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LARGE-SCALE ASSESSMENT ON CIVIC AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION:
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND FUTURE RESEARCH
DEVELOPMENTS¹

VALUTAZIONE SU LARGA SCALE DELL'EDUCAZIONE CIVICA
E ALLA CITTADINANZA: PROSPETTIVE STORICHE E SVILUPPI FUTURI
DELLA RICERCA

Since the Seventies international large-scale assessments carried out by IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) have significantly contributed to educational research, in terms of definition of theoretical constructs, methods for developing achievement tests, enhancement of data analysis techniques and creation of indicators, in order to examine and compare different education systems in the world.

Since the second half of 1990s, in addition to IEA, also the OECD (Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development) organizes and manages international comparative studies. This institution carried out international surveys related to either school education (i. e. PISA, Programme for International Student Assessment, which represents the most relevant study) or adult education (starting from the IALS and SIALS projects to the recent PIAAC project, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies). This paper firstly aims at retracing, from an historical point of view, IEA and OECD large-scale assessments development, analysing the similarities and the differences in the planning and managing of the surveys with regard to the conceptual background, the adopted methodologies and tools and the use of results.

Starting from this preliminary historical analysis, this contribution then examines international large-scale assessments on civic and citizenship education carried out by the IEA, from the First Civic Education Study (1970-1971) to the ICCS 2016 (International Civic and Citizenship Education Study), whose results have been released in November 2017. This review allows reflecting on the development over time of the theoretical frameworks, of the survey methodologies and tools of the IEA international comparative research. This analysis tackles aspects related both to the specific field of civic and citizenship education and more in general to other surveys conducted by the organisation in different areas of school education (reading, maths and science, ICT). The overall aim of this investigation is to highlight the specific and significant contribution provided by international large-scale assessments in the scrutiny of education, both in relation to national curricula and school and classroom contexts.

Le indagini comparative internazionali realizzate dall'IEA (*International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement*) a partire dagli anni Sessanta del Novecento hanno contribuito in maniera significativa alla ricerca valutativa, in termini di definizione dei costrutti teorici, di metodologie per la costruzione delle prove, di sviluppo di tecniche di analisi dei dati e di creazione di indicatori per poter analizzare e comparare diversi sistemi di istruzione nel mondo.

A partire dalla seconda metà degli anni Novanta, oltre all'IEA è presente nello scenario mondiale delle organizzazioni che pianificano e gestiscono le indagini comparative internazionali anche l'OCSE (Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico). Tale organizzazione ha realizzato indagini sia

¹ The present contribution is the result of the common work of the three authors. With regard to the drafting of single paragraphs, Valeria Damiani is author of paragraph 4; Bruno Losito is author of paragraphs 1, 2 and 5; Alessandro Sanzo is author of paragraph 3.



nel campo dell'istruzione (il progetto PISA, *Programme for International Student Assessment*, costituisce l'indagine di maggiore rilevanza) che in quello dell'educazione degli adulti (dai progetti IALS e SIALS fino all'odierno progetto PIAAC *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies*).

Il presente contributo ricostruisce in primo luogo la nascita e lo sviluppo delle indagini comparative internazionali realizzate dall'IEA e dall'OCSE, analizzando i punti di convergenza e le differenze nelle impostazioni di queste indagini per quanto concerne l'impianto concettuale, le metodologie, gli strumenti e l'utilizzo dei risultati all'interno degli studi sulle caratteristiche dei sistemi di istruzione.

A partire da questa analisi storica preliminare, viene approfondito l'ambito di ricerca relativo alle indagini comparative internazionali sull'educazione civica e alla cittadinanza realizzate dall'IEA, dal *First Civic Education Study* degli anni 1970-1971 allo studio ICCS (*International Civic and Citizenship Education Study*) del 2016, i cui risultati sono stati pubblicati nel novembre 2017. Data la rilevanza che questo ambito di ricerca ha progressivamente assunto fin dalle prime indagini condotte dall'organizzazione, esso permette di effettuare una disamina dello sviluppo nel tempo degli impianti teorico-concettuali, delle metodologie di indagine e degli strumenti delle ricerche comparative internazionali dell'IEA, sia sull'educazione civica e alla cittadinanza sia più in generale. Attraverso tale disamina si vuole evidenziare il contributo specifico e significativo delle indagini comparative su larga scala per l'analisi dei fenomeni educativi (formali, non formali e informali) e dei curricula nazionali in quest'ambito di studio.

Key words: civic and citizenship education; large-scale assessments; comparative studies; educational research and policies; school curricula.

Parole chiave: educazione civica e alla cittadinanza; indagini internazionali su larga scala; indagini comparative; ricerca e politiche educative; curricula.

1. Introduction

Beginning with the first studies conducted by the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement* (IEA) in the 1960s, international large-scale assessments have provided the means to deepen the knowledge of education systems, and their characteristics, while simultaneously making a significant contribution to the development of educational research, both on a theoretical and a methodological level.

In the second half of the 1990s, the *Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) added to the IEA studies with new assessments both in the field of school education (i.e., PISA, *Programme for International Student Assessment*), as well as in adult education, from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and SIALS up to the most recent PIAAC (*Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies*) study.

This paper presents the contribution of these surveys to the investigation of education systems and educational research, identifies the common characteristics and differences in regard to aims, theoretical and methodological frameworks, and research design and procedures. This paper will also discuss some strengths and limitations of these surveys, which were highlighted in the debates that arose with their development.

Starting with this preliminary discussion, we will provide an in-depth analysis of international large-scale assessments on civic and citizenship education conducted by

the IEA, from the *First Civic Education Study* (1970-1971) to ICCS 2016 (*International Civic and Citizenship Education Study*), whose results were released in November 2017.

The aim of this paper is to identify and analyse, in a historical context, the contribution of these surveys to the development of civic and citizenship education of young people, which is considered one of the most important areas of school education and one of the fundamental aims of education systems.

2. *The aims of international comparative assessments and the use of their results*

A recent report on large-scale assessments in the field of education by Singer, Braun and Chudowsky (2018) has identified the following general purposes of international comparative assessments:

- to describe and compare student achievement across countries, as well as the contextual factors associated to this achievement;
- to identify the changes in student academic performance, and their contextual factors, over time;
- to support the processes of educational reforms;
- to create international benchmarks for evaluating education systems;
- to evaluate the effectiveness of curricula, instructional strategies, and educational policies;
- to explore the relationships between student achievement and contextual factors (e.g. demographic, social, economic, and educational variables).

Furthermore, there are two additional aspects, which can be considered both an aim and an effect, of these studies (Wagemaker 2014):

- the development and improvement of assessment and monitoring systems at the level of individual countries²;
- the creation and development of an international research community.

Considering the abovementioned purposes, it is understandable that international comparative studies are usually primarily addressed to policymakers, to organizations active in school contexts in various ways, and to education researchers. The underlying idea, which has accompanied the development of such assessments, is that international comparison offers useful information and data to education policy makers in order to improve education systems. Although international comparisons have too often been represented, and continue to be represented in the media according to often improper rankings, they are essentially seen as a tool to help identify the best

² From this point of view, the Italian case can be considered somewhat exemplary. Beyond the decision to conduct surveys on populations and not on samples, the assessments conducted by INVALSI are largely influenced from the point of view of the structure, and the methodological and analytical approach from international surveys, repeatedly indicated by the Institute as a reference model for national surveys.

solutions to improve students' achievement.

To date, the impact of international comparative surveys has been identified in different fields in the countries that have participated and participate in the assessments. In particular, Hans Wagemaker, who had long been the IEA executive director, found three main areas in which such influence can be observed. These areas are: education policies and processes of educational reform; curricula, as a consequence of the results of PISA, TIMSS (*Trends in Mathematics and Science Study*), and PIRLS (*Progress in Reading Literacy Study*); teaching strategies and teacher training systems (Wagemaker 2011, 2014). Moreover, Heyneman and Lee (2014) emphasized the impact of these assessments on knowledge related to the specific curricular areas under assessment (i.e., reading, mathematics, science, civic and citizenship education, and use of ICT in teaching), and on the further development of scientific and methodological expertise of researchers working in educational research.

The breadth and depth of changes influenced by international assessments varies widely from country to country, depending on various factors such as the characteristics and socio-economic development of countries, the characteristics and development of education systems, and the relationship between policies and educational research (Heyneman and Lee 2014; Tobin, Nugroho, and Lietz 2016)³.

3. *IEA, OECD and international comparative assessments. A historical-critical overview*

IEA is an independent, international non-profit organization with the institutional purpose of conducting large-scale comparative assessments on students' performance and education policies. The organization currently has over sixty institutional members, namely research institutes, universities, and education ministries, of different geographical areas, such as Asia, Africa, America (North and South), Australia, Europe and the Middle East. The IEA comparative studies involve more than one hundred education systems.

IEA was officially founded in 1967. However, its origins date back to the late 1950s when a group of scholars, comprised of educational psychologists, educational researchers, sociologists, and psychometricians, interested in educational problems met in Hamburg at the Institute for Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)⁴. The purpose of the meeting was to reflect on issues related to the evaluation of school effectiveness and student learning. A conviction, shared by all the participants, was that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a school system, it was essential to bear in mind, first and foremost, the *results*

³ For the impact of international comparative assessments in Italy, see Damiani 2016.

⁴ Among the numerous researchers who have contributed to the creation and development of the IEA it is worth mentioning here, at least, Arnold Andersen, Benjamin Samuel Bloom, Gilbert Léopold de Landsheere, Torsten Husen, Gaston Mialaret, Thomas Neville Postlethwaite, Aldo Visalberghi. On the history of the IEA see, among other publications: Purves 1991; Husén and Postlethwaite 1996; IEA 1998.

(i.e. “student performance”) and not only the so-called “input variables” and the conditions under which school education takes place.

This is one of the key moments in the twentieth-century development of research in the field of education and comparative studies in education (see Todeschini and Ziglio 1992). It was a change occurring, significantly, just when mass education, and the urgency to analyse its consequences, was growing⁵. It should, however, be specified that as far as IEA is concerned, the aforementioned “exploratory” aim (the analysis of the problems posed by the phenomenon of mass education) was not an end in itself, but was characterized by an important and significant intent of an explicit, democratic motivation: the need to identify how to improve the quality of education offered to the “masses” that gradually gained access to education and, looking further ahead, to ensure a progressive reduction of the impact of socio-economic backgrounds on the performance of new and increasingly greater number of students.

The dual exploratory and political-innovative intent which characterised the first phase of international comparative assessments was illustrated by Aldo Visalberghi during an international symposium on “IEA research results, Mastery Learning and the implications for and educational policy and practice”, held in Frascati at the European Centre for Education (CEDE)⁶ from the 28th to the 30th of March in 1977. In one of his speeches at the Symposium, Visalberghi indeed stated:

On the one hand, we have to review the situation and analyse all the [...] characteristics, the results of the assessment, so rich in data (we found, at various levels, between six hundred and two hundred and fifty variables that can be reported for each student); on the other hand, the problem we have to face is trying to transform school practice in such a way as to adapt it to the needs of mass education, which is a reality of all developed or developing countries⁷ (Visalberghi 1977, 370-371).

For a better historical overview of the IEA’s activities in the 1950s and 1960s, it is worth remembering that during this period the process of opening pedagogy, and research in education, to other social sciences was reinforced and that the «post-war period, since the sixties, represents the most mature phase of development» of comparative education; a «phase characterized by a search for an epistemological and methodological definition», which also developed thanks to the connection with several international organizations (Zago and Callegari 2016, 25)⁸.

Furthermore, as regards the contextualization of the “democratic” approach of the activity carried out by the IEA between the 1950s and 1960s, it is important to

⁵ It is worth mentioning, in this regard and as regards Italy, that the first years of life and activity of the IEA coincide, in large part, with the process and the debate that will lead to the establishment of the unified lower secondary school (Law of December 31, 1962, No. 1859).

⁶ The European Center of Education, established by Presidential Decree no. 419, of 31.05.1974, promoted several researches and assessments in collaboration with national and international organizations. Under the direction of Aldo Visalberghi, at the beginning of the seventies, Cede coordinated the Italian participation in the assessments promoted by the IEA, as associated center for Italy.

⁷ Translation of the author.

⁸ Among the researchers who gave a fundamental contribution to this process – in the direction of enhancing the scientific nature of the discipline – George Bereday and Franz Hilker should be mentioned.

note that in the same period there are important changes also in regard to the Euro-American educational historiography; changes that are closely related to the political, economic, and social transformations at an international level (*primarily*, the contrast between the United States of America and the Soviet Union). In fact, the “technological race” between the USA and the USSR lead western researchers of educational problems and historians (*tout court* and educational) to investigate the connections between education and social transformations, with particular attention to the link between diffusion / quality of education and economic development, thus initiating a critical reflection on the effectiveness of education systems, also in terms of teaching content and methods (see Napoli 2011)⁹.

A testament to the “pioneering” phase represented by the IEA’s activity for large-scale comparative studies, at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, is identifiable in the nature and purpose of the first survey conducted by the organization, the *Pilot Twelve-Country Study*, which had precisely the aim of verifying the possibility of conducting international comparative studies on student achievement. Indeed, the most relevant result of this survey was the demonstration of the possibility to conduct analyses based on large-scale assessments and in different countries (Foshay 1962)¹⁰. The *Pilot Twelve-Country Study* was implemented between 1959 and 1962 with samples of thirteen-year-old students from twelve countries¹¹. The assessment covered the following five areas: mathematics, reading comprehension, geography, science, and non-verbal skills¹².

Beginning with the initial research mentioned above, the IEA has conducted more than 30 international comparative studies, during the sixty years since its founding¹³. The studies conducted by the IEA, and, starting from the 1990s, those conducted by OECD, in the field of adult education¹⁴, represent a great wealth of valuable data. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, these data have been used and are currently being used: 1) by political decision makers, to make informed choices about school policies, starting from a comparison with what occurs in other participating coun-

⁹ As regards the Italian context, see the following works: Cipolla 1960; Vigo 1971; Lacaita 1973.

¹⁰ For the results of the *Pilot Twelve-Country Study* see Foshay *et al.* 1962; Purves 1991.

¹¹ Belgium, England, Finland, France, Germany (FRG), Israel, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, and Yugoslavia.

¹² All publications related to the studies carried out by the IEA are listed and can be found on the organization’s website (<https://www.iea.nl>). As for the older studies, a brief summary of the results is available on the website. For the *Pilot Twelve-Country Study* see <https://www.iea.nl/pilot-twelve-country-study> (last consultation in May 2018).

¹³ Among the main studies: *First International Mathematics Study* (FIMS); *Six Subject Survey*; *First International Science Study* (FISS); *Second International Mathematics Study* (SIMS); *Second International Science Study* (SISS); *Written Composition Study*; *Reading Literacy Study*; *Computer in Education Study* (COMPED); *Second Information Technology in Education Study* (SITES); *Second Civic Education Study* (CIVED); *Trends in Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS); *Progress in Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS); *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (ICCS); *Early Childhood Education Study* (ECES); *International Computer and Information Literacy Study* (ICILS). The assessments concerning reading, mathematics, sciences, technologies of education, and civics and citizenship have been repeated over time and are at present of a cyclical nature.

¹⁴ *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS); *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills* (ALL); *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA); *Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC).

tries¹⁵; 2) by education researchers, despite the criticisms that have been sometimes expressed on international comparative assessments. Over the years, especially in the last two decades, there have been several, sometimes even very harsh, criticisms concerning: the presumed “ideological nature” of international comparative assessments; their purpose and their political, cultural, and economic function; their validity, linked to the differences between the participating countries and the complexity of the survey designs; their usefulness for evaluating the quality of teachers and schools; the reliability of the tools used (especially in regard to translation / linguistic adaptation issues). These criticisms prompted a deeper analysis into some of the methodological and technical aspects of the assessments, in particular regarding the comparability of the data, the invariance of the measures and the differences not only between countries, but also within countries¹⁶.

As regards the studies conducted by the IEA and the OECD, it is important to note some similarities and some differences, the latter mainly related to the nature and purpose of these two organizations. While the IEA is an independent body, the OECD is an intergovernmental organization comprised by the most economically developed countries in the world. Furthermore, the objectives of the OECD are primarily economic in nature. That is to say, the OECD is concerned with the promotion of policies aimed at: 1) achieving higher levels of economic growth and employment in member countries by favouring investments and competitiveness and maintaining financial stability; 2) the development of non-member countries; 3) expanding world trade on a non-discriminatory basis in line with international obligations¹⁷. In this regard, the interest of the OECD in the problems of education derives from the belief that the level of education and competence of the population is a key element in economic development¹⁸.

It is within the above framework that PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) exists. PISA was promoted by the OECD with the clear aims to collect data which would allow the construction of output indicators to be related to the other indicators on the quality of education systems (mainly input) developed by the organization¹⁹. This not only explains the triennial cyclical trend since the first survey in 2000, but, to some extent, also why the results of PISA have had a wider international political appeal, which is often greater than that of the assessments conducted by the IEA.

¹⁵ Regardless of whether this is actually done or not, as is the case in Italy, or whether the decisions made actually consider the results of the assessments.

¹⁶ For some reflections on these aspects, see Singer, Braun, and Chudowsky 2018; Losito 2010.

¹⁷ Established with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development convention, signed in Paris on 14 December 1960, the OECD has replaced the *Organization for European Economic Cooperation* (OEEC) born from the need to create forms of cooperation and coordination in the economic field between the European nations in the period immediately following the Second World War (*primarily*, the management of the so-called “Marshall Plan” for post-war reconstruction of the European economy).

¹⁸ The CERI (Center for Educational Research and Innovation) is active within the OECD, specifically focused on education.

¹⁹ The INES project (Indicators of Education Systems) is dedicated to the creation of these indicators, giving rise to the annual publication of *Education at a Glance*.

This characteristic also explains one of the fundamental differences between the assessments promoted by the IEA and PISA. The IEA studies have historically identified the so-called “opportunities to learn” (OTL) as an aim of assessment. Therefore, only those aspects of the curricula that students, at least the majority of students, had the opportunity to learn throughout the course of their studies are a part of the assessments. The idea of OTL is based on the distinction between intended curriculum (the curricula officially adopted in various countries) and implemented curriculum (the curriculum actually developed at school and class level). Thus, the IEA studies are strongly linked to the existing curricula in the participating countries.

Conversely, PISA focuses on the set of knowledge, skills, and competences that students should possess by the end of their compulsory education, in relation to either the pursuit of higher education or on entry into the labour market²⁰. In other words, PISA aims to detect and measure the extent to which students are able to use, on a real-world basis, the knowledge and skills gained alongside the areas under assessment²¹.

This diverse approach is the basis of the underlying differences between the instruments used in PISA and in the IEA studies, both in regard to the structure of the cognitive test and in regard to the contextual questionnaires (see Losito 2010).

Another difference that is important to note is the target populations. PISA measures the performances of 15-year-old students; in contrast, the IEA target populations are based on school grades, generally testing students of grades four and eight²². From the different definition of target population derives the diverse sampling design adopted by PISA compared to that of the IEA. While in the IEA a “whole class” is selected within each sampled school, in PISA a cluster of fifteen-year-old students are selected within the sampled schools, regardless of the grade level of the student selected²³.

Another characteristic that the IEA and OECD assessments share is related to the frequency of assessment. In both cases, the assessments are repeated over time. However, while PISA occurs every three years, and has done so since its beginning, IEA studies have only progressively assumed this recurrent trend, in relation to the need to compare the outcomes of the assessments over time. The frequency varies from study to study, either occurring every four years or every five years²⁴.

As regards Italy, the participation in international comparative surveys is ensured by the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI), which has obtained the legacy of the European Education Centre (CEDE), the centre associated with the IEA for Italy from the outset²⁵.

²⁰ The term used in PISA to indicate this set of knowledge, skills and competences is *literacy*.

²¹ The main areas investigated in PISA are reading, mathematics and science. Over the years, problem solving, financial literacy and - starting in 2015 - global competence were added to the survey.

²² The 1999 CIVED study, where the population was defined by age (14-year-old students) is an exception. Therefore, each participating country was asked to identify the modal class for this age.

²³ The methodological approach for sampling schools is the same in PISA and in IEA assessments.

²⁴ On the implications of these temporal choices see Losito 2011.

²⁵ For a summary reconstruction and analysis of the Italian participation in international comparative assess-

4. *IEA surveys on civic and citizenship education: from the Study of Civic Education to the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS)*

Civic and citizenship education represented an area of studies of particular importance for the IEA since the *Six Subject Survey* in 1972.

The first IEA study on Civic Education (*Study of Civic Education*) was conducted within this survey and aimed at analysing whether, and to what extent, the aims of civic education were being fulfilled within the education systems and to identify the most important factors in addition to school (e.g., family, mass media, friends) that could influence the achievement of these goals.

The interest of the Association for civic education was based on the premise that, in order to prepare future citizens, it was not enough to know how to read and write, to know science, and to be able to perform mathematical operations²⁶. It was also necessary for students to learn how to understand social realities, and to have those attitudes towards political and social institutions that are the basis of civil coexistence, guaranteeing the proper functioning of society. From this point of view, the development of the political attitudes of the young generations, generally ascribed primarily to the socio-economic background of the family of origin, was also ascribed to the influence of the school in developing political knowledge and behaviours.

The theoretical assumptions underlying the study thus followed these guidelines: on the one hand, the literature on political socialization, on political learning, and on the acquisition of political attitudes by children and adolescents was analysed; on the other, reference was also made to social and developmental psychology studies and to the research on the role of the school in the process of socialization (Hess and Torney 1967; Almond and Verba 1963). The result was a definition of civic education that went beyond the traditional historical and philosophical dimension but was also linked to contemporaneity.

The research activity of the first *Study of Civic Education* began in 1967, aiming at gathering information and data on the characteristics of civic education in ten participating countries (Finland, Federal Republic of Germany, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and United States of America).

The national reports resulting from this preliminary theoretical and curricular review highlighted for the first time some conceptual aspects that still characterizes the study of civic and citizenship education. Firstly, the awareness that civic education could not be limited to the knowledge of facts and events, but should also concern the teaching of democratic attitudes (such as tolerance, support of institutions and democratic values, observance of the law, loyalty to one's own country, etc.). For this

ments concerning civic and citizenship education – also in terms of analysis of the results – it may be useful to see, in addition to the following paragraphs: Torney-Purta 2009; INVALSI 2011; Agrusti 2014.

²⁶ The first areas of assessment of international comparative studies carried out by the Association (since the 1960s) included also mathematics, science, literature, reading comprehension, English as a foreign language, and French as a foreign language. All the above areas (with the exception of mathematics) were included in the *Six Subject Survey*.

reason, the civic attitudes of the students became, together with the knowledge of topics related to the sphere of civic education, the object of measurement of the survey and were considered, like knowledge, a result of the teaching-learning processes at school.

The twofold object of measurement adopted in the first *Study of Civic Education* was included in all subsequent IEA surveys on civic and citizenship education and represents a distinctive element of this area of assessment compared to other studies conducted by the Association (in which students' attitudes are usually investigated to gather contextual information to interpret the results of the cognitive test).

Secondly, the information collected from the preliminary research activity showed a general heterogeneity in the denominations that civic education had in the various countries, a high degree of variation of the curricula within the educational systems (in terms of the topics included in the curriculum and learning objectives) and of the number of hours ascribed to this area by individual schools.

On the basis of this findings and on the analysis of the literature, the theoretical framework of the first *Study of Civic Education* was divided into three macro-areas:

- a Cognitive area (concerning for example the understanding of concepts related to citizenship such as patriotism, authority, historical developments of the country, political processes and institutions, etc.);
- an affective area (for example, understanding rights and duties, respect for diversity, interest in civic matters at a national and an international level, etc.);
- a behavioural area (for example, participation in public life, possibility of exercising the right to vote, critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills).

Four data collection tools were used in the survey:

- a cognitive test aimed at assessing students' knowledge in relation to the six areas identified within the framework: (1) fundamental concepts and nature of citizenship; (2) political processes at a national level; (3) political institutions at a national level; (4) political processes and institutions - international topics; (5) economic processes and institutions; (6) social processes and institutions;
- a student questionnaire on attitudes and behaviours (that included questions related to the *Democratic Values* and *Citizenship* areas and to the students' socio-economic background);
- a teacher questionnaire (including questions on teacher training, teaching and assessment methods and other more specific questions on civic education);
- a school questionnaire (with questions about the choice of textbooks, school rules, etc.).

These tools have been used in all the subsequent studies conducted by the Association on civic education, albeit with obvious due differences as to the measured variables.

The main study of the first *Study of Civic Education* was implemented in 1971, and involved more than 30,000 students of three age levels (10 years, 14 years and pre-

university students²⁷), as a representative sample of the different target populations²⁸.

The 1974 report analysed in a comparative perspective the results of the cognitive test and the attitudes of the students participating in the survey, and highlighted the implications for schools and policy-makers in relation to the teaching and learning of civic education (Peaker 1975; Torney *et al.* 1975; Walker 1976).

Twenty years after the publication of the first *Study of Civic Education* report, the IEA General Assembly decided to conduct a new study on civic education.

The second IEA study on Civic Education (known as CIVED) was designed in 1994, following major international changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The assessment had a twofold purpose: on one hand, to investigate the changes in the different educational systems due to the transition to democratic forms of government in post-communist countries; on the other hand, to analyse the critical issues that traditional democracies were facing in relation to the low interest adolescents had in active participation in society and to their insufficient levels of knowledge of the basic concepts of democracy and political structures.

The second IEA study on civic education also responded to the need to reinterpret the concept of citizenship in the light of the new phenomena characterizing societies at the end of the twentieth century: the emergence of mass global movements, the growing importance of associations for the promotion of human rights and environmental protection among adolescents compared to traditional forms of political participation (such as political parties), the greater autonomy young generations had in making individual choices and acting independently and actively within society.

Twenty-eight countries participated in the survey²⁹, including eleven post-communist countries, for a total surveyed population of approximately 90,000 fourteen year-old students³⁰.

The study was divided into two phases (1995-1996 and 1997-2000). Phase 1 was focused on the collection of information on the contexts, contents and processes of civic education in the participating countries. The 24 case studies prepared by the National Research Coordinators were presented in the volume *Civic education across countries: twenty-four national case studies from the IEA Civic Education Project* (Torney-Purta, Schulle, and Amadeo 1999) and formed the basis for the preparation of Phase 2, that was instead focused on the drafting of the assessment tools and their administration (which took place in 1999) (Torney-Purta *et al.* 2001; Amadeo *et al.* 2002).

The theoretical framework underlying the survey, graphically represented as an “Octagon”, assumed that the learning of citizenship is developed through “nested” contexts (family, school, peer group, neighbours and broader society) promoting the

²⁷ The age of the students of the target population varied within each individual country and across countries.

²⁸ The involvement of the three different target populations varied from country to country. The age group selected by most of the participating countries (nine out of ten, with the exception of Sweden) is that of fourteen year olds students.

²⁹ Australia, Belgium (French), Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United States.

³⁰ The reference population included the modal class of students aged 14 at the time of the survey.

growth of students' thinking and actions to navigate political and social environments. Citizenship is thus understood in terms of engagement in the community and of the development of an identity in relation to a group. In the so-called «communities of discourse and practice» (Torney-Purta *et al.* 2001, 20), adolescents have the opportunity to develop more complex ways of thinking and new behaviours.

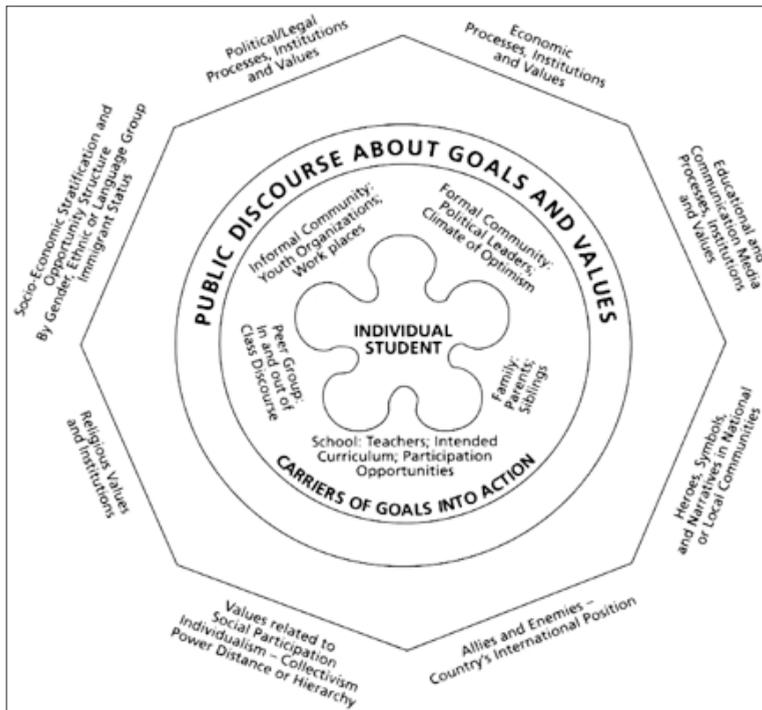


Figure 1. Model for IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED). Source: Schulz *et al.* 2008.

The CIVED model has been influenced by the theories on ecological development (Bronfenbrenner 1988), situate cognition (Lave and Wenger 1991) and political socialization (Niemi and Hepburn 1995; Flanagan and Sherrod 1998). According to these models, young people move within overlapping communities, at a school and a neighbourhood level up to a national one. The learning of citizenship is thus understood not only in terms of the transmission of knowledge by teachers, but also of the involvement of the political community, that is able to permeate the very idea of citizenship and to provide the contexts required for developing political awareness (Wenger 1998; Torney-Purta *et al.* 2001).

On the basis of the conceptual theoretical framework outlined above, CIVED was focused on school-based learning and on opportunities for civic participation outside the school, and included three study-domains: (1) democracy and citizenship; (2) national identity; (3) social cohesion and diversity. Five different types of items were

used in CIVED in order to assess not only the knowledge, but also the attitudes and participation of students. More in detail, they were related to: (1) knowledge of content; (2) skills in interpretation; (3) concepts (such as democracy); (4) attitudes and (5) participatory actions (Schulz and Sibberns 2004).

Nearly a decade after the CIVED main study, IEA decided to conduct a third study on citizenship education, the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (ICCS 2009). This survey shared the same purpose of the two previous studies: to analyse the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their role as citizens in a historical period characterized by considerable changes in the civic sphere, especially in terms of *governance* and international relations (globalization, the massive immigration phenomenon, terrorism, economic inequalities, the crisis of national identities, but also the growing importance of new forms of social participation).

One of the new elements of the theoretical framework of ICCS is the adoption of the term *civic and citizenship education* for the area under assessment. This new name underlined the extension of the concept, processes and practices related to the area of civic education building upon the CIVED survey. Indeed, whereas civic education focused on the knowledge of formal institutions and civic life (such as voting in elections), citizenship education focused on knowledge and opportunities for participation and engagement in civic and civil society. It thus referred to the «wider range of ways that citizens use to interact with and shape their communities (including schools) and societies» (Schulz *et al.* 2010, 22).

The number of participating countries showed a considerable increase compared to CIVED: 38 countries³¹ for a total of 140,000 students (eight grade students) under assessment.

The theoretical conceptual framework of ICCS is structured upon three broad dimensions:

- (1) content domain, focused on civic and citizenship education subject matters to be assessed. ICCS 2009 encompassed four content domains: (1) civic society and systems, (2) civic principles, (3) civic participation, (4) civic identities;
- (2) affective-behavioural dimension, related to students perceptions and activities. Four content domains were included: (1) value beliefs, (2) attitudes, (3) behavioural intentions, (4) behaviours.
- (3) cognitive dimension, describing the thinking processes to be evaluated, namely knowing, reasoning and analysing. (Schulz *et al.* 2008; Schulz *et al.* 2010).

The ICCS survey showed, on one hand, a certain level of continuity with the second IEA study on civic education, both in terms of the theoretical framework of reference

³¹ Austria, Belgium (Flemish), Bulgaria, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, England, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong SAR, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand.

(“the Octagon”) and variables taken from the 1999 study, albeit with some changes³².

On the other hand, it was deeply different from CIVED in the design and tools of research. First, the assessment framework had broader contents and was more focused on themes concerning motivation and forms of participation of young adults. Secondly, the research instruments enabled the collection of data on a wider spectrum of contents (by adopting a balanced rotated design of seven booklets for the cognitive test) and the collection of data from a larger and more representative sample of teachers in each school (while the teacher questionnaire was administered only to two or three teachers per school in CIVED³³, in ICCS 2009 it was administered to teachers teaching all subjects at target grade – grade eight – that means about 15 for each sampled school).

In addition to this, ICCS 2009 included a few additional tools compared to CIVED: the *National Context Survey*, a questionnaire to collect information on civic and citizenship education at a country level that was to be drafted by the National Research Centres and three regional modules; the “European Module”, the “Asian Module” and the “Latin America Module”, conceived respectively for the European, Asian and Latin American countries participating in the study and devoted to the themes of civic and citizenship education of greatest interest in the specific context of these three continents (Fraillon *et al.* 2012; Schulz *et al.* 2011; Kerr *et al.* 2010).

Finally, in ICCS 2009, also an *Encyclopedia* collecting information on national contexts, curricula and policies on civic and citizenship education in the participating countries was drafted.

A few years later, in relation to the new scenarios characterizing societies in the second decade of the 21st century, the IEA conducted a second cycle of the *International Civic and Citizenship Study*, ICCS 2016. These scenarios involved, on one hand, the continuous transformation of the notions of democracy and civic participation, while on the other they revolved around the impact of new phenomena (such as, for example, the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the impact of human activities on the environment, the effects of globalization on the redefinition of traditional concepts of citizenship and identity, the increase in bullying in schools, the rapid development of ICT technologies) in the field of civic and citizenship education.

ICCS 2016 envisaged a direct link with the previous cycle – in order to measure changes over time in relation to the same variables included in both surveys – and included three new areas of assessment: environmental sustainability in civic and citizenship education, social interaction at school (i.e. bullying) and the use of new social media for civic engagement.

The content domains included in the assessment framework did not differ from those included in ICCS 2009. The greater differences were visible in the affective-behavioural domains (which had gone from four to two, namely *Attitudes* and *En-*

³² In ICCS 2009 there were several CIVED trend items in both the cognitive test and the student questionnaire.

³³ In CIVED, national coordinators were asked to identify the teachers who, in the various school systems, were responsible for teaching the contents included in the cognitive test. The questionnaire was administered in each country up to a maximum of 3 teachers.

gement) and in the naming of the second cognitive domain (*Reasoning and applying* in ICCS 2016) (Schulz *et al.* 2016).

The second cycle of ICCS involved 94,000 students in the eighth year of schooling (about 14 years of age) in 24 countries around the world³⁴.

Given the low participation of Asian countries in the study, the survey included only two regional questionnaires³⁵, the European student questionnaire and the Latin American one (Losito *et al.* 2018; Schulz *et al.* 2018).

Confirming the importance of the studies on civic and citizenship education in the member countries of the Association, the IEA has decided to turn ICCS into a survey that is cyclically repeated over the years, as it happens for other surveys conducted by the Association, such as TIMSS and PIRLS. The next cycle is scheduled for 2022, introducing new areas of assessment (in particular, global citizenship and sustainable development).

5. Concluding remarks

Thanks to its methodological conceptual framework, ICCS enabled the collection of data comparable over time not only of a cognitive nature and related to the different contexts in which students study and live (family, school, class), but also on some of their attitudes and behaviours related to the idea of civic and citizenship education underlying the study. From this standpoint, ICCS is a rather peculiar example in the framework of international comparative surveys, in which the affective-motivational and behavioural dimensions are mainly investigated according to the interpretation of the results of the students in cognitive tests.

A further peculiarity of ICCS is the attempt to support the core study with questions that are more directly related to specific regional contexts (the regional ‘modules’), indicating a possible solution – albeit partial – to one of the limits often considered as typical of large-scale comparative assessments, i.e. overly relying on aspects comparable across countries, thus losing sight of the specificities of individual countries and failing to take sufficient account of the cultural differences characterizing them (Theisen *et al.* 1983).

At the same time, it is important to highlight that the number of countries participating in surveys on civic and citizenship education is relatively lower than that recorded for other international comparative assessments. There are two main reasons for this lower participation. On one hand, the different importance of civic and citizenship education in school curricula compared to reading, maths and sciences and the different approaches adopted for its delivering, which makes comparisons more complex. On the other hand, the fact that citizenship education inevitably deals

³⁴ Belgium (Flemish), Bulgaria, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, Italy, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia, Norway, Peru, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sweden.

³⁵ Unlike in 2009, the regional modules of ICCS 2016 did not include a cognitive test.

with more ‘sensitive’ issues and problems compared to other curricular areas (e.g. the issues related to migration and cultural diversity, especially for Europe). These topics make citizenship education more easily influenced by changes in the cultural and political set-up of the participating countries, which – in turn – can influence the decision of countries to participate in surveys focusing on students’ readiness to play their role as citizens.

Paradoxically, however, it is precisely this feature of civic and citizenship education that makes comparisons even more useful and interesting, if not necessary, in an international context in which differences seem to increase, also with reference to fundamental values that our societies have taken for granted for decades. The in-depth investigation on how schools can help to educate citizens to exercise their rights and duties in the context of a democratic society is increasingly necessary.

From this standpoint, despite all the limitations that are often attributed to them, large-scale comparative assessments, not only those focusing on citizenship education, «are here to stay. Indeed, not only are they here to stay, they are likely to become even more salient to educational policy discussions as the world becomes increasingly globalized» (Singer, Braun, and Chudowsky 2018, 77).

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