a specific profession.	Střední odborné učiliště (SOU)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	General education continuation from osmileté gymnázium.	Osmileté gymnázium (5. až 8. ročník)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	Specialized secondary education focusing on music and performing arts.	Konzervatoř
3	Post-secondary Non-tertiary	19+ years	Follow-up study that extends vocational education.	Nástavbové studium

Table 1: *The structure of the educational system as portrayed in the ISCED classification*