

EDUCATION FOR A BETTER CITIZEN

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“The education of the young needs the special attention of the lawmaker. The neglect of education in a state is injurious to the state. One ought to be educated in accordance with the particular form of the state, because the particular character of each state both guards the state and originally establishes it. The democratic ethos promotes democracy, and a better ethos produces a better state”.

Aristotle

It took over two thousand years for people to realise the importance of civics and introduce it into the school curriculum. Civics has been a late addition and extension of human capital theory. Building civic behaviour contributes to the formation of social capital, which is expected to have economic returns similar to that of other forms of capital.

The aim of civic education is to inculcate behavioural traits that would make the student a better citizen. Civics contributes to making a society more homogenous and contributes to social fairness, unity, common values and democracy.

TRUST AS CIVIC BEHAVIOUR

Out of the many benefits of civic behaviour, trust has received most attention because it is measurable based on answers in social surveys asking the question: *“Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?”*

Higher trust levels increase information sharing and allow faster dissemination of new research and ideas. Trust is associated with efficiency gains because it reduces transaction costs and enhances the profitability of investments in physical and human capital. Trust affects economic growth by facilitating investment in physical capital.

Trust plays a significant role in determining the extent to which countries will trade with one another. The

level of trust varies widely between countries, with the highest values observed in Scandinavia and the lowest in Southern Europe.

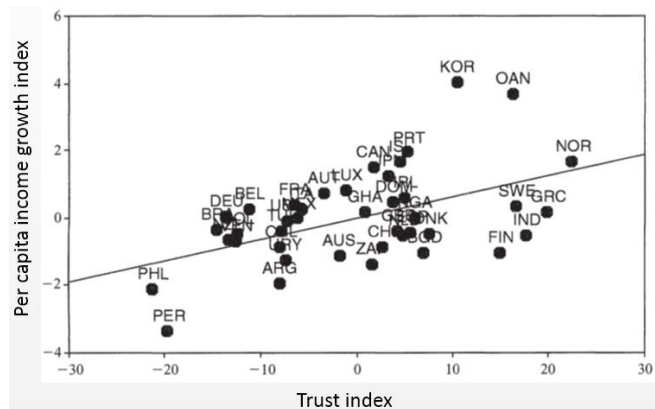
Trusting others (% of adults)

Denmark	75
Norway	73
Netherlands	67
Sweden	62
Finland	62
Germany	45
Estonia	40
UK	36
Belgium	36
Italy	30
Czech R.	29
France	27
Poland	23
Hungary	21
Greece	21
Slovenia	20
Spain	20
Portugal	19
Slovak R.	12

OECD

There is a positive correlation between the level of trust in a given country and the rate of economic growth.

Trust and economic growth



Zak and Knack (2001).

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE AMONG STUDENTS

In a survey carried out in schools in European countries, only 59% of students answered civics questions correctly, with the highest score in Finland, 82%, and the lowest in Lithuania, 47%. In another survey,

- 50% of students declared trust in civic institutions,
- 53% felt that they have a sense of European identity,
- 50% report having opportunities for learning about Europe in school,
- 70% trust the European Union and 72% the European Parliament,
- 65% expect to vote in European elections,
- 85% expect to vote in national elections,

CIVIC BEHAVIOUR AMONG ADULTS

Based on the World Values Survey, the European Values Survey and Gallup World Poll, better educated people are more likely to behave in a civilised way relative to the less educated. Those who attend school more and complete higher levels of education are likely to commit less crime. It has been found that in England a 1-year increase in the average years of schooling for

men reduces conviction rates for property crime by 20–30% and violent crime by roughly a third to a half. In the United States there is a sharp drop in the probability of imprisonment for African-Americans who have completed high school vs. high-school dropouts. A one-year increase in years of schooling reduces arrests by 11%, while a 10 percentage-point increase in high school graduation rates reduces arrest rates by 7%. In the United States, only 30% of those with less than secondary education believe that people can be trusted, compared to 58% of those with higher education. Individuals with more schooling are more likely to report having voted. While only 52% of US high school dropouts report voting, this percentage increases to 67% for high school graduates, 74% for individuals with some college education and 84% for college graduates.

POLICY HINTS

Active citizenship is an important correlate and determinant of a broad range of socioeconomic outcomes. At the same time, the level of civics education in the world today might be far less than what is desirable. Active citizenship should be promoted. The next question is how it should be delivered. Family background is an important determinant of children’s later civic behaviour, but this is not an instrument for policy manipulation. Civic values in school can be instilled in two ways: first, tacitly, by absorbing values from subjects in the general school curriculum; and second, explicitly, by offering a civics-specific subject. Based on the available evidence, general education is a very powerful determinant of civic behaviour later in life. A pro-civic environment in regular class teaching, such as having an open classroom climate, holding student elections and promoting working in teams, contributes to civic knowledge among students and thus should be encouraged.

For more details see: George Psacharopoulos, “Education for a better citizen: An assessment”, EENEE Analytical Report No. 35, 2018.

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