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THE SUBVERSIVE STRATEGIES OF POPULIST POWER: ON THE EMANCIPATORY POTENTIAL OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

ABSTRACT: In this article, the author presents various strategies employed by populist power that lead to ontological and axiological exclusion and the structural blockage of the communicative dimension of the public sphere as a civil space for dialogue. The article refers, among other ideas, to Jürgen Habermas's normative theory of the public sphere and Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism to show the threats to democracy, public order, and the functioning of civil society that result from the new forms and mechanisms of symbolic power and that produce polarization, stigmatization, and the exclusion of different ways of defining reality. The author presents the main assumptions of citizenship education in regard to forming social consciousness, developing critical thinking skills and other civic competencies, and forming habits of active participation in public life, all of which can influence the structure and key functions of the public sphere and unlock its emancipatory dimension. The author tries to show that countering the strategies of polarization and ontological exclusion used by populists requires citizenship education, understood as a certain normative project. The article outlines a perspective that could provide an opportunity at the present time for depolarization and the restoration of mutual respect between social groups with antagonistic worldviews and axiologies.
KEYWORDS: citizenship education, populism, social polarization, public sphere, civil society.

The revival of populist forms of power has been observed in Europe and around the world for some time and has undoubtedly become a real threat to many contemporary societies that operate within the framework of democratic states under the rule of law. In this article, I would like to outline the main threats that stem from the ongoing appropriation of the political dimension of the public sphere and that result in an increasingly radical polarization of society and gradual loss of the capacity for consensual regulation of social conflicts. The strategies of symbolic domination employed by populist power lead above all to a structural blockage of the communicative dimension of the public sphere and of the civic space for dialogue. Citizens consequently lose their ability to solve major social problems themselves. In the long run, this situation contributes to increasing polarization, involving symbolic stigmatization and axiological and ontological exclusion. Here I would like to outline the foundations for a normative project of citizenship education, which could offer hope for depolarization and the restoration of mutual respect among antagonistic social groups. The emancipatory potential of citizenship education lies, in my view, in its ability to restore and reconstruct the rational

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basis of universal debate, that is, to recreate a space of social dialogue embedded in the intersubjective language of argument and meaning.

Symbolic Stigmatization and Ontological Exclusion

In normatively oriented political theory, the functioning of civil society has been framed as the mediation of power in the political dimension of the public sphere, which is understood as the proper space of social emancipation (Habermas, 2007). This approach to power and politics, however, was clearly grounded in Enlightenment optimism and assumed that the public sphere constituted an area for the rational (discursive) formation of the civic will. According to Jürgen Habermas, emancipatory potential is a structural component of the public sphere itself. One of the key areas for the functioning of the public sphere, and thus for the realization of power, is civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*). Its final shape is determined by the balance of the political, cultural, and social spheres (Arato & Cohen, 1992; Habermas, 2005: 349-407; Habermas, 2007: 143-278). The public sphere is also conceptualized as a complex communicative structure whose base is a civil society rooted in the lifeworld (Habermas, 2005: 379-407)[1]. Simply speaking, it is in the public sphere that society articulates, interprets, and resolves its most important problems. Citizens therefore perceive the real social problems they face in their lives and each of them can, at any time, join in the discussion of these problems. In the political sense, the public sphere must furthermore be open to the exchange of ideas and arguments and to public discourse. In such an understanding of the public sphere, there is a clear incentive for citizens to overcome their inertia and actively co-create the socio-cultural conditions for civic engagement. The social energy and potential for dissent, which through the openness of the public sphere can be redirected into concrete institutional solutions to social problems, is not insignificant here. At the same time, Habermas is less interested in the symbolic order as an autonomous reality and more in its role in shaping the structures of the public sphere. Therefore, he uses the formula of the colonized lifeworld to explain the loss of connection between the level of cultural competences of individuals and the world of structures and institutions (Habermas, 2002: 659-668).

Although Habermas notices that the formation of consumer society has intensified the crisis of citizenship and the progressive erosion of the public sphere, he does not take into account the other mechanisms of symbolic domination that led to this erosion. Habermas's vision thus assumes the possibility of society's self-liberation

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[1] Habermas discusses the specific difference between civic and civil society in *Faktyczność i obowiązywanie. Teoria dyskursu wobec zagadnień prawa i demokratycznego państwa prawnego* (Habermas, 2005: 349-407).

from various forms of violence and ideology and gives hope for true emancipation. In this case, emancipation means unblocking communication – abolishing its barriers and ideological distortions – in such a way that a general debate becomes possible in which we decide on the legitimacy of norms, which we then consider socially binding (Maślanka, 2011: 25-42). We are dealing here with an idealized situation in which socially sensitive citizens, faced with the depoliticization of civil society, make use of their abilities to reason critically. In Habermas's social philosophy, public opinion itself becomes a new way of legitimizing the social and political order, because public opinion does not have a formal character, and its legitimating power comes from a conscious consensus achieved through nonviolent communication. At the base of this concept is Habermas's belief that the rational justification of universal norms – those that articulate common interests – is possible (Maślanka, 2011: 28-29).

In times where populist politics dominate, it would seem that this idealized visualization of power and the practical dimension of politics as a space for the rational resolution of disputes and social problems free from external pressures has become an unjustified declaration of faith (Negt & Kluge, 1972; Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1996; Mouffe, 2015) The public sphere, which constitutes a dialogical and symmetrical space for reporting and negotiating so-called claims to validity (Habermas, 1999: 59), is being replaced by new forms of populist power and domination, which lead to the blocking of the democratic and pluralistic dynamics of social conflicts. In the remainder of the article, I will focus on selected strategies of populist power, that is, ontological exclusion and legitimation through harm and suffering, in order to highlight the growing role of citizenship education and the need to unleash its emancipatory potential, as one of the key ways to overcome antagonisms and ideological or worldview divisions in democratic societies. Citizenship education in this sense actually unlocks the emancipatory potential of the public sphere as Habermas conceived it.

The contemporary dispute between liberals and conservatives may be perceived as unresolvable because it is not solely an axiological conflict. Liberalism and conservatism, of course, refer to different values, but more importantly, they define reality itself in different ways. When political opponents become "absolute strangers" to each other, in the sense Georg Simmel gave to this concept (Waldenfels, 2002: 68-89; Simmel, 2005: 300), mutual understanding becomes impossible because both parties belong to different orders of reality. The world then ceases to be a space of intersubjective relationships between people and becomes a barrier separating incompatible realities. However, the loss of this relationality, which allows for mediation between different orders of reality, means the loss of the political dimension, because politics is always an attempt at a specific arrangement of interpersonal space, which involves the consensual regulation of differences, not their radical highlighting. In other words,

ideological and worldview contradictions, which have their justifications, demarcate the structural framework of political liberalism, in which the democratic community is always deeply divided on axiological issues (Rawls, 1998: 11-18). The problem is that what is at stake in the conflict between liberals and populists is not only values but also identity, whose defence becomes one of the main strategies used by both antagonistic parties. Therefore, the conflict seems unresolvable precisely because both sides are fighting over their own way of defining reality, that is, while trying to define the same concepts and values, they use fundamentally different dictionaries (Markowski, 2019: 105). However, this is not only a dispute about values, because such a dispute is normal, inevitable, and insoluble in every democratic community, but an ontological dispute over a linguistically mediated definition of reality. Both liberals and populists use the strategy of fighting for the recognition of their own reality as the only legitimate one and at the same time excluding the reality of their opponents.

This strategy should therefore not be associated with a clash of values (because these always conflict for empirical reasons) but with a confrontation of varying ways of defining reality, within whose framework we define the same values differently. The essence of symbolic domination – which undermines the key principles of organizing the democratic order – is not reducible to the presence of axiological conflicts but to a fundamental ontological conflict: the refusal to recognize a different way of defining reality. This is how populists undermine democracy: by rejecting their political opponents' alternative reality and its attendant language, and not just their system of values.

Political conflicts in the era of populism are therefore increasingly struggles for recognition (Hegel, 2010: 125-159), a duel for the victory of one vision of reality over another, a skirmish in which political opponents define the same concept of identity in different ways. The state naturally cannot act as mediator in this dispute, because it is not a reality based on values but on a certain legal structure that allows the coexistence of many different realities and axiological orders (Rawls, 1998: 194-243). The core of the ontological-exclusion strategy used by populist governments is therefore a modified identity policy, the forcing of a specific vision of reality and acting based on specific values. The greatest threat, however, is not the collision of values themselves, because the conflict between them is structurally embedded in every social order, but the connection of values with the legal system, which is universally binding. Universal obligations arise from belonging to a specific legal regime and not from the fact that we profess one or another kind of values.

The judicialization of the public sphere, which is, in fact, an element of the ongoing dislocation of liberal democracy, has been described by various conservative critics of multiculturalism (Bock-Côté, 2017: 206-207) as an effective way for minority groups to articulate claims. Such judicialization is largely free from the controversies of classical

politics. The judicialization of the public sphere is understood here as a complex process of gradual inclusion of various aspects of social life into the space of regulation through legal norms and procedures. Social problems that were once solved at the political, social or cultural level are transferred to be resolved within the framework of legal norms and procedures. This process may result in formal and legal regulation of the functioning of the public sphere, expanding the competences of courts in the sphere of public policy, or even replacing politics with law. In particular, it may lead to resolving social disputes, including ideological ones, as a specific combination of legal norms. In the hands of the ruling majority, it becomes an equally effective tool for creating a monopoly in the sphere of values. The subversive nature of populist strategies of symbolic domination culminates in the methodical provision of symbolic representation to real changes. These changes become sanctioned and gain universal legitimacy by being embedded in the legal sphere, and therefore in the very core of the symbolic system. This leads to the symbolic stigmatization and exclusion of political opponents, who are presented as enemies threatening our existence and our identity, and not as people with different views or guided by different value systems.

The use of such polarizing symbolic identifications similarly constitutes part of the internal structure of civil-society discourse (Alexander, 2010: 308-321). According to the American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, the creation of a civil symbolic sphere also occurs with the aid of binary and exclusionary "symbolic codes," which act as a mobilizing factor in crisis situations (Alexander, 2010: 134-142). However, there is an important difference between the polarizing discourse of civil society and populist strategies of ontological exclusion in that the binary discourse of citizen/non-citizen refers to the inclusion and exclusion of others, that is, strangers to the national or political community, while populists exclude their own citizens, in other words, members of the same cultural community. This strategy is tantamount to ontological exclusion, that is, the refusal to accept other definitions of reality. In other words, populists semiotically dehumanize their own citizens, presenting them, for example, as enemies of the nation, non-patriots, traitors, or even agents of a foreign state[2].

Legitimation through Harm and Suffering

When analysing the successes of populist power, it is impossible to ignore the feeling of injustice and exclusion that is the central experience of marginalized groups, minority groups, and those who find themselves on the outskirts of the dominant social, political,

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[2] The chairman of the Polish right-wing party "Law and Justice" Jarosław Kaczyński used all of these epithets in Poland's parliament or in public in regard to Donald Tusk, chairman of the liberal party.

economic, and cultural system. In countries such as Poland, the shift in the main axis of symbolic power and the populist turn would be difficult to explain without taking into account the liberal rhetoric that became dominant after the transformation of the 1990s and that deprived the working class of almost all its symbolic capital (Ost, 2007: 136-253). This symbolic dispossession helps explain the intensity of the struggle these social groups have conducted for recognition and existence in the space of shared meanings. However, both strategies presented here lack a proper language that would enable the conflicting parties to agree. The sense of injustice and exclusion is not adequately represented in the dominant, linguistically mediated symbolic universe, which leads to the delegitimization of the prevailing imaginary by those who experience their lot as failure, defeat, or exclusion. The feeling of social exclusion results in the delegitimization of the dominant symbolic universe, and this mechanism has been used by populists to create a quasi-political language that serves to strengthen their symbolic power. For example, in Poland, according to Andrzej Leder, the sense of injustice, which is a very real experience of many marginalized social groups, was not translated into political language but was limited by those in power to the mournful language of moral exclusion, or possibly to the retaliatory language of "restoring moral order" (Leder, 2014: 37). However, this is not political language that could give any hope to a divided society of a rational modus vivendi, the creation of a plane of coexistence, or the regulation of a sphere of possible cooperation. Liberal political language, in its striving to eliminate contempt, hatred, or the desire for revenge, cannot become the language of the excluded, and thus it de facto blocks the linguistically mediated channel of communication with that part of society to whose fears and emotions conservatives appeal. One reaction to a sense of injustice is a polarization of worldviews and the saturation of the public space with moral categories that allow the wronged to identify themselves emotionally as victims and at the same time to despise or hate their harmers, who are presented as perpetrators. At the same time, the intensification of confrontation in the symbolic sphere eliminates democratic forms of political power, which by definition do not refer to strong feelings, emotions, and symbols, but to moderation and common sense (Leder, 2014: 39-41). What occurs here is such a transformation of the symbolic order that, through moral stigmatization and the radicalization of political language, it triggers in its followers the desire to take revenge on their alleged oppressors, who belong to a different order of reality. When others become strangers whom we deny access to our reality, it means we do not recognize their claims to possess our reality. The public space, having been colonized by the subversive tactics of populist power, thus becomes a space deprived of the potential for alternative visions of reality to confront one another.

The strategies of symbolic power used by populist governments cannot thus be reduced to the inevitability of conflicts in democratic societies (on the grounds that the presence of such conflicts is the intellectual adhesive of political liberalism itself). The ontological conflict, on the contrary, disrupts the structural framework of every political language by transforming into a type of antagonism, a struggle between enemies over how to define reality, instead of becoming an "agonism" – the ideological, political, or axiological confrontation between opponents (Mouffe, 2015: 22-23) that is an unquestionable element of every modern democracy. The confrontational battle over how to define reality leads to the blocking of the democratic and pluralistic dynamic of conflicts: in other words, to a situation where the languages used by opponents no longer refer to the intersubjective language of meaning but find expression in an undemocratic, retaliatory, and affective language of moral condemnation.

The Emancipatory Potential of Citizenship Education

Most active participants in public life are probably aware that citizenship education, understood as the more or less formalized education of adults who have already acquired basic competencies during socialization, is of key importance for the functioning of civil society and democracy. The role of citizenship education in regard to democratic principles and values seems relatively obvious (Hahn, 1998). It also unquestionably prepares people for active participation in the processes of conscious and collective decision-making, as well as the use of civil institutions. Thanks to appropriate citizenship education, participants in a democratic community are less susceptible to manipulation, can effectively avoid discrimination, and can thus fully exercise their civil rights and freedoms while actively defending themselves against abuses by the authorities (Figueroa, 2000). Participation was once associated with influencing the political sphere through electoral mobilization and the election process itself (Petrosyan, 2016). Currently, civic participation is understood much more broadly (Barret & Bruna eds., 2014; Tormey, 2015).

Adult education undoubtedly contributes to increasing the degree of social integration, while also fostering attitudes of active civic involvement. Effective citizenship education leads to the development and acquisition of many important competencies, which are key for functioning within the structures and procedures of civil society. One of the most important competencies is the ability to normativize, that is, the ability to reflect on the norms and values that determine the motivational structure of human actions and are components of collective forms of identification. This skill involves being able to understand the motives for one's own actions, which are inevitably entangled in the order of values. Values fundamentally help to simplify the world, while the emancipatory

potential of citizenship education relies more on its being embedded in a hermeneutic sphere of meaning. Consequently, such education introduces students to functioning within the extremely complex structures of the social lifeworld. Raising the level of civic self-knowledge helps to maintain the belief that a vision of life in a conflict-free and harmonious society is a utopia or ideology. To develop normativization competencies, it is necessary to have the kind of semantic distance that enables discussion about the desired goals of civil society and the principles of organizing public order. This discussion is possible in a language other than the language of values. The ability to act for the public good, which also means the ability to take into account other perspectives and points of view, is another competency of strategic cooperation. All these competencies require abandoning the language of opinions and emotions in favour of intersubjectively negotiated meaning. This may, of course, cause some discomfort at the level of individual choices, resulting from the asymmetries inherent in every axio-normative system (Kołakowski, 2009: 158-161; 166-169). The human tendency to eliminate moral tensions and to avoid axiologically heterogeneous situations is in conflict with the need to systematically ensure coherence in the field of lawmaking. This results from the subjectively experienced need for "rightness," that is, the need to ensure the compliance of the applicable norms with the professed values. Those who do not accept this inconsistency are subject to the pitfalls and limitations of codified ethical systems that strive to eliminate any moral tension from social life, which is, of course, an impossible task (Kołakowski, 2009: 172-173). A further competency, critical thinking, most obviously requires a departure from the language of values because it is based on the ability to self-question, which some even consider a constitutive feature of European culture (Kołakowski, 2006: 11-31). Simply put, his competency involves the fundamental ability to reflect critically on the values that form the structural components of our collective identity. Therefore, it is the ability to question or correct the norms of our actions, as well as to reject erroneous practices or opinions that deform our image of reality. In the context of civil society, the role of social self-awareness, which as a competency is characterized by the ability to question the motives of one's own -sometimes ideologically obscured – actions, is often discussed (Shils, 1994: 9-53). The quality of a democracy depends on the degree of development of this competency, that is, the political awareness of citizens themselves (Niemi & Junn, 1998). The competency of multidirectional problem-solving involves being able to solve complex problems in different, sometimes contradictory ways. A key element of this competency is cognitive appreciation, that is, being able to take other cognitive perspectives into account when solving complex problems (Habermas, 2009: 204-230). Doing so often requires questioning one's own deeply entrenched but obscured opinions and beliefs.

The basic goal of citizenship education in the practical dimension can therefore be defined as the ability to expand the degree of civic involvement and thus the ability to participate in the institutions of a democratic society (McCowan, 2011). Fulfilment of this aim could occur on several levels and could encompass forming social awareness, developing critical thinking and other civic skills, and shaping habits of active participation in public life. The primary goal here is to create transparent civil-society structures, free from ideological distortions. Such education is of a processual nature and depends on the development of knowledge, skills, and predispositions that are key to effective participation in social life, including political life. The goals of citizenship education formulated in such a general manner allow us to point to its clearly normative character. Citizenship education, while developing a person's capacity to participate in a democracy, should also teach mutual respect and the ability to take into account other cognitive, ideological, and axiological perspectives (Habermas, 2009: 134-158). Its function can thus be expanded to include making space for constructive dialogue and cooperation in solving important social problems. Many authors have drawn attention to the need to develop skills in constructive conflict resolution through the development of communication competencies (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Patrick, 2000). The ability to reach compromises and the ability to think critically have also been emphasized (Morse, 1993). It is difficult to imagine effective citizenship education without taking into account efforts to counteract information manipulation or to eliminate communication barriers in the form of ideological distortions. Citizenship education is therefore not about solving specific social problems but about fostering communication competencies, because only they enable the mobilization of people's own resources and the solving of complex problems. Contrary to the recommendations of social pedagogy in the traditional sense and the principles of conducting citizen campaigns, the quality of interpersonal relationships does not have to be rooted in shared values or founded on a sense of community (Kubik ed., 2024: 104).

Broadly speaking, the emancipatory potential of citizenship education lies in promoting the idea of tolerance and respect for ethnic, cultural, religious, ideological, and political diversity. However, a danger lurks behind this attractive-sounding idea of respect for diversity, because making difference a normative goal can also take the form of a false understanding of tolerance and respect for diversity. If we celebrate differences as something we should absolutely respect and preserve, we abandon the concern for differences as something we should eliminate, as Walter Benn Michaels succinctly put it (Michaels, 2006).

The hard core of citizenship education with emancipatory intentions can, in my opinion, be distinguished on the grounds of its having the following functions: it stimulates reflexivity and the ability to understand social phenomena and processes

critically, and it promotes inclusive strategies (taking into account the Other) and the ability to question social and political reality. Such education could lead to acceptance of the contradictions between various cognitive perspectives, axiological horizons, and identity projects (McLaughlin, 1992: 296). Based on the above isolated components, an attempt can be made to outline a normative project of citizenship education.

Citizenship Education as a Normative Project

An analysis of the effects of the strategies used by populist power (as presented at the beginning of the article) gives us grounds to claim that basing citizenship education on the introduction of appropriate procedural and institutional mechanisms is insufficient to unlock the emancipatory potential of the public sphere and is an expression of a naive concept of civicness in a liberal-democratic system. Therefore, the question arises of how to assess the role of citizenship education in its normative aspect, given growing social polarization? In other words, why do the current form and content of citizenship education turn out to be so unsatisfactory, that is, why do they not contribute significantly to the depolarization of society?

The conviction that citizens themselves actively co-create the framework for their actions is a basic assumption of social constructivism, and the approach I propose here is close to the assumptions of constructivism (Haste, 2010:163). Shaping civic awareness is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about shaping experiences. In short, what is important is civic experience, not acquiring information from the world of politics. These experiences trigger awareness of the existence of controversies and contradictions whose social meaning requires negotiation. Civicness is a construct that depends on both the level of personal competencies and the quality of social interactions. A citizen should be critical of worldviews, identities, or ideas of community presented in the public sphere. This idea of citizenship education involves not solely formal education (the transfer of knowledge) but also formation (the development of dispositions, competencies, and attitudes). What is particularly important here is the ability to reflect critically on the values that motivate people to act within the community. Citizenship education should thus not be solely "knowledge about society," but should set the conceptual framework for an entire program of instruction (Kymlicka, 2001: 293).

Therefore, the goal of citizenship education, in the context of the previously outlined polarization, ontological exclusion, and structural blocking of the communication dimension of the public sphere, includes a normatively outlined project that can prevent ontological and axiological exclusion. In my opinion, it is especially important to draft a prospective improvement of the functioning of the public space and thus to strive to

develop rules and principles that could unite people regardless of their values. Educating, that is, conversing with society, should lead to a situation where society learns to talk to itself, that is, to define common problems in the same language of meaning, then to understand and interpret them in order to solve them constructively. Education is therefore the midwife of democracy (Dewey, 1980: 139). The goal of citizenship education is not only to change society but also to change oneself by increasing one's degree of self-knowledge (Freire, 1970). Without meeting this condition, no education or citizens' campaign will be able to achieve its goals. The matter can be formulated as an even simpler question: how can it be brought about that having good arguments will be sufficient to convince others to act and thus trigger social changes that would make the world more just? The most important thing here, in my opinion, is to abandon the language of emotions and values in favour of the language of sense and arguments. Referring to the strongly polarizing language of values, opinions, and emotions does not contribute in any way to solving important social problems. A number of specific examples can be mentioned here.

Polish right-wing politicians have often publicly accused their political opponents of moral corruption, and they call transgender or non-heterosexual people an "ideology", which undoubtedly constitutes a form of dehumanization. The assertion that our political opponents are axiologically degenerate if they profess different values clearly indicates a fundamentalist politics of values that excludes the plane of an intersubjective negotiation of meaning. Strongly polarizing issues, of which the discussion on changing the abortion law in Poland is undoubtedly one, are usually related to values. The dispute is essentially about whether human life is the highest value, and this is a matter that cannot be resolved on the basis of extreme worldview and axiological attitudes, nor do these allow justified premises to be developed for a rational policy on the protection of human life, including in regard to abortion or, for example, euthanasia (Habermas, 2003: 48). As a result, it becomes impossible to develop a rational basis for an effective policy regarding the protection of human life at the level of state legal procedures. The dispute in this case does not concern the essence of the problem, because it has been transformed into a strongly antagonizing question entangled in the order of values, that is, "When does human life begin?" and not, "In what circumstances and under what conditions should we protect human life?" Citizenship education should make us realize that the public dimension of politics is not an arena of struggles about who we are but about what we should do to make our social coexistence better. It is worth emphasizing the active dimension of citizenship education, which makes it education in action. However, the necessary condition here is to abandon the language of values.

Citizenship andragogy should therefore be both critical and emancipatory (Freire, 1970) in order to eliminate the ontologically devastating effect of the strategies used

by populists and restore the impression of everyone living in the same reality. In my opinion, this is a more important issue than all the more specific goals of citizenship education for adults. Dialogue has always been a key tool for citizenship education. Already in the nineteenth century, the Protestant pastor Nikolai Frederik Grundvik was using the "living word" as the basis for organizing "schools of life" for citizens, as part of promoting the idea of Danish national identity (Bron-Wojciechowska, 1986). I consider that in these times of a revival of populist forms of power, dialogue in the same language of arguments and meaning remains the only way of averting or mitigating the radical polarization of society. Only rational, meaningful dialogue can provide hope for the peaceful coexistence of a divided society. If people do not understand each other because they define the same concepts in different ways, there is practically no chance they will be able to develop any form of lasting cooperation. No less important here is the ability to engage in public discussion, which, first, may lead to questioning the validity of political decisions and, second, to consideration of other opinions and views based on other value systems, worldviews, or visions of a good life (Kymlicka, 2001: 296).

The key to depolarization is the ability to take into account other points of view, which are often contradictory to our own worldview or value system. In this way, civic sensitivity becomes a kind of "public rationality" (Kymlicka, 2001: 296-297). The problem can be reduced to an attempt to unravel modernity's fundamental contradiction between individual freedom and the sphere of values that determine the conditions of social coexistence (Honneth, 2012). This requires the ability to separate the content of private experiences from the sphere of what constitutes the public interest. Such a distinction is necessary to prevent discrimination in the public space and the ontological exclusion already discussed above (Kymlicka, 1996).

The lack of effectiveness of citizenship education has often been explained by the low level of trust among citizens and the erosion of so-called social capital (Putnam, 1995; 2008). Researchers have also pointed to the transformation of democracy itself and its turn toward a procedural model (Schumpeter, 1995: 293-377; Dahl, 2012). Democracy in such conditions is limited to the periodic reconstruction of the procedures themselves and the process of legitimizing power, that is, in practice, to electoral mobilization and cyclical participation in universal voting. This results in the belief among citizens that they have no real influence on the decisions and actions of those in power, and in a weakening of citizens' motivation and social energy. For this reason, citizenship education should primarily concern the civil public sphere, that is, the space that mediates the private sphere and the political space of exercising power. Citizenship education in action thus means active reconstruction of social trust, work on improving the quality of interpersonal relations, learning to participate in collective decision-making, and

promoting the idea of active cooperation (Pateman, 1970). Consequently, citizenship education more closely resembles work on the creative use of human capital rather than social work in the traditional sense, whose main goal is above all to reduce the level of social deprivation. Education is more about working with people than about working on behalf of people who, for one reason or another, find themselves in a disadvantaged position. Citizenship education as a form of social activation teaches people to speak on their own behalf, while maintaining an awareness of the common good (Mansbridge, 1999). This allows so-called social traps to be overcome, that is, it allows dilemmas of cooperation and joint action to be resolved (Hankiss, 1986). Such activation, though, is not only about providing help or guidance in taking strategic action on specific social problems but about long-term work aimed at gaining awareness of the relative location of one's own identity projects and the horizontal limitations of each axiological or worldview perspective, including one's own.

Citizenship education in its normative aspect therefore leads to reconstruction of the rational basis for conducting social dialogue in the intersubjective language of arguments and meaning. Citizenship education understood in this way is, in a sense, a kind of organic work at the base, which should precede any more organized form of citizens' campaign. Such education is intended to restore the civic competencies needed to conduct a universal social dialogue, in the same language and within the same reality. This language cannot be the affective language of struggling for recognition of one's own identity as the only valid one, because such a language leads to the perpetuation of social lifeworld structures that irrevocably separate us from others.

The goal of citizenship education is transcendental in the philosophical sense, because it involves restoring the conditions for conducting universal social dialogue. One-off protests, managing the complex organizational structure of social movements, or conducting citizens' campaigns can, of course, raise the level of civic self-awareness, but only if the normative project outlined here is successful. A democratically enlightened mind should reflect the mental condition of a multi-voiced audience. The educational process should not serve to protect us from the existence of values with which we do not agree. Citizenship education is supposed to raise awareness of the various contradictions that are a constitutive element of civil coexistence, such as, for example, the fact that the national issue, which is emphasized by the right and involves accenting unity and underlining differences, is incompatible with the class issue, which is emphasized by the left and is based on eliminating differences.

In practical terms, I would like to point to several strategies for citizenship education in the normative sense. In my opinion, it is important to use conflicts as a potential resource when taking strategic action, as Saul Alinsky, the classic proponent of so-called

"community organizing," pointed out (Alinsky, 1989)[3]. Therefore, confrontation in the public sphere does not have to lead to the adoption of defensive and, as a result, strongly polarizing practices of defending a threatened identity, but could also, according to Alinsky, lead to non-confrontational methods of introducing social changes. The idea of "agonistic pluralism" that Chantal Mouffe (2015) proposed seems to combine Alinsky's more radical (conflict-based) approach with the liberal model of consensual regulation of social tensions and antagonisms (which may seem overly idealistic in a situation where populist strategies of symbolic domination are being used).

I would also like to point to other pillars of citizenship education embedded in the intersubjective language of meaning: the promotion of a culture of substantive debates with the participation of experts, and public discussion of important social problems, instead of their individualization (Beck, 2002: 135-137). Such debates might also take the form of active deliberation, that is, they need not be limited to organizing what citizens already know but could also provide them with the new knowledge needed to expand their general competencies in regard to complex information processing (Held, 2010: 299-330). It is also important to work toward increasing the availability of various sources of information (preventing the creation of "information bubbles"), developing critical thinking skills based on the precise use of concepts, and consequently moving away from the language of values, emotions, and opinions, which favours divisions and serves to highlight differences (Lilla, 2018). Finally, identity politics must be replaced with the politics of action. What is fundamental here is to reformulate the goals of public policy: to convert the question of who we are into a question of what we should do, and to educate citizens for the complex management of inevitably conflicting forms of social life. This, in fact, is the answer to John Rawls's question about how to create a just and equal society of free citizens who are divided on fundamental ideological and axiological issues (Rawls, 1998: 18-19). The question also concerns how to re-include those who experience their lot in terms of failure and exclusion, that is, how to manage the existing sense of injustice without resorting to the retaliatory language of moral condemnation used by populists.

Social dialogue should be a type of open exchange, not guided by confrontational logic or strategic defence of one's own viewpoint or values. Methodologically, it means creating a nonhierarchical civil space whose structural components are axiological and normative pluralism, and conflict (Freire, 1970: 21-22). Freire places the emphasis here on self-emancipation, instead of a hierarchical relationship, which is always a relationship of power. Our knowledge is, of course, subjective, often flawed, and full of prejudices. Social dialogue can lead to the depolarization of worldviews and to the elimination of

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[3] In the 1960s and 1970s, many liberal organizations made use of Alinsky's ideas for the purpose of activating society in a manner alternative to that of radical counter-culture movements.

exclusion and mutual distrust. The purpose of dialogue is to realize a hermeneutic aim, to provoke new questions rather than to find ready-made solutions (Gadamer, 2008: 258-270; 2013: 493-515). However, hermeneutics does not refer to legitimate methods of acquiring knowledge but rather to the description of how culturally mediated self-awareness is constituted (Gadamer, 2013: 367-657). Applying the rules of hermeneutic interpretation, instead of appealing to emotions and opinions, leads to overcoming the "anarchy of worldviews" (Dilthey, 1987) and thus to gaining self-awareness of the relativization of the available cognitive and axiological perspectives.

Conclusions

The strategies of populist power, which are based on polarizing discourse and symbolic confrontation in the sphere of linguistically mediated ways of defining reality, constitute the most serious threat to the functioning of contemporary democratic societies. It would be naive to think that liberal political language, in referring to the consensual regulation of public order, especially in its normative dimension, will irrevocably eliminate ontological exclusion and contribute to realizing our vision of a harmonious society. If we could imagine such a situation, it would mean the end of citizenship education, that is, the fulfilment of all its functions. This assumption is as counterfactual as the idea of the "over-socialized" individual (Wrong, 1999). The notion of "agonistic pluralism" (Mouffe, 1993) quite well reflects the inevitability of conflict between various social groups guided by different values, norms, and interests. However, the idea of conflict consensus assumes that opponents are not enemies but adversaries operating within a shared vision of reality. The subversive strategies of symbolic power used by populists, which I tried to present at the beginning, exclude not only the liberal hope of rationally solving social and political conflicts but also the possibility of conducting agonistic politics within the framework of democratic procedures and institutions.

Some theorists write in this context about the "agonistic respect" that emerges from the common human condition and the inevitable struggle for identity. Agonistic respect becomes an essential virtue of radical pluralism and the most important political value in our contemporary world of deep social and political divisions (Connolly, 2005). Ontological exclusion, which is a constitutive element of populists' symbolic power, leads not solely to radicalization but to the rejection of any linguistically mediated and mutually shared definition of reality that could constitute the foundation for civil coexistence in democratic societies. Determining the superiority of any of the languages and ways used to define reality seems to be a difficult task, but at the same time removing the perspective of hermeneutic idealism, which allows us to hope for the existence of a meaning on which we can agree, regardless of the system of values

or forms of collective identification that we have adopted, can only lead to further polarization. I believe that this hermeneutical idealism sets the normative framework for contemporary citizenship education, which gives hope for restoring mutual respect to antagonistic parties. The emancipatory potential of citizenship education thus understood lies in its potential for social depolarization. Without proper citizenship education, we can expect intensification of confrontations, further radicalization, and growing social divisions, or in other words, a situation in which others are no longer perceived as people who simply have different views or value systems but as strangers who question our identity and threaten our existence.

Interpretations of individual ethical and political principles that divide the community of citizens is not only justified but also necessary in every democracy. These interpretations allow for the coherent coexistence of various forms of civil identity and are the essence of democratic politics. However, interpretation is subject to certain rules and cannot be founded on opinions and emotions. Citizenship education should be based on learning this painstaking art of hermeneutic interpretation, which is embedded in the intersubjective language of meaning and thus involves the rejecting of easy explanations based on deeply held beliefs. Citizenship education entails a constant effort to influence society's awareness and cannot be identified with a one-off protest action, even in defence of what we believe to be the right values or ideas. The normative character of public andragogy imposes a specific purpose on it, without cancelling its axiological neutrality. The aim of citizenship education is not to convert anyone to another, supposedly better system of values, but to achieve a state of civic self-awareness that shows conflicts and divisions to be a constitutive element of every public order and excludes illusory hopes for a final reconciliation.

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