

Review of: "The Young Pioneers of Cuba: The Formation of Cuban Citizens through Civic Education"

Dominik Dvořák¹

¹ Charles University Prague

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I consider the topic of the article extremely important. In the world, in recent years, there has been a decline in the number of countries with a liberal democratic structure. The erosion of freedom and the rule of law also affects nations considered to be stable democracies. Therefore, from the point of view of both theory and practical politics, it is crucial to describe and analyse how education is conducted in countries with various forms of illiberal and authoritarian regimes. At the same time, there is a need to reflect on what social research, specifically educational research, can and should look like in these countries. From a substantive point of view, I consider the article to be an interesting contribution to academic discourse, but I lacked a more detailed reflection precisely from the point of view of research methodology in the school systems under illiberal regimes.

Currently, when evaluating education in countries where the communist party ruled or is ruling, we encounter either works based on the positions of anti-communism and the theory of totalitarianism, or revisionist approaches. Detailed analyses of specific cases have the potential to overcome the limits imposed by both frameworks. In this, I see the key value of the study of Andresen and Breidlid, which names the positives and negatives of Cuban (civic) education and socialization. However, in the introduction to their paper, I lack a more comprehensive overview of what we know about civics and citizenship education in past and current state-socialist countries, which would lead to a more transparent formulation of research gaps and research questions. This is also seen in the discussion, where I missed a clearer link of the study results to the existing literature and an outlining of what is actually new about the authors' conclusions.

The analysis of the relationship between Cuban citizenship education and the Critical Global Citizenship Education model can be summarized as follows: students in democratic countries are expected to criticize their governments, and students in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes are expected to criticize governments in democratic countries, too.

In the discussion, the authors do not mention the possible limitations and distortions that stem from the living and working conditions of the respondents in a non-democratic society. Perhaps the involvement of local actors in the design of the research or in the validation of the results would help here. Greater variability of voices could increase the credibility of the results: e.g., how would members of the Cuban exile community who grew up in Cuba reflect on the research results? But perhaps in this respect, the authors are applying some form of (self) censorship to protect the respondents or not to close their way to further research in Cuba.

