

Patriotism among Slovenian Youth: Empirical Research

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Abstract: *Research in Slovenia shows a low level of expression of patriotism among young people, which points to the fact that we are unable to express this value because we are not convinced of its quality and necessity. The belief that we will love and respect our homeland, which has also been a state since 1991, is based on completely false assumptions. Those who were emotionally present at the founding of our country naturally have a keener sense of patriotism, but the younger generations see the emergence of an independent and sovereign Slovenia as a historical fact, and therefore without any emotional overtones. Therefore, the results on the poor knowledge of the facts related to the establishment of an independent and sovereign Slovenian state, analysed in this article, are not really surprising.*

Keywords: *patriotism, citizenship, young people, political activism, Slovenia*

Introduction

Slovenes are no strangers to patriotism, and even more, a cursory glance and a superficial knowledge of Slovenian history reminds us that we have often been able to show it clearly. Patriotism was what enabled the survival of a nation in times of extremes and, above all, self-preservation. Unfortunately, this cannot be perceived in everyday life to the same extent as in times of severe external pressures, in times of extreme forms of Roman and Germanic nationalism, or in the defence of the independence and sovereignty of the Slovenian state. While this is not unusual, as it is virtually impossible to maintain patriotism at such a high level of expression, the lukewarm response of young people to the

issue of patriotism, which has been highlighted in admittedly scarce research for some time, is worrying.

As a consequence of an increasingly fast-paced society, an important part of the socialisation of young citizens is being transferred from the family as the basic unit of society to schools, where young people spend more and more of their time. This is why it is important to pay more attention to the current state of the Slovenian education system and to point out any shortcomings, while at the same time looking for ways to further improve the situation in this area. We all remember the endless, years-long debates on the introduction of civic culture and ethics into the Slovenian primary school system. The polemic ended without any real result and, of course, without bringing about any change. Unfortunately, it has also failed to bring about major shifts in the understanding of patriotic themes.

Patriotism thus remains something that is largely left to the individual or the family. If patriotism is left to unorganised forms of deepening, the line – which is already quite thin and blurred – between patriotism and nationalism can be crossed quite quickly. As young people grow up, they are also identity-located in a wider space¹ and this is not possible without their own spatial definition, which is indirectly offered by patriotism. In this case, irreparable damage will be done, and our greatest patriotic symbols will be crippled in value, and consequently the patriotic potential that makes it possible to build patriotic foundations and a healthy patriotic self-confidence in the first place. This is clearly far too important a content to be improvised on the one hand or to do nothing on the other. Therefore, it is necessary to shake up patriotic content at the very beginning of the identity construction of citizens, which inevitably concerns the Slovenian education system (Kukovič et al. 2022).

Literature review

Social science is concerned with the development of the individual in a social context, as long as this development is not harmful to the society in which the individual has developed (Altıkulaç 2016). There are binding social boundaries that are shaped by societies and manifested in the historical process, with values being at the top of the individual as well as of the society that controls the individual (Armstrong 1980). Values are therefore a concept to be respected, valued and admired (Venkataiah 2007); they are the motives that guide one's behaviour and that remain in one's consciousness. They can be described as mental phenomena that reside in the emotional domain and that control and direct our actions. Compared to beliefs and attitudes, values are more comprehensive and

1 For more on young people's European identity and the impact of Christian values on its formation, see Golob et al. (2019). For more on collective identities and identity politics, see Koller (2021; 2022).

more deeply embedded in the individual. From this point of view, the education of young people also means the development of their values in order to discover their individuality, the best form of existence and the attainment of human perfection. Venkataiah (2007) even argues that values education is primarily about ensuring an emphasis on humanism, but also about educating young people to think about other individuals and the well-being of their country (Reiners 2019: 36–38). To achieve this, young people need to experience social values, not as acts of manipulation, but as inspiration to people to choose their own social, ethical and spiritual values and to understand them more deeply. These values include (Altıkulaç 2016: 26; Fukuoka & Takita-Ishii 2021: 248) the importance of family, justice, freedom, diligence, cooperation, sensitivity, being scientific, honesty, aesthetics, tolerance, hospitality, giving importance to health, respectfulness, affection, responsibility, orderliness, willingness to help and being patriotic. There are different approaches to bringing each of these values to young people; we can use traditional methods of instruction and explanation, but it is more optimal to give them their own way of identifying and internalising the values.

Patriotism reflects an individual's attitude towards the nation and culture, so that the individual strives to achieve love for his or her homeland and nation, but has no intention of exercising aggression against other nations (Altıkulaç 2016). Different dimensions of patriotism can be found in the literature. One of them is given by Curti (Bourne 1977), who distinguishes between the militarist and the civil side of patriotism. Morray (1959) distinguishes between obedient (imitative) and disobedient (innovative) patriotism, while Sommerville (1981) distinguishes between ignorant (irrational) and oppositional (rational) patriotism. Adorno (Schatz et al. 1999) contrasts the ideas of supposed and genuine patriotism, where supposed patriotism implies blind loyalty and dogmatic compatibility, while genuine patriotism is based on a critical approach to the limits of national values and love of nation.

A similar division can be found in Staub (1997), who argues that there are two types of patriotism, blind and constructive. The first is characterised as showing dogmatic acceptance of and loyalty to a policy, regardless of whether the national policy and its actions are in conflict with human rights and the rights of other peoples. Blind patriotism varies from time to time and from society to society; the object of loyalty may be a country, a nation, a view or an ideology, but what is common is unconditional loyalty and service to that object. In blind patriotism, criticism of state policies is often considered treason, thus showing a tendency to resist change, to maintain a conservative mentality and to protect the status quo. It could be said that blind and constructive patriotism are indicators of differences in the democratic capacity of citizens. Democratic values and ideals are more related to cognitive values than to what we try to define as values of patriotism. The ideal situation in this case is for individuals

to approach each other's groups critically, in which they develop their capacity for loyalty and rationality (Altıkulaç 2016). Critical consciousness refers to an individual's ability to freely evaluate knowledge and perspective in relation to authority or society (Staub 1997). From this perspective, constructive patriotism challenges the *status quo*. Patriotism deals with feelings of loyalty that could hinder the active, critical citizen that a modern democratic state wants. From this perspective, the constructive patriotism described above (with its critical consciousness and concern for change) is a solution to such concerns. Thus, patriotism, enriched with democratic qualities, is not an obstacle to an active and participative citizen, but rather a support for him/her.

Although it is not the intention of this paper to delve (too) deeply into the forms of patriotic attitudes, when analysing the literature on the phenomena of patriotism, it seems that there are two key and contradictory concepts. Both are highly relevant to debates on educational policy in the field of home education; each of the two concepts also carries a political connotation, which naturally influences what young people learn about patriotism, civic duties and democracy. We will call those manifestations of patriotism authoritarian and democratic (Westheimer 2006).

Authoritarian patriotism is the abandonment of one's own will, the right to choose and the need to understand authority – its emotional foundation is gratitude for being (having been) relieved of the burden of democratic responsibility. Authoritarian patriotism requires unquestioning loyalty: loyalty to a goal, a cause, a principle, defined by a leader or a leading group. Such patriotism requires commitment to the governing principles and therefore opposes dissent and opposition. Meanwhile, democratic patriotism is based on truth and loyalty – not to the ruling power, but to the principles that underpin democracy. Concern for the essential values that underpin democracy is a fundamental feature of democratic patriotism. This does not mean, of course, that democratic patriotism leaves no room for symbolic displays of support and solidarity. On the contrary. Democratic patriotism is not only about adherence to a nation, its symbols and its political leaders of the present and the past, but also to every member of that nation and to the well-being of fellow countrymen. The true foundation of democratic patriotism is the right to diversity of opinion (Callan 2009: 60–62).

Patriotism is defined by most authors as a positive emotion and feeling towards the country to which one belongs. Archard (1999: 158) describes patriotism as a genuine love and deep respect for one's country and its heritage. Love of country is most often described as an individual's impeccable inclination to act – often at self-sacrifice – for the sake of his or her country. Nathanson (1997) argues that patriotism consists of four main components, namely: a) special affection for the country; b) defining oneself through one's country; c) interest in the welfare of the country; d) sacrifice for the welfare of the country. Patriotism shares with nationalism the same value base – nations exist, and the

existence of one's own nation has a special moral value for the individual, and therefore a nation is worthy of special affection and action in favour of one's own nation. That is why every nationalist is surely also a patriot. A patriot is committed to his/her own country and nation, but not every patriot is necessarily a nationalist in the sense of seeking harmony between the nation and the state (Folvarčný & Kopeček 2020: 163–164). In contrast to nationalism, patriotism contains an element of political society that is concrete evidence of a nation or a state. Here we recall the explanation of Anderson (1983) that a nation is a social construction and a group, limited in its political and social values, that exists in the consciousness of the members of this community. If nationalism played an important role in history in building a nation, patriotism, which develops gradually according to the cultural activity of the people, is concrete proof of the unity of the nation for its prosperity (Berger and Luckman 1966). Patriotic feelings and sentiments are reflected in a sense of belonging, connectedness and loyalty.

Patriotism is the most misused concept in education according to the authors (Levine & Youniss 2006: 8). Teachers very often confuse the concept of patriotism with the militaristic chauvinism used by some 20th century dictators to manipulate their own nation. What they fail to realise is that it is precisely the patriotic resistance against such authoritarian movements that has contributed to their downfall. Many authors openly question whether patriotism is an outdated concept that should not be passed on to younger generations. One of the most famous debates of this kind on the role and meaning of patriotism in the contemporary educational and cultural system is that between Callan and Galston (Archard 1999). Both authors stress the profound need for civic education in the modern education system to build young people's patriotic attachment to a single national identity. Both see the need for a strategy of citizen integration, a way of ensuring citizens' loyalty and allegiance to democratic political institutions within a liberal society. Both see civic education, imbued with elements of patriotism, as the means to achieve these goals. Both are concerned about the oft-stated concern for unbiased, objective thinking that almost always arises whenever any form of patriotic or patriotic education is attempted to be introduced, especially into the compulsory education system. It is a common dilemma, highlighting the tension between the demands to integrate elements of patriotism into the education system and the realisation that the concern for unbiased, objective thinking often has a corrosive effect on the circumstances in which such education is introduced. The belief that patriotism is a positive value and that it is good for a modern state to have citizens who love their country is often undermined by concerns for the well-being of impartial, objective thinking and the continued existence of the conditions for critical thinking. We should therefore distinguish the concept of patriotism from the concepts of nationalism, blind patriotism, xenophobia and other radical expressions that (too) often find a place in day-to-day discourse.

Data and research methods

In an empirical study, the researchers analysed the meaning of patriotism and the patriotic consciousness of young people and, on this basis, tried to attribute a role and meaning to patriotism in the context of the education system in primary and secondary schools. Patriotism is an inevitable and important attribute of every person. It follows that home education is necessary for personal self-knowledge, which in turn is the necessary basis for a person to reflect on himself or herself and to enter into a critical dialogue with other persons. Self-knowledge is a prerequisite for a critical thinker, and without critical thinkers, the ideals of personal growth and democracy are unlikely to be realised. Patriotism is also a necessary component of a positive self-image. Democracy, personal growth and a positive self-image are values that rank highest on the moral scale and are closely interlinked. Patriotism, as the basis for their realisation, is therefore of great public or general-societal importance and should be fostered at school, especially in the context of civic education or a new special subject. The empirical research therefore sought to answer the following research questions: What is the (positive) function of patriotism? Is it reasonable and necessary to cultivate patriotism and teach it in schools (in which schools, as a part of which subjects)? How could education in patriotism take place? What are the basic dispositions and orientations of young people in the field of patriotic and civic awareness?

The survey was conducted in two parts, for primary school (PS) pupils and for secondary school (SS) pupils across Slovenia. The survey was conducted using the same questionnaire for each of the two target populations. In terms of timing, both surveys were conducted simultaneously, in December 2021 and January 2022, on a representative sample of 1,000 pupils in the final year of primary school and 1,000 pupils in the third year of secondary school, with primary and secondary schools from all statistical regions of Slovenia equally included in the representative random sample. The questionnaire was completed in the presence of the interviewers by 918 pupils in their final year of school (91.8% response rate) and 823 pupils in their final year of secondary school² (82.3% response rate). In analysing the empirical research, we will focus on two areas. The first one sought to answer the question to what extent young people are familiar with the process of national independence and the most important events related to the period of the formation of the Slovenian state. The second part of the workshop was devoted to the analysis of young people's civic literacy, i.e. the cognitive identification of young people's knowledge in the field of patriotism and active citizenship. The results of the survey can also be usefully

2 Based on the enrollment shares of the enrolled secondary school population, we appropriately included vocational and technical secondary schools and gymnasiums in the research. The share of the gymnasiums was 56.5% of the realised sample.

compared with the results of the survey conducted as part of the project »Active Citizenship and Homeland« (from here on ACH) in 2013.

Empirical research

Slovenian independence

The main focus of the empirical research was on knowledge of Slovenian independence. First, we asked the young people whether they had considered the topic of Slovenian independence as part of their history lessons and expected a high percentage of positive answers, as the topic is definitely part of the current curriculum in the subject. It was therefore quite a surprise that, although the majority of secondary school students (73%) and a much smaller proportion of primary school students (49.9%) answered 'yes', 22% of elementary school students answered 'no' and only 11.5% of secondary school students answered 'no' at the same time. Given that these are pupils in the last years of primary school, it is to be hoped that they will still be listening to this topic at the end of Year 9. The next logical question was how many school hours they thought were devoted to Slovenian independence in all subjects combined; 15.7% of primary school students and 15.2% of secondary school students thought that they spent between one and three school hours on independence in all subjects combined. The largest proportion of primary school students (52.9%) and secondary school students (49.5%) could not estimate how much time they spent on Slovenian independence in all subjects combined. Interestingly, 79.9% of primary school pupils and 74.3% of secondary school students felt that the time allocated for such a topic was quite sufficient.

Young people were further asked to rate their own knowledge about Slovenia's independence (Table 1). The highest proportion of students in the final year of primary school (43%) and of pupils in the final year of secondary school (44.4%) rated their own knowledge as good. Interestingly, secondary school students are much more critical of their own knowledge (or lack thereof) about Slovenia's independence than primary school students, which is confirmed by the proportion of those who rated their own knowledge as 'very good' or 'excellent', which is 38.5% for primary school students and only 25.7% for secondary school students. If this finding is combined with the previous question about the number of hours spent on the topic of Slovenia's independence in all subjects combined, it can be concluded that secondary school students in particular would like to learn more about this topic.

We were also interested in the sources from which young people learn the most about Slovenia's independence. Primary school students in Year 9 learn the most at school in history lessons, and a proportionally large amount from their parents, the internet and TV programmes, while the least from friends and

Table 1: Self-assessment of knowledge about Slovenia's independence (in percent)

	Insufficient (1)	Sufficient (2)	Good (3)	Very good (4)	Excellent (5)
Primary School Students	4.3	14.2	43.0	27.9	10.6
Secondary School Students	5.3	25.6	44.4	18.7	6.0

* Respondents answered the question 'Can you assess your knowledge about Slovenia's independence?'
Source: Research 'Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022, N(PS)=918, N(SS)=823).

acquaintances, newspapers and magazines, and radio programmes. The answer to the question on the extent to which primary school pupils are interested in events related to Slovenia's independence shows that, unfortunately, it is below average and that the largest proportion (70.2%) of primary school pupils have little or no interest in such topics. Comparing the data with the 2013 ACH survey, we can see that the percentage of primary school students with little or no interest in the topic of independence has increased by 10.3% over the last decade.

The situation is similar for secondary school students in their final year; here too (Table 2), students learn the most about the independence process at school in history lessons and from other sources, and the least from friends and peers, newspapers and magazines, and radio broadcasts. Secondary school students in their final year are also below average in their interest in events related to Slovenia's independence. The majority of secondary school students (68.6%) have little or no interest in the topic of independence, while only 31.4% of secondary school students have at least some interest in the topic. Here again, the proportion of secondary school students with little or no interest in the topic of independence has increased by 4.7% over the past nine years.

If we compare the data obtained between the two generations of young people, we can see that both generations of young people learn the least about Slovenia's independence from radio broadcasts, rather little from newspapers and magazines, as well as from friends and peers, which is further evidence that young people do not talk much about this topic among themselves. The main sources of information on independence for primary school students and secondary school students are school and history lessons; this influence has decreased for primary school students and slightly increased for secondary school students since 2013.

Primary school pupils and secondary school students discuss topics related to Slovenia's independence quite rarely at home, but also with friends and peers, and most often at school. Interestingly, 43.1% of primary school pupils say that even at school they never or rarely discuss topics related to Slovenia's independence; among secondary school students, the figure is a high 55%. It is interesting

Table 2: Comparison of sources of knowledge on Slovenian independence among youth

... how much did you learn about Slovenia's independence from the sources listed?	Primary School Students 2013	Primary School Students 2022	Secondary School Students 2013	Secondary School Students 2022
From parents	3.05	2.99	3.35	3.01
From relatives and acquaintances	2.57	2.40	2.78	2.50
From friends and peers	2.11	2.14	2.26	1.99
In school history lessons	3.85	3.53	2.93	3.78
From TV programmes	3.05	2.71	3.22	3.02
From radio broadcasts	1.87	1.84	2.08	1.91
From newspapers and magazines	2.09	1.73	2.46	1.93
On the Internet	2.87	2.87	2.95	2.99

* Respondents answered the question 'Please rate how much you have learned about Slovenia's independence from the following sources?', with value 1 being 'None.', value 2 being 'A little.', value 3 being 'Medium.', value 4 being 'Quite a lot.', and value 5 is 'A lot.'. The higher the value, the more the respondents learned about Slovenia's independence from that source.

Sources: Research 'Active Citizenship and Homeland' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2013, N(PS)=888, N(SS)=844); Research 'Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022, N(PS)=918, N(SS)=823).

to note that young people seem to want to talk about these issues, especially at school, as 69% of primary school students and 66% of secondary school students consider that knowledge of the events related to Slovenia's independence is 'still' or 'very' important for young people in our country. Compared to the 2013 ACH survey, the share of primary school students who consider knowledge of events related to Slovenia's independence important for young people in their country has decreased by 2%, while the share of students has increased by 1.2%.

We further asked young people to evaluate the association of some concepts with the period of Slovenia's independence; we wanted to see which concepts young people particularly associate with the period in which our country gained its independence. The results in Table 3 show that the majority of young people associate the concepts of 'patriotism', 'national consciousness', 'freedom', 'equality', as well as 'Slovenia's position in the world' and 'courage' with the independence period. The terms 'injustice', 'national purity of Slovenia', 'war suffering' and 'exploitation' are the ones that the youngest associate with the period of independence. It can also be noted that this time the responses in the two surveys compared (2013 and 2022) are very similar to each other and that the differences are minimal.

Table 3: Linking some concepts to the period of Slovenian independence

To what extent is each concept related to the period of Slovenia's independence?	Primary School Students 2013	Primary School Students 2022	Secondary School Students 2013	Secondary School Students 2022
	(888)	(918)	(844)	(823)
Courage	3.28	3.36	3.35	3.57
Patriotism	3.53	3.51	3.60	3.72
National consciousness	3.36	3.25	3.57	3.60
Slovenia's national purity	2.77	2.75	2.83	2.90
Abolishing socialism	2.97	2.84	3.00	3.04
Democracy for every citizen	3.32	3.27	3.40	3.46
Freedom	3.63	3.65	3.60	3.73
Equal rights	3.59	3.57	3.58	3.62
Slovenia's position in the world	3.37	3.36	3.32	3.45
Injustice	2.46	2.63	2.68	2.87
The suffering of war	2.60	2.73	2.78	2.84
Exploitation	2.57	2.65	2.84	2.92
Economic development	3.25	3.15	3.27	3.35

* Respondents rated each concept on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being 'Not at all related', 2 being 'Somewhat related', 3 being 'Rather related' and 4 being 'Very related'. The values in the columns are the average values of the responses; the higher the value, the more respondents associate the concept with the period of Slovenia's independence.

Sources: Research 'Active Citizenship and Homeland' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2013); Research 'Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022).

Civic literacy

A special section of the questionnaire was devoted to examining knowledge of national symbols (the flag, coat of arms and anthem of the Republic of Slovenia), independence and key events related to it, knowledge of national holidays (with special attention paid to those with a more patriotic connotation), and knowledge of the elements of civic literacy (this was tested with a series of questions on the right to vote, the Slovenian constitution and political system, fundamental human rights and freedoms, etc.); it was therefore designed to cognitively identify the knowledge of primary and secondary school pupils in the field of patriotism and active citizenship.

In the question asking respondents to identify the flag of the Republic of Slovenia among three pictures of flags, the vast majority of answers were correct in the 2013 ACH survey and also in the most recent 2022 survey; 97.3% of

Table 4: Identifying the national flag (percentage of correct answers)

Which of the flags below is the flag of the Republic of Slovenia?	Primary School Students 2013	Primary School Students 2022	Secondary School Students 2013	Secondary School Students 2022
Flag of the Republic of Slovenia - incorrect	1.4	2.0	2.4	1.9
Flag of the Republic of Slovenia - correct	97.8	97.3	96.8	97.3
Flag of the Republic of Slovenia - incorrect	0.8	0.7	1.1	0.5

* Respondents answered the question 'Which of the flags below is the flag of the Republic of Slovenia...'
 Sources: Research 'Active Citizenship and Homeland' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2013, N(PS)=888, N(SS)=844);
 Research 'Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022, N(PS)=918, N(SS)=823).

primary school pupils and the same percentage of secondary school students correctly identified the flag of the Republic of Slovenia. Based on these results, we conclude that the knowledge of the flag of the Republic of Slovenia among both groups of young people is extremely good.

Table 5: Knowledge of official state symbols (in percentages)

What are the official state symbols of the Republic of Slovenia?	Primary School Students 2013	Primary School Students 2022	Secondary School Students 2013	Secondary School Students 2022
Flag, coat of arms, passport	2.0	0.3	1.7	0.6
Flag, coat of arms, anthem	93.4	97.1	92.3	95.6
Anthem, constitution, coat of arms	3.7	1.9	5.2	2.9
Coat of arms, identity card, passport	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.9

Sources: Research 'Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022, N(PS)=918, N(SS)=823); Research 'Active Citizenship and Homeland' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2013, N(PS)=888, N(SS)=844).

The second question, related to civic literacy, asked young people to identify the official symbols of the Republic of Slovenia. The proportion of correct answers is also high and even slightly higher than in surveys conducted in previous years; similarly to the identification of flags, the proportion of correct answers is slightly higher among primary school students, with 97.1% of primary school students and 95.6% of secondary school students identifying the official state symbols of the Republic of Slovenia.

Table 6: Young people's knowledge of holidays (percentage of correct answers)

	Primary School Students 2013	Primary School Students 2022	Secondary School Students 2013	Secondary School Students 2022
Slovenian cultural holiday	85.5	77.0	88.9	91.9
Statehood Day	59.9	61.4	58.2	76.9
The return of Primorska to its homeland	54.0	64.3	52.2	75.1
Reformation Day	63.9	65.9	72.7	82.6
Rudolf Maister Day	54.5	66.3	51.2	76.0
Christmas	90.8	94.7	92.3	95.9
Independence and Unity Day	51.0	56.3	48.0	71.3

* Respondents were asked to associate the seven dates given with the names of seven different national holidays. Avoidance and non-response on specific dates have been taken into account as incorrect responses ('valid percentages' are available in the attached summaries).

Sources: Research 'Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022, N(PS)=918, N(SS)=823); Research 'Active Citizenship and Homeland' (Faculty of Social Sciences 2013, N(PS)=888, N(SS)=844).

The civic literacy question asked primary school and secondary school to relate the names of the holidays to the dates of the celebrations of those holidays. We asked both groups of respondents the same question, expecting – based on surveys carried out in previous years – a slightly lower response from primary school pupils. We wanted to find out to what extent young people were familiar with two typical patriotic holidays (we chose Statehood Day, 25 June, and Independence and Unity Day, 26 December), to which we added three well-known holidays (Christmas, Reformation Day and the Slovenian Cultural Day), which are mostly not associated with patriotic themes by the general public *a priori*, although the latter certainly has a strong patriotic connotation, and added two less well-known and more recent holidays (which are also *not* public holidays), i.e. Rudolf Maister Day and the return of Primorska to its homeland, which certainly have some patriotic connotations.

We find that knowledge/recognition of the holidays improves significantly with age; secondary school students are more familiar with the holidays than primary school students. 38.6% of primary school students (and 23.1% of secondary school students) do not know the date on which the Slovenian state celebrates its birthday, and 43.7% of primary school students (and 28.7% of secondary school students) do not know the date of Independence and Unity Day or confuse it with the Statehood Day. Even less impressive is the knowledge of the slightly more recent and less simple holidays, i.e. Rudolf Maister Day and the day of return of Primorska to its homeland. Both groups of young people have the least difficulty

in identifying two well-known holidays (Christmas, Slovenian Cultural Holiday). There are no statistically significant differences between primary school pupils and secondary school student in terms of the environment in which they attend school; female pupils are slightly more familiar with the holidays, although the gender difference is not significant. The expected correlation was also found for students, who also show an extremely strong correlation between knowledge of holidays and type of secondary school, with secondary school students attending gymnasiums having a significantly higher knowledge of holidays.

Based on these responses, we conclude that the knowledge of national holidays related to the period of independence and the gaining of independence of the Republic of Slovenia is rather poor, especially among primary school students, but has slightly improved since 2013 among secondary school students, especially among gymnasium pupils; we have observed that young people often confuse the Statehood Day and the Independence and Unity Day; the lack of knowledge of these two key holidays among primary school pupils is in fact on a par with the lack of knowledge of Rudolf Maister Day and the Day of the return of Primorska to its homeland.

Table 7: Young people’s knowledge of the Slovenian Constitution, political system, human rights, democracy and similar areas in the most general terms (percentage of correct answers)

Claims		Primary School Students	Secondary School Students
(N =)		(918)	(823)
1	The Slovenian Constitution was adopted after Slovenia’s independence.	79.6	77.3
2	The Slovenian Constitution speaks, among other things, about human rights.	81.2	88.9
3	The Slovenian Parliament is made up of the National Assembly, which has 90 members, and the National Council, which has 40 councilors.	67.4	71.0
4	The Government of Slovenia passes laws.	33.1	37.3
5	The Slovenian Parliament elects the Prime Minister and ministers.	51.4	49.0
6	Our fundamental human rights are already guaranteed by international treaties and conventions.	58.8	61.0
7	Any citizen aged 18 or over can vote.	88.8	92.7
8	The President of the Republic of Slovenia is elected in elections.	88.7	93.3
9	In the Republic of Slovenia, church and state are separate.	56.1	81.7
10	Slovenia is a member of the European Union and NATO.	86.6	90.2
11	Slovenia was an independent country after World War I, between 1918 and 1941.	83.1	90.7

Source: Research ‘Strengthening Patriotic and Civic Consciousness among Young People’ (Faculty of Social Sciences 2022).

In the set of questions related to the analysis of civic literacy (Table 7), we tested Slovenian primary and secondary school students' knowledge of the Slovenian Constitution and political system, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and other areas of civic education. Both groups of respondents were asked the same questions, and for each statement they were asked to identify whether the statement was true or false. Analysis of the responses shows three qualitative strands of knowledge. The highest level of knowledge (on average over 80 percent of correct answers) was shown by both groups for the statements 'Any citizen who has reached the age of 18 can participate in elections', 'The President of the Republic of Slovenia is elected at the ballot box', 'The Slovenian Constitution was adopted after Slovenia's independence', 'The Slovenian Constitution speaks, among other things, of human rights', 'Slovenia was an independent state after the First World War, between 1918 and 1941', 'Slovenia is a member of the European Union and NATO'. It can be concluded that primary and secondary school pupils showed a fairly high level of knowledge of the foundations of civic literacy. The statement 'In the Republic of Slovenia, church and state are separate' is also the only statement where there is a significant difference in the knowledge of primary and secondary school pupils.

Both groups showed a medium level of knowledge (on average between 60% and 80% of correct answers) for the statement 'The Slovenian Parliament consists of the National Assembly, which is composed of 90 members, and the National Council, which has 40 councilors' and 'Fundamental human rights are already guaranteed by international treaties and various conventions'.

However, both groups showed a relatively low level of knowledge (below 60% of correct answers) for the statement 'The Slovenian Parliament elects the Prime Minister and ministers', and especially for the (admittedly incorrect) statement 'The Government of Slovenia passes laws'. This statement is not recognised as incorrect by about seven tenths of Slovenian primary school pupils and Slovenian secondary school pupils. The results of the short civic literacy test show that it would be useful to pay a little more attention in both primary and secondary schools to the basics of the functioning of the Slovenian state and the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches of government, which is also crucial for a well-functioning parliamentary democracy.

In addition, we asked respondents a few more questions. We asked them when the first multi-party elections were held in Slovenia. Only 10.5% of primary school students (5.9% less than in the 2013 survey) and 26.4% of secondary school students (19% more than in the 2013 survey) answered this question correctly (April 1990). We further asked young people which political group founded the government that brought about independence. The correct answer (Demos) was selected by 22.2% of primary school students (17% less than in the 2013 survey) and 47.2% of secondary school students (22% more than in the 2013 survey). Interestingly, the proportions of primary school students who

think that Slovenian independence was brought about by Demos (22.2%) and the Socialist Union of Slovenia (21.2%) are almost identical.

We also asked what Slovenians decided in the plebiscite in December 1990. Among the five options,³ the correct answer (on Slovenia's independence and sovereignty) was selected by 72.1% of primary school students and 81.4% of secondary school students, which is slightly more encouraging than in the previous two questions, and slightly better than in the 2013 ACH survey.

The next question asked about the person who headed the Executive Council (government) of the Republic of Slovenia during the independence period (Lojze Peterle). Only 10.2% of primary school students identified the real prime minister of the Republic of Slovenia among the nine names offered (in 2013: 29.9% of primary school students) and 31.4 percent of secondary school students (in 2013: 19.2% of secondary school students).

We also asked for the exact date on which Slovenia declared its independence (25 June 1991 – Statehood Day). 78.6% of primary school students correctly circled this date among the three options (in 2013: 77.2% of primary school students) and 88.1% of secondary school students (in 2013: 80.4% of secondary school students).

The last question on civic literacy asked young people 'how has Slovenia achieved full international recognition'. Here again, the highest proportion of primary school students (40.5%) chose the 'don't know' option, while 27.5% of primary school students and 37.4% of secondary school students found the correct answer (with the recognition of the European Union countries), which is higher in both groups than in the 2013 ACH survey.

Conclusion

Patriotism has been an emotion among us throughout human history. Of course, the content of emotions, their scope and perhaps even the understanding of homeland change, but patriotism is undoubtedly tied to a social community, or its members, and the area that this very community inhabits and thus indirectly understands as home. It has been fought for, died for, protected, worshipped and certainly loved by individual communities. Like most emotions, patriotism can be linked to material existence and therefore knowledge of it is essential. This is even more important in the case of a home or homeland, which does not change and most often follows many generations. On this basis, patriotism can also be linked to knowledge of the history of one's home or homeland. What is being done and how it is being done in Slovenia is at least partly illustrated by the results of a large-scale survey we conducted among Slovenian primary school

3 The options offered were 'to adopt a new constitution', 'to introduce democracy', 'to establish a confederation with Croatia', 'on Slovenia's independence and sovereignty', 'on EU membership' and, of course, 'I don't know'.

pupils and secondary school students after several years of pause. Although the primary focus of this article is on the period of the creation of the Slovenian state, and many other important themes from Slovenian history might need to be defined for the purposes of a comprehensive concept of patriotism, this topic is particularly important. After all, the gaining of independence was the goal towards which the views of the greatest patriots were indirectly, and in many cases directly, directed.

For students, patriotism is a rather abstract concept; as we have seen from the results of the empirical research, young people's interest in topics related to the founding of the Slovenian state and independence is relatively low,⁴ but there is still some interest. Even more worrying is the relatively low level of knowledge displayed by young people when it comes to the processes of independence and the formation of the Slovenian state, as well as when it comes to the functioning of our country and the Slovenian political system – when it comes to so-called civic literacy. The consequences of low levels of patriotism among the youth can lead to increased levels of distrust towards key political institutions, may result in reduced civic engagement, decreased willingness to contribute to the community and challenges in fostering a cohesive society. However, it's essential to note that not all expressions of patriotism are positive, and a critical and informed citizenry can contribute positively to a nation's development.

For many years, researchers have been pointing out that radical changes are needed, but that these changes should truly address the problem in depth (Haček 2019: 438; see also Kukovič et al. 2022); sadly, political decision makers have neglected this educational policy area almost from the independence, and results of this neglect are not surprising. In order to make some improvement, it will be first necessary to come to a common understanding of what patriotism means to us, while consciously avoiding petty politicking, when political forces in society are so eager to abuse patriotic sentiments for their own daily needs. What content will bring young people closer to their homeland? Or maybe these contents are not important at all for modern young people? A wide-ranging professional debate could undoubtedly provide a framework that could then be

4 Of the 18 areas offered, primary school pupils are by far the least interested in the area of 'politics and political participation' (84.8% have little or no interest in this area), with an average response of 1.72 on a scale of 1 'I have no interest' to 4 'I am very interested'. The 'national past and the fate of the nation' and the 'formation of an independent Slovenian state' scored an average of 2.13 and 2.20 respectively. Very similar results are found for final year secondary school students, where 'politics and political participation' also ranks last (77.7% have little or no interest in this area), with an average value of 1.91. The 'national past and the fate of the nation' and the 'formation of the independent Slovenian state' scored slightly higher than the average scores of primary school pupils, 2.27 and 2.28 respectively. Compared to the 2013 ACH survey, interest in all three of these areas has fallen further among both primary and secondary school pupils. On the other hand, both groups of respondents are most interested in 'friendship' and in 'a job or profession' (the mean values for primary school pupils are 3.56 and 3.47, respectively; for secondary school students the mean values are 3.57 and 3.55, respectively). See Kukovič et al. (2022).

translated into attractive teaching content for existing or new subjects, with the help of didactic theorists and, ultimately, practitioners – teachers. And of course, this content will need to be continuously updated – because the achievements of our homeland have been and will continue to be repeated in the years to come.

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