



LIBERAL AND COMMUNITARIAN MODELS OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

In the face of evolving geopolitical tensions, digital transformations, and the emergence of new civic challenges – such as Russia's military aggression and the arrival of refugee communities – civic education in Lithuania has become a matter of renewed urgency. While traditionally centered on transmitting political knowledge, civic education increasingly plays a critical role in shaping civic virtues, values, and participatory attitudes. This research is dedicated to a question: how different models of civic education – liberal and communitarian – have influenced Lithuania's civic landscape since independence, and how these frameworks respond to current societal needs?

The study employs a comparative historical analysis of Lithuanian educational policies, civic participation trends, and socio-political contexts, tracing civic education's evolution from the communitarian mobilization of the Sąjūdis era to a liberal emphasis on individual autonomy and legal-rational governance. Data is drawn from policy documents, curriculum reforms, and secondary analyses of civic engagement indicators in Lithuania from 1990 to the present.

Findings reveal that while liberal models have institutionalized civic norms through rights-based education, they often fall short in fostering emotional engagement and community belonging. Conversely, communitarian models encourage solidarity and active citizenship but risk marginalizing individual freedoms. An integrative approach is proposed, combining liberal and communitarian elements to develop a civic education model aligned with Lithuania's present context, aimed at enhancing democratic resilience, social cohesion, and a participatory civic culture.

Keywords: civic education, communitarian model, individual autonomy, liberal model, Lithuania, social cohesion

Introduction

Recent geopolitical disruptions - including Russia's military aggression, the emergence of new refugee communities in Lithuania, and the rapid expansion of digital technologies and artificial intelligence - have renewed the urgency of civic education. These challenges have altered traditional forms of social solidarity, stretched institutional capacity, and exposed the limited civic agency of individuals and communities (Degutis et al., 2021; Democracy Index, 2020, 2023). As democratic societies confront complex uncertainties, a recalibration of citizenship and civic competence is needed - one that goes beyond technical skills to encompass moral judgment and emotional intelligence.

From the perspective of political sociology, civic education is more than the transmission of knowledge about democratic institutions. It involves the cultivation of civic virtues, values, and attitudes that guide social participation (Tocqueville, 1996; Walzer, 1989). Civic education, therefore, is not confined to the classroom or a subject area but functions as a foundational principle that permeates the entire educational process. As Stevenson (2001) has argued, civic

education serves to transmit a society's shared cultural and political identity. A key concern, then, is whether civic education can reinforce civic continuity or promote democratic transformation (Janoski et al., 2005; Czyzewski, 2020).

This study examines the interaction of education with political, social, and cultural processes in Lithuania, with particular attention to how civic education has evolved since the country's independence. The analysis explores how educational frameworks shape both individual and collective identities by embedding shared values, social norms, and symbolic practices. In doing so, it reflects on the historical transition from a communitarian model of citizenship, dominant during the National Revival period (Furmonavičius, 2009), to a predominantly liberal framework emphasizing autonomy, rights, and procedural participation.

Civic education has been a topic of academic interest since Lithuania's independence, with researchers examining its shifting goals and pedagogical strategies in response to evolving political conditions (e.g., Balčiūnienė, 2007; Degėsys, Bakanas, & Simutytė, 2021; Lukšienė, 1992; Markelienė, 2005; Miseliūnaitė & Vaidelytė, 2018; Zaleskienė, 1998; 2003; 2004; Žiliukaitė et al., 2012). In addition, applied initiatives - such as the „Kuriame respubliką“ [Making of the Republic] project and the „Moksleivių akademija“ [Academy of Students] - have helped to shape civic competencies and participatory capacities in practice.

This paper contributes to that ongoing discussion by analyzing the ideological foundations and practical outcomes of civic education models in Lithuania and by proposing directions for future civic renewal grounded in both liberal and communitarian traditions. The central issue addressed in this research is not the acquisition of civic knowledge or the development of technical democratic skills, but the capacity of civic education to foster empathy, ethical leadership, and civic resilience. To that end, the research evaluates and compares liberal and communitarian models of civic education and assesses their practical implications for strengthening democratic culture in contemporary Lithuania. First, it provides a critical theoretical synthesis of liberal and communitarian models of civic education, contextualized within the Lithuanian post-independence experience. Second, it empirically maps the trajectory of civic education discourse and practice in Lithuania. Third, by employing a sociological lens, the research demonstrates the mismatch between formal civic education frameworks and the actual civic needs of Lithuanian society, particularly in light of new digital, generational, and geopolitical challenges. Most importantly, it proposes an integrative model that blends liberal and communitarian elements, emphasizing both democratic resilience and emotional solidarity, as a conceptual alternative to reimagine civic education for a more participatory and cohesive democratic culture.

Research Methodology

Design

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design to examine the evolution of civic education in Lithuania through the lens of liberal and communitarian theoretical models. The research is theoretical and documentary in nature and does not involve empirical data collection. It draws on political sociology and education theory to explore how civic education has developed over time and how it reflects broader sociopolitical and cultural shifts in Lithuanian society.

The study follows a comparative historical approach, focusing on the changing conceptual and ideological underpinnings of civic education from the period of National Revival in the late 1980s to the present Lithuania. It is primarily exploratory and analytical, aiming to clarify conceptual tensions and trace the practical implications of different models of civic education.

Data Sources

The analysis was based on secondary sources and publicly available documents. The materials reviewed included:

- National education policy documents (e.g., General Programs for Civic Education).
- Strategic civic participation assessments (e.g., the Lithuanian Civic Empowerment Index and Democracy Index).
- Academic literature on civic education in Lithuania and internationally.
- Theoretical works on liberalism, communitarianism, and democratic education (e.g., Rawls, Berlin, MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor).
- Reports and narratives from civil society initiatives (e.g., “Kuriame Respubliką,” Civitas academies, and NGO project outputs).

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three overlapping stages:

Comparative Historical Analysis - educational policies and civic education frameworks were reviewed across several decades to identify shifts in ideological orientation and practical emphasis. Attention was paid to key turning points, including Lithuanian independence (1990), EU accession (2004), and the post-2022 geopolitical climate.

Thematic Content Analysis - key themes were identified and coded from documents and literature, including autonomy, responsibility, solidarity, civic virtue, and engagement. These were mapped against the core tenets of liberal and communitarian models, allowing for a conceptual comparison.

Sociopolitical Contextualization - the thematic findings were interpreted within the broader context of societal change in Lithuania, drawing on political developments, trust in institutions, patterns of civic engagement, and public discourse. This provided insight into how educational practices intersect with wider social dynamics.

Reliability and Rigor

To enhance credibility and coherence, the study triangulated insights across multiple data types: policy documents, theoretical frameworks, and participation data. Concepts were analyzed consistently across historical periods and educational levels, ensuring analytical depth and thematic saturation.

Ethical Considerations

As this study was based exclusively on publicly available sources and theoretical analysis, it did not involve human participants or sensitive data. Therefore, ethical review was not required.

Research Results

The Evolution of Citizenship in the Period of Independence

The evolution of civic education in Lithuania during its Independence (since 1990) has been characterized by a dynamic interplay between national identity formation, European integration, liberalization, and responses to global and regional challenges. This process has reflected broader social changes, from the rejection of Soviet authoritarianism to the adaptation to

a globalized and digital world, while continuously grappling with the need to balance individual freedoms with communal responsibilities. The early years of independence were marked by a strong emphasis on national revival and the re-establishment of Lithuanian identity, which had been suppressed during the Soviet era. Civic education during this period focused on fostering national consciousness, patriotism, and the values of independence, aiming to build a citizenry capable of sustaining the newly established democratic state (Lukšienė, 2000; Zaleskienė, 2004). Civic education also aimed to dismantle the remnants of Soviet authoritarianism by promoting democratic values, human rights, and civic participation, distancing the new democratic society from the authoritarian practices of the past (Cesiulis, 2006).

Later, Lithuania's integration into the European Union brought a shift in civic education towards the promotion of European values, such as pluralism, rule of law, and human rights (Spurga, 2008). Following EU accession, there was a gradual shift towards more liberal approaches to civic education, reflecting broader trends of liberalization in society (Šiliauskas, 2005). This period emphasized individual rights, personal autonomy, and the development of critical thinking skills, aligning with the values of a liberal democratic society. There was a growing need to address issues of economic inequality, social justice, and the integration of diverse social groups within the civic education framework (Šaulauskas, 2000).

Recent social trends, including political polarization and the erosion of social cohesion, have prompted a renewed emphasis on communitarian aspects of civic education (Švarplys, 2015). There is an increasing focus on fostering social responsibility, empathy, and community engagement to counteract the fragmentation of society. For example, in response to regional security concerns, particularly due to Russia's actions in Ukraine, civic education began to incorporate themes of national security, resilience, and the importance of civic duty in safeguarding democracy. On the other hand, the rise of digital technologies and the global shift towards the information society have led to the integration of digital literacy into civic education (Genys, 2023). This includes educating citizens on navigating digital spaces, combating misinformation, and engaging in digital forms of civic participation.

To this day, the current discourse in Lithuania experiences a tension between liberal and communitarian approaches to civic education. While there is still a dominant emphasis on individual rights and freedoms (Jokubaitis, 2017), there is a growing recognition of the need to cultivate a sense of community, shared values, and collective responsibility, especially in the face of global and regional challenges (Mikelić & Mažeikienė, 2019).

Table 1*Interrelation Between Key Transition Periods and Main Contemporary Challenges for Civic Education*

Relative geopolitical events	Restoration of independence 1988-1992	Transition / Integration into the European Union (2004)	1 st war in Ukraine 2014	Global pandemic / 2 nd war in Ukraine 2019-2022
Relative sociopolitical changes and public concern	Period of national revival, the struggle for independence. The transition from authoritarian system to democracy.	The period of integration with the West has been marked by a strengthening of democratic culture, with important reforms to adapt to the new principles of democratic governance.	Russia's aggression in Ukraine has raised the profile of regional security issues, which has led to a consolidation of authorities and public vigilance on security.	The pandemic changed political priorities and required rapid decision-making, increasing the power of the institutional network. The war in Ukraine mobilized the public for aid and prevention.
General public participation forms and attitude	Mass mobilization and participation, trust in society, and high hopes for the statehood	Decline in political participation but still high trust in political culture	Relatively low political participation, low trust in political institutions, but growing trust in governmental institutions, growing civic empowerment	Low political participation, low trust in political institutions, but strong governmental institutions and active civic activities, but shrinking civic empowerment
Civic empowerment index	ND	2007 m., 33,9. 2008 m., 33,2. 2009 m., 35.	2013 m., 36. 2014 m., 34 2015 m., 33,4.	2019 m., 39,7. 2020 m., 41,3. 2022 m., 35,9.
Relative contemporary challenges for citizenship/civic education				
Cultural identity, globalization, and economic inequality	Political polarization (disillusionment) and erosion of social cohesion	Moral and ethical education	Digitalization and changing educational priorities	
Globalization challenges to rediscover national and cultural identity, as international influences grow stronger. This is further complicated by economic inequality, which creates disparities in access to education. Students from less privileged backgrounds may find it harder to engage in civic life, leading to a fragmented sense of belonging and uneven participation across society.	Lithuania faces increasing political polarization and public disillusionment with political leaders, contributing to a decline in social cohesion. As trust in political institutions wanes, it becomes more difficult to build a unified society with shared values. This erosion of social bonds poses a significant challenge for civic education, which seeks to foster a sense of community and collective responsibility.	There is a pressing need to enhance civic education by focusing on moral and ethical reasoning. In a society where individualism often overshadows collective well-being, it is crucial to instill values such as empathy, integrity, and civic responsibility to prepare citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also morally engaged.	The rapid digitalization of society has transformed how citizens engage with information and each other. While digital tools offer new avenues for participation, they also introduce risks like misinformation and digital divides. At the same time, the increasing focus on STEM education and workforce readiness risks sidelining civic education.	

The educational theorists who have studied post-Soviet situations, e.g., Apple (2001), have warned about the risks of a rapidly installed liberal system. According to the researcher, in countries undergoing rapid change, there is a risk of neoliberal policies (based on market economy values) becoming entrenched not only in the economic sectors, but also in the cultural or educational sectors. In such cases, there is a legitimate concern that the entire education system may find it increasingly difficult to fulfil its public good function and may drift more and more towards favoritism and inequality between privileged groups.

The changing values, norms and attitudes of society are inevitably reflected in citizenship education. As societies have undergone changes in governance, ideology and cultural practices, civic education has played a crucial role in promoting democratic values, tolerance, pluralism, and respect for human rights. Civic education programs have begun to emphasize the importance of civic virtues and active citizenship as fundamental principles for building an inclusive and democratic society in Lithuania. Despite progress, Lithuania's transition to democracy has been accompanied by challenges and tensions in the areas of political culture and civic participation. Issues such as political polarization and disillusionment with political elites have tested the resilience of democratic values and institutions, resulting in periodic fluctuations in civic engagement and public trust. However, in retrospect, some researchers have made rather strong generalizations, stating that "signs of disillusionment with the democratic system have become increasingly evident in society (not only a prevailing dissatisfaction with the way the new political system works, but also a much more dangerous belief that is widespread in society, Authoritarian rule can reverse the ineffectiveness of the problems of the existing government" (Žiliukaitė et al 2016). Liberal democracy seems to have liberated the individual but reduced the importance of the community (Taylor, 1996; Howard, 2003), which has led to a more active but less influential civil society.

The classical axiom of democracy states that civic identity is acquired through shared values and ideals as well as moral commitments, i.e., through being co-creators of society (Dahrendorf, 1990; Putnam, 2001). The gaze of civic education should be fixed on the future, because the historical narrative is not finished. By focusing not only on rights but above all on responsibilities, the idea of the common good emerges, which is what drives moral commitment. Civic maturity depends on social relations, social habits, and traditions of action, which do not emerge spontaneously. Civic education plays a vital role in nurturing this civic consciousness by providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to participate in democratic processes, advocate for their rights, and contribute to positive social change. In this sense, the citizenship trajectories of Lithuania, as a post-Soviet and at the same time post-modern society, are very interesting: after escaping from the Soviet regime and finding ourselves in the post-modern era, we have adopted democratic procedures, but we haven't matured authentic civic skills (especially during the Soviet era) nor behavioral traditions. As already mentioned, the ideas of communitarianism, which guaranteed mass mobilization at the beginning of Independence, were quickly and effectively overshadowed by the principles of a liberal society. The circumstances of rapid change did not allow one to mature and experience the manifestation of communitarianism, but on the other hand, even the ideas of liberal democracy were more influenced by the laws of the market economy than by moral culture. Bearing in mind today's challenges to democracy, it is important to reflect on the confrontation between liberalism and communitarianism and highlight what each model can offer to the tradition of Lithuanian civic education and citizenship in general.

*The Relevance of Liberal and Communitarian Civic Education Models
Addressing Contemporary Challenges*

Civic education is of great importance from a political sociology point of view, as it plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' understanding of society, politics, and their roles as citizens (Janoski et al., 2005). Education is a key factor in socialization, exposing individuals to the norms, values, and practices of their society (Annette, 2000). Through formal education systems, individuals learn about the political structures, history, and civic duties that define their citizenship. Civic education contributes to the formation of political identity by shaping individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and values related to citizenship (Kymlicka, 1999). Civic education provides knowledge about political institutions such as government structures, legal systems and electoral processes, and the specific curriculum influences how individuals perceive their role in the political community. This understanding is essential for individuals to be able to participate actively in the political processes of their society in a concrete way.

The ongoing intellectual debate between liberalism and communitarianism has been a central theme in contemporary political philosophy (Dryzek et al., 2008) and sociology (Nash, 2010), as well as providing valuable insights for civic education theorists (Arthur & Bailey, 2000). It might as well serve as a productive stimulus in addressing specific challenges (like cultural identity, globalization and economic inequality, political polarization (disillusionment) and erosion of social cohesion, moral and ethical education, digitalization and changing educational priorities) that are undergoing contemporary Lithuania.

Cultural identity, globalization, and economic inequality. Globalization has spurred significant cultural exchanges while simultaneously intensifying concerns about the erosion of cultural identities and the exacerbation of economic inequality. From a political sociology point of view, small nations undergoing intense social change, communitarianism is considered as one of the most notable antidotes of this challenge. Taylor (1992) argued that respecting and nurturing cultural identities within educational frameworks is essential for fostering a sense of belonging in an increasingly globalized world. The researcher contends that the liberal focus on individual autonomy often neglects the cultural contexts that shape personal identities, leading to alienation and a weakened sense of community. MacIntyre similarly (1981), highlighted the importance of tradition and community practices, asserting that moral reasoning is inherently tied to the social contexts from which it emerges. For MacIntyre, civic education should not only emphasize cultural identity but also address economic inequality by fostering a shared sense of moral responsibility toward disadvantaged groups, ensuring a more equitable distribution of the benefits of globalization. Such argumentation is particularly relevant for Lithuania, where civic education could integrate a communitarian approach to promote a shared sense of moral responsibility and ensure that globalization benefits are more equitably distributed, particularly in rural areas or among minority groups. This could help civil society to become not only more vibrant but also powerful.

In contrast, liberal thinkers, particularly John Rawls and Milton Friedman, approach this challenge from the perspective of individual rights and opportunities. Rawls (1999) has advocated for civic education that equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and thrive in a globalized economy. The researcher has emphasized the need for educational policies that address economic inequalities through the principles of justice as fairness, ensuring that individuals can compete on a level playing field. Meanwhile, Friedman (2002) has stressed the importance of economic freedom, arguing that educational approaches should prioritize individual economic empowerment. According to Friedman, civic education should enable students to fully participate in the global market, thereby enhancing their personal freedoms and economic opportunities. It is noteworthy that the idea - fostering personal freedoms and economic opportunities – was at the center of not only economic policy, but also liberation

of society in general, almost since the beginning of Independence. It certainly rewarded us in multiple ways (i.e., personal freedom, market economy, rule of law etc.), however, in the last decade we witness a paradox, when using liberal argumentation (under the guise of a market economy and efficiency of the public interest), Lithuanian government has been pursuing centralism not only in many branches of state economy, but also education sector.

Political polarization (disillusionment) and erosion of social cohesion. The rise of political polarization and subsequent disillusionment with democratic institutions represent significant challenges to social cohesion. Communitarians like Michael Sandel and Michael Walzer argue that civic education must play a crucial role in fostering a strong sense of community and shared values. Sandel (2012) has criticized the liberal emphasis on individualism, suggesting that it undermines the communal ties necessary for a cohesive society. He has advocated for civic education that cultivates virtues binding individuals to their communities, promoting active participation in public life. Walzer (1983) has argued that justice is context-dependent and rooted in the values and practices of specific communities. The researcher has suggested that civic education should encourage dialogue and understanding among diverse groups, thereby addressing political polarization and strengthening social cohesion. Even though such an approach could be relevant for Lithuania, where the emphasis on community ties and active participation in public life could counteract the divisive effects of polarization, it is not popular. Context-dependent citizenship rooted in specific community values, strengthening social cohesion and mitigating polarization, is being perceived as an alternative citizenship, mainly as an effective counterpropaganda and counter manipulation tool (Mažeikis, 2010), however, it is not included in civic education programs as a reasonable and eligible approach.

Conversely, liberal thinkers emphasize the importance of protecting individual freedoms within a pluralistic society. For example, Isaiah Berlin (2002) warns against the dangers of enforcing a single communal vision, which could lead to the suppression of individual freedoms. He advocates for a civic education that promotes tolerance and respect for differing political views, thereby mitigating polarization through critical thinking and open dialogue. Rawls would support creating a civic culture that upholds fair and impartial institutions, fostering trust in democratic processes, and reducing disillusionment with the political system. The notion of promoting tolerance and respect for differing political views is essential in a society. The government especially promotes the idea of the importance of fair and impartial institutions, which could guide the development of a civic culture in Lithuania to uphold democratic processes, thereby reducing disillusionment with the political system¹. However, as empirical evidence shows, it does not always have a positive effect on the power of civil society (Degutis et al, 2021).

Moral and ethical education. Moral and ethical education lies at the heart of the communitarian approach (as well as its critique of liberalism). MacIntyre (1981) has argued that contemporary moral discourse has become fragmented due to the liberal focus on individual autonomy, which often neglects the shared ethical traditions that give meaning to moral concepts. He has advocated for a form of civic education that re-engages students with the moral narratives of their communities, helping them develop a coherent sense of ethical responsibility. Similarly, Sandel (2012) has emphasized the importance of teaching students about their roles within their communities, encouraging them to consider the common good in their moral reasoning. Sandel argues that without such communal grounding, moral and civic education risks becoming superficial and disconnected from the lived experiences of individuals. This is particularly relevant for Lithuania, helping society to develop a moral sense of belonging and a coherent sense of ethical responsibility. Sandel's emphasis on communal roles in moral reasoning further highlights the importance of grounding moral education in

1 For example, see Valstybės pažangos strategija „Lietuvos ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, <https://lr.lt/media/viesa/saugykla/2023/12/pkvNdKV10fk.pdf>

the lived experiences of individuals within their communities, which is particularly relevant in Lithuania's tight-knit social structures. However, as it was mentioned already, any real attempts in doing it are rare and marginal (Genys, 2016; Mažeikis, 2009).

Liberals would advocate for moral education that respects individual autonomy. For example, Rawls's (1999) has supported a civic education framework that encourages students to engage with moral principles from a standpoint of fairness and impartiality, ensuring that ethical reasoning respects the rights and freedoms of others. Friedman (2002) has argued for moral education that emphasizes personal responsibility and the ethical dimensions of economic freedom, equipping individuals to make moral choices in both their personal and economic lives. Such a liberal approach to ensure that ethical reasoning respects the rights and freedoms of all citizens, fostering a balanced and fair society, is also very important. However, it is quite typical in the Lithuanian case that personal responsibility is more associated with utilitarian (rather than moral) dimensions of economic freedom (Norkus, 2008).

Digitalization and changing educational priorities. The rise of digital technology presents new challenges and opportunities for civic education. Communitarians would likely express concern that digital disruption could further erode social bonds and deepen individualism. Charles Taylor might argue that civic education needs to adapt by incorporating digital literacy while also reinforcing the importance of face-to-face interactions and community engagement (Taylor, 1989). Sandel (2007) has emphasized that education should not merely focus on technical skills but also on using technology to strengthen communal ties and promote collective well-being. In Lithuania, where digital literacy is increasingly important, civic education could incorporate Taylor's and Sandel's concerns about the potential erosion of social bonds. Education should not only focus on technical skills but also on using digital tools to strengthen communal ties and promote collective well-being, ensuring that technology enhances, rather than detracts from, social cohesion.

In contrast, liberals might view digitalization as an opportunity to expand individual freedoms and access to information. Berlin's pluralism suggests that digital tools should empower individuals to pursue diverse ways of life, free from the imposition of a single communal vision. Rawls would likely emphasize the importance of ensuring that digital tools and platforms are used in ways that are fair and equitable, supporting the development of a just society. Civic education, from a liberal perspective, should focus on equipping students with digital skills while promoting critical thinking and the ability to discern credible information in an increasingly complex digital landscape. In Lithuania, the usage of digital tools to empower individuals to pursue diverse ways of life is very popular, but it is quite rarely linked to the benefit of the public good.

The Development of Liberal and Communitarian Models in Lithuania and its Implications

Citizenship education covers a wide range of aspects aimed at preparing individuals to be informed, responsible, and active members of society (Gutmann, 1999). These include developing an understanding of civic principles, democratic values, social responsibility, and the skills needed to engage in civic life (Mouffe, 1992). Civic education equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate actively in society and contribute to social change. By educating citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for civic participation, civic education strengthens individuals' sense of autonomy and ability to influence the direction of social change (Arthur, 2008).

In a transitional society as Lithuania, civic education is linked with the advancement of democratic values and practices, which are essential for building inclusive and pluralistic societies based on the rule of law, human rights, and social justice (Degėsys et al, 2021;

Lukšienė, 1992). By developing an understanding of historical contexts, social dynamics, and power structures, civic education enables citizens to play an active role in addressing societal challenges and advocating for positive change during periods of social upheaval (Donskis, 2010). Accordingly, both liberal and communitarian civic education promotes the principles of democratic citizenship, including participation in decision-making processes, but has certain emphasis and quite different practical implications.

Table 2

The Interrelation Between Civic Education Concerns and Its Practical Implications

Transitional stages	Restoration of independence 1988-1992	Transition / Integration into the European Union (2004)	1 st war in Ukraine 2014	Global pandemic / 2 nd war in Ukraine 2019-2022
Development of civic education policy	1988-Conception of a national school 1992-Conception of Lithuanian Education	General Program for Citizenship 2004	General Program for Citizenship 2008	General Program for Citizenship [currently valid]
Dynamics of citizenship program objectives	To develop citizens and patriots who are aware of their duties and rights, who are able to participate constructively in and improve the governance of society and the state. To foster a sense of love of the Homeland, responsibility for one's own nation and state, national self-esteem, and determination to work for the good of one's native land.	To help pupils develop civic self-awareness through the development of values, knowledge of the structure of society and the state, the basic functions of the state and government, democratic values and principles, and the development of action and participation skills.	To ensure that pupils acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to participate actively and responsibly in the life of the Lithuanian democratic state and civil society	To develop a conscious, independent and active personality, fostering democratic values, able to critically evaluate information and build a progressive Lithuanian civil society.

Development of liberal model and its implications	The restoration of independence in 1990 marked the beginning of Lithuania's transition from a Soviet-controlled state to a democratic republic. Democratic institutions, free elections and the rule of law were built during this period. Political parties emerged, advocating liberal principles, individual freedoms, human rights, and a free market economy.	Lithuania has implemented wide-ranging economic reforms aimed at shifting from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. Privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation, and the promotion of entrepreneurship were key elements of these reforms. Liberal economic policies focused on promoting competition, attracting foreign investment, and stimulating economic growth.	It emphasized the importance of diplomacy and respect for international law, as well as to critically analyze media narratives to understand the complexities of geopolitical tensions. Liberal civic education has encouraged individuals to engage in informed discourse about the geopolitical landscape and the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society. The idea of liberal democracy became even more important and stressed in the public discourse.	Lithuania's democratic institutions remained intact during the pandemic because decision-making processes were transparent, constitutional rights were respected, and accountability mechanisms were in place. Similarly, in response to Russia's war in Ukraine, liberal values reinforced Lithuania's commitment to democratic principles, underlining the resilience of its institutions in the face of external threats to sovereignty and democracy.
Development of communitarian model and its implications	After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence, the restoration of the community links that had been broken during the Soviet era was again a major concern. Local communities started to organize civic initiatives, cultural events, and social gatherings aimed at fostering solidarity and strengthening social ties.	Communitarian values encouraged civic engagement and volunteering as people sought to contribute to their communities. A wide range of community organizations, charities and voluntary groups emerged to tackle social problems, support vulnerable groups, and improve local infrastructure. However, communitarian values attracted less attention in public discourse and started to fade away.	It mobilized communities to provide humanitarian aid and support for refugees. By nurturing a sense of solidarity with the people of Ukraine, these initiatives have reinforced the values of compassion, altruism, and civic engagement. Moreover, communitarian civic education has encouraged citizens to reflect on their roles as active members of society, challenging them to contribute positively to their communities and uphold shared values of peace, justice, and solidarity. The communitarian idea did not become popular; thus, it remained underrated in the public discourse.	Communities came together to provide support, assistance, and solidarity to those in need, reflecting the importance of collective action and mutual aid. In Lithuania, during the global pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine, community played a vital role in promoting community solidarity, cultural resilience, local empowerment, and interpersonal support networks. These values helped to strengthen social cohesion, build resilience, and sustain collective well-being in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The critique of each model addressing contemporary civic education challenges			
Cultural identity, globalization and economic inequality	Political polarization (disillusionment) and erosion of social cohesion	Moral and ethical education	Digitalization and changing educational priorities
Liberal model			
The liberal approach emphasizes individual freedoms, autonomy, and equal opportunities within a market-driven framework. This model would advocate for ensuring that all citizens, regardless of economic background, have access to civic education that prepares them to compete in a globalized world. However, the liberal model might struggle to fully address economic inequalities, as it often relies on market mechanisms that can exacerbate disparities.	In the face of political polarization, the liberal model might stress the importance of protecting individual rights and encouraging pluralism. It would advocate for civic education that promotes critical thinking, tolerance, and the ability to engage in civil discourse. However, this approach may not fully address the erosion of social cohesion, as it tends to prioritize individual over collective identities.	The liberal perspective would support moral and ethical education to empower individuals to make informed, autonomous decisions. This might translate into a focus on developing personal responsibility and ethical reasoning within a framework that respects individual choice. Liberal reasoning to respect the rights and freedoms of all citizens, fostering a balanced and fair society, is also very important	The liberal approach would likely view digital disruption as an opportunity to enhance individual learning and access to information. This could mean leveraging digital tools to expand civic education and encourage self-directed learning. However, the liberal model might underplay the risks of digital divides and misinformation, focusing more on individual adaptability than on communal resilience.
Communitarian model			
The communitarian perspective focuses on the importance of community bonds and social responsibility. In addressing globalization and economic inequality, this model would prioritize policies and educational programs that strengthen community ties and ensure that civic education promotes social justice and collective well-being. It would emphasize the need to support economically disadvantaged groups to foster a more cohesive society.	The communitarian approach would focus on rebuilding social cohesion by fostering a sense of shared values and communal responsibilities. This model would advocate for civic education that emphasizes the importance of community engagement, mutual respect, and the common good, thereby directly addressing the fragmentation caused by political polarization. However, some risks remain as this model might provoke further division among ideologically different communities.	From a communitarian standpoint, moral and ethical education is central to building a strong community. This would mean a greater focus on teaching shared moral values and fostering a sense of collective responsibility. The communitarian approach would argue that moral education should not only prepare individuals for personal ethical challenges but also for their roles as members of a larger community. The downplay is that both communitarian approach and moral education initiatives are very rare.	The communitarian model would emphasize the need to use digital tools in ways that strengthen community bonds and promote collective learning. This might involve creating digital platforms that foster community engagement and dialogue, while ensuring that civic education addresses the ethical use of technology and the risks associated with digital disruption. This model would also stress the importance of maintaining civic education as a priority within the curriculum, despite pressures to focus more on STEM and workforce readiness.

The communitarian model of civic education emphasizes collective empowerment and agency, fostering a sense of belonging to a community and shared responsibility. In the case of Lithuania, we saw a lack of a sense of community and opportunities for wider impact.

Thus, this feature of the community model would be very useful as it encourages students to recognize their interconnectedness with others, to cooperate with their fellow citizens, and to pursue common goals for the good of society. Through communitarian civic education in Lithuania, individuals develop a strong sense of civic duty and solidarity, thus contributing to the empowerment of communities and the promotion of the common good.

The communitarian model encourages learners to actively contribute to the well-being of their communities, uphold shared values, and engage in democratic decision-making processes. Through communitarian civic education, individuals in Lithuania develop a sense of belonging to their communities and nation, fostering a deeper commitment to democratic principles and collective action. This is a very important emphasis for Lithuania, encouraging the nurturing of democracy from below, and thus strengthening communal bonds. It is possible to have great respect for democracy, to fight for abstract human rights, but if citizenship is not rooted in a concrete community, it will be harder to feel the power of empathy and to measure the results of action.

The liberal model enshrines a strong commitment to democratic values such as equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Through liberal civic education in Lithuania, individuals learn about the importance of democratic institutions, civic responsibility, and active participation in political life, thereby fostering a culture of democratic citizenship. This is a crucial aspect of the liberal model, fostering respect for democratic culture and broadening the concept of democracy - different communities but equal rights.

The liberal model of civic education is famous for emphasizing personal empowerment and agency, focusing on the rights, freedoms, and autonomy of citizens. In the case of Lithuania, we saw a growing level of public (individual) activism, but a lack of power. Individual citizenship is important, but the impact has very clear limits that depend on community support.

Both liberal and communitarian models of civic education, during the Independence period, have provided valuable benefits in promoting democratic citizenship: fostering critical thinking, active participation, and contributing to state building. Both liberal and communitarian civic education teaches how to critically assess, reflect and transform events in public life from the distant and insignificant to the immediate and significant, re-identifying the role, quality and place of public services and infrastructure (from service delivery to health and social services) in relation to the needs of citizens' daily lives. This encounter between liberal and communitarian civic behavior has very clear consequences for society.

Two different citizenship models are likely to crystallize if continuously develop them separately. In the first (liberal model), democracy emerges as a political system characterized by effective governance, based on 'rationalism' and 'professionalism', with political life being managed as a structured mechanism based on procedural regulation, with civic duties and responsibilities entrusted to 'professional citizens', but with no encouragement for deeper and broader public involvement in community life. In the second case (the communitarian model), democracy is based more on bottom-up civic initiative, autonomy and self-government, values such as mutual trust and responsibility, and political life is likely to be more chaotic as a result, based on community participation, with civic duties and responsibilities being assigned to organized groups of citizens, and with the aim of moderating the straightforward regulation of government by a representative principle.

The criticism of the liberal model relates to nominal participation, where on the one hand, the individual is activated, but their impact remains limited due to a lack of community support. In this case, it is difficult to become a moral leader and to influence others, because leadership is not practically embodied in a given community. Leadership may be shaped by classical values that permeate all members of society (e.g., honor, fair play, etc.), but these are exceptional cases, more typical of certain periods. Conversely, criticism of the communitarian model is associated with overly narrow notions of citizenship that are tailored to the specific

needs of communities. It is often difficult for community leaders to maintain impartiality and social justice when the range of activities and responsibilities expands.

Ideally, it is advisable to combine these models with each other, considering the unique Lithuanian context and challenges. Starting with a communitarian model that provides the foundations to foster community action, caring for others and a collective sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community. And then introduce a liberal model to promote individual freedom and a sense of individual responsibility, both for one's own community and for other social groups. This would not only facilitate critical thinking and active participation in decision-making processes but also provide a much-needed dimension of civic support and influence. It is important that the process of civic education is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, and that it encourages public participation and cooperation at different levels.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine how liberal and communitarian models of civic education have evolved in Lithuania since the restoration of independence and how these models address contemporary civic challenges such as political polarization, social fragmentation, and digital transformation. Using a comparative historical approach grounded in political sociology, the study analyzed key educational policies, civic participation data, and ideological narratives to assess the strengths and limitations of both models.

The findings confirm that Lithuania's civic education system has experienced a dynamic shift, moving from the communitarian ideals of the National Revival period, focused on collective identity and civic mobilization, toward a more liberal model centered on individual autonomy, rule of law, and pluralism. This mirrors broader patterns observed in other post-communist societies (Apple, 2001; Janoski et al., 2005), where civic education has served as both a vehicle of democratic socialization and a reflection of societal transformation.

The liberal model has contributed to expanding civic literacy, promoting inclusiveness, and aligning with European democratic standards. However, consistent with critiques by Sandel (2012), Taylor (1992), and Walzer (1983), this study finds that liberal civic education in Lithuania often falls short in fostering emotional engagement, ethical responsibility, and long-term civic commitment. Despite the emphasis on rights and participation, civic empowerment indices (e.g., Degutis et al., 2021) suggest that meaningful civic agency and trust in institutions remain limited. This supports Stevenson's (2001) argument that liberal education, while normatively strong, may be too individualistic to cultivate solidarity in fragile civic cultures.

Conversely, the communitarian model – once prominent during the national movement – continues to resonate emotionally and ethically but lacks structural embedding in contemporary educational practice. While community-based learning and moral leadership are increasingly valued, their institutionalization remains weak, particularly in fragmented societies with low interpersonal trust. This is consistent with Howard's (2003) and Foa and Ekiert's (2017) analyses of civil society in Eastern Europe, which highlight the enduring difficulty of sustaining grassroots cohesion without robust intermediary institutions.

The study also highlights the unique role of digitalization in shaping civic identity. While liberal models embrace digital platforms as tools of empowerment (Rawls, 2002), communitarian thinkers caution that digital spaces can dilute affective ties and civic rootedness (Sandel, 2007). In Lithuania, digital participation has grown, but not always in tandem with civic cohesion or critical democratic engagement (Genys, 2023). This pattern underscores the challenge of translating technical access into meaningful civic connectedness.

In addition, moral and emotional dimensions of civic learning – empathy, care, and ethical reasoning – remain underdeveloped. While Lithuanian civic education acknowledges

values, its formal expression often lacks depth, echoing findings from Gutmann (1999) and Annette (2000), who advocate for stronger normative foundations in civic curricula.

Lithuania offers a particularly insightful case for analyzing civic education due to its multilayered post-Soviet transition and current geopolitical position. The country combines a strong national identity and geopolitical alertness with relatively low civic trust and participation – an unusual configuration that shapes how citizenship is taught and experienced. This study shows how civic education in Lithuania has had to reconcile the emotional legacies of occupation, the liberal demands of European integration, and the rising uncertainties of the digital and geopolitical landscape.

One distinctive finding is the paradoxical coexistence of high symbolic solidarity (especially around national causes) and weak interpersonal or communal trust. While support for causes like Ukraine reveals strong collective sentiment, this does not consistently translate into everyday civic involvement. The legacy of emotional restraint and institutional distrust - rooted in the Soviet past - continues to affect how both teachers and students engage with civic ideas and practices. These patterns underscore that civic education in Lithuania is not merely about conveying democratic knowledge, but about navigating unresolved cultural and emotional legacies.

This context can serve as a comparative model for other transitional democracies where institutional modernization outpaces civic cultural adaptation. Lithuania's experience demonstrates that civic education reform must engage with emotional and symbolic structures, not just technical or legal frameworks. The country's trajectory also highlights the need for educational approaches that address not only knowledge deficits but also affective gaps in civic life.

By bridging liberal and communitarian models, this paper contributes a conceptual and analytical framework that other researchers can apply in settings where civic education must negotiate between historical memory, institutional inertia, and rapidly changing global dynamics. In doing so, it invites scholars and policymakers to think beyond static models and toward integrated, culturally grounded, and emotionally intelligent approaches to civic learning.

While the study provides a robust theoretical synthesis, it does not include empirical fieldwork. As such, the findings reflect conceptual insights rather than measured behavioral patterns. Furthermore, the paper focuses on the Lithuanian context, though it contributes to wider post-Soviet education discourse.

Conclusions and Implications

This study has traced the conceptual and historical development of civic education in Lithuania, highlighting how it has both shaped and been shaped by broader political, social, and cultural transformations. From the early years of national independence to the present, civic education has served as a crucial mechanism for fostering democratic engagement and transmitting citizenship values.

Viewed through the lens of political sociology, civic education is not merely a curriculum matter - it is embedded in wider societal processes. It reflects prevailing ideologies, institutional arrangements, and the strength of civic culture. During the Revival period, civic education in Lithuania emphasized community mobilization and collective responsibility - traits aligned with the communitarian model. Over time, however, civic education has increasingly reflected liberal values, emphasizing individual rights, autonomy, and legal-political literacy.

While both models aim to support democratic resilience, they do so in distinct ways. The liberal model promotes cultural diversity, critical thinking, and tolerance, contributing to inclusion in an increasingly pluralistic society. However, its emphasis on individual responsibility may limit deeper civic cohesion, particularly in societies where civic participation remains

fragile. Civic engagement in Lithuania has grown, yet civil society's practical influence remains constrained, suggesting that liberal civic education alone may not sufficiently foster democratic participation.

The communitarian model, in contrast, emphasizes shared responsibility, mutual obligation, and local civic ties. Where applied, it can strengthen belonging and promote horizontal trust within and across communities. However, Lithuania's relatively weak communal structures and fragmented public sphere limit the model's broader applicability. As a result, its potential remains largely underutilized in civic education practice.

This analysis demonstrates that neither model is wholly sufficient for addressing Lithuania's current civic challenges. A context-sensitive synthesis - one that draws on the inclusivity of liberalism and the social embeddedness of communitarianism - is needed. Such an approach would align with Lithuania's political development while also nurturing more participatory, trust-based, and emotionally engaged forms of citizenship.

Ultimately, civic education must move beyond abstract models to respond to the lived realities of Lithuanian society. Strengthening communities, bridging social divides, and cultivating civic virtue are not only educational goals but necessary conditions for democratic sustainability. Future civic education efforts should therefore aim not only to inform but also to connect - to foster both competence and care among citizens in an evolving democratic society.

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