

## DEBATE AS A PRACTICE OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

*This contribution aims to analyse the spread of Debate as a learning methodology in various European and global contexts, also considering the different debate protocols existing. The study considers the following countries: Italy, England, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Romania. Each national debating society aims to spread the practice of regulated debate as an opportunity to promote dialogue and active citizenship. Fundamental is the development of the ability to assert one's own ideas in a democratic manner, listening and accepting to different ideas.*

**KEYWORDS:** debate, active citizenship, Europe, dialogue, democracy

### 1 Introduction

The debate as the “art of knowing how to speak” was born with great Greek and Latin figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian up to the Middle Ages in which there was the first use of the debate for educational purposes with teaching methods of the *lectio* and of the *disputatio* (Monaco, Casertano, Nuzzo, 1997; Conte, Pianezzola, 2010; Russo, 2021). The regulated debate as a teaching/learning method was born in England and its basic elements are cooperative learning and peer education; in fact, the aim is to work together to achieve goals that are common to all members of the group. The Debate is intended as a “gym for democracy” (De Conti, Giangrande, 2017, p.XIII) through which it is possible to develop not only curiosity in the learning environment, but also creative and divergent thinking; the Debate represents “a type of regulated dialogic interaction in which several interlocutors, divided into teams with incompatible points of view, try to make a jury adhere to their position by convincing or persuading it, through arguments, of preferability of their position” (De Conti, Giangrande, 2017, p.1). Recent studies (De Conti, Giangrande, 2017; Sanchez, 2018; Refrigeri, Russo, 2020; Cinganotto, Mosa, Panzavolta, 2021; Russo, 2021; Russo, 2022) have shown how much the Debate favors the development of transversal skills, useful in multiple areas and contexts of the individual’s life, but, above all, for the achievement of lifelong learning. The regulated debate allows a type of education whose center of gravity is represented by the student, therefore a type of learner-centered, active and constructive learning, while the teacher acts exclusively as a mediator and facilitator in the construction of knowledge. Charles Bonwell and James Eison (1991) affirm that a teaching technique focused on the figure of the students is vital thanks to the impact it has on their level of learning; it is precisely the students who favor a type of lesson in which to be an active part.

The Debate, therefore, becomes a reason for student to grow as thinking individuals (reflective and contextualized learning) and is “intended as a real training that requires constancy and application so that the structure of the format [...] and its argumentative logics are made transparent to leave room for the full protagonism of contents and arguments in a virtuous combination of form and substance” (Cinganotto, Mosa, Panzavolta, 2021). The

Debate, thanks to its particular didactic characteristics and the implications of transversal skills, has seen a great diffusion in several countries, contexts and according to different debate formats.

## 2 THE DEBATE FORMATS

A Debate protocol, as De Conti states (2013, p.112), “is the set of objectives, rules and activities that structures, regulates and characterizes the debate itself, allowing a linear and complete development”; the various formats differ from each other according to structural and secondary characteristics, such as the number of team members, the time to devote to individual constructive interventions, the function of the interventions themselves, the time dedicated to the preparation of the arguments, the evaluation and underlying pedagogical objectives (De Conti, 2013). Furthermore, “according to the protocol [...] the competences promoted in the students also vary: by modifying each of its characteristics it is possible to intervene on the skills that the students will have to focus and exercise” (De Conti, 2022, p.45). There is also a key element present in all debate protocols, characterized by fair-play, as there is a tendency to reward “compliance with the rules and severely sanction their infringement to promote an ethos of critical discussion [...] considering the counterpart not an opponent to be defeated, [...] but as a trusted partner in the collaborative search for a critical perspective on the world (Giangrande, 2019, p. 26-27).

Christopher Sanchez (2018) lists and describes all the actors involved in a Debate:

- debaters (also called speakers or players), the main protagonists, who must demonstrate to the jury their skills in the categories provided for in the evaluation of the debates;
- chairperson or timekeeper, moderators of the debates;
- judges, who are tasked with providing constructive feedback to debaters at the end of the debate. This represents the most formative aspect within a regulated debate, “providing the appropriate suggestions [...] learning and develop the skills of self-control and self-regulation” (De Conti, 2015, p.35);
- coach, the figure who helps debaters in the construction of arguments.

### 2.1 *World Schools Debate*

The World Schools Debate (WSD) format originates from the World Schools Debate Championship, an international competition organized for the first time in 1988 in Australia and is currently the most widely used format internationally. The directives for the evaluation of the debates according to this format have only been indicated since 1995 (Giangrande, 2019). The typical motions of this protocol are mainly of a political, economic nature, relating to human rights; each team, alternately, can argue for a total of four interventions and the first three last 8 minutes, while the last, the repeat speech, lasts 4 minutes. Constructive interventions in the first and last minute are defined as "protected", as the opposing team cannot speak or ask questions (De Conti, Giangrande, 2017, p. 20-21). In unprotected minutes, however, the speakers of the opposite team can ask to ask a question, the point of information (POI). These questions are fundamental as they require active listening to all arguments by each debater (De Conti, Giangrande, 2018).

## **2.2 *Lincoln-Douglas***

It is a type of protocol associated mostly with philosophical issues and ethical values. Logical skills are set in motion and the organization is like a court, therefore, each team is made up of a single element and includes competitions in which the same issue is debated for several months, and each team must also be able to support position. opposite (Fine, 2011). At the basis of this format is the desire to increase the ability of debaters to understand and analyse human, critical and analytical thinking values (Giangrande, 2019).

## **2.3 *Patavina Libertas***

This protocol is typical of the University of Padua and its name comes from the motto of the University "*Universa Universis Patavina Libertas*". This format has the following pattern that must be followed by both teams: prologue, first argument, second argument, pause, reply, epilogue. For each team there are six participating students and 6 minutes for each constructive intervention.

## **2.4 *British Parliamentary Debate***

This format usually involves four teams of which each is composed of two elements. It debates on issues of a political, economic and international law nature. The protocol arises from the desire to imitate the discussion methods present in the House of Common.

## **2.5 *Karl Popper Format***

The Karl Popper protocol requires that the participants in the debate work in groups of three and look for both the pro and the contra sides of each motion. It focuses more attention on the educational aspect and pedagogical objectives, giving greater importance to the content and critical analysis of the motion rather than the style.

## **2.6 *Global Young G7***

The Global Young G7 is a type of format that provides for the simulation by a student group of the negotiation work of the G7 through the development of greater "global awareness", therefore awareness of the surrounding world and the dynamics that affect it. The peculiarity of the format is that it is inspired by the Model United Nations format, which consists of simulations of the sessions of the Parliament of the various United Nations bodies and provides for the participation of 3 children from each G7 member country who have a good knowledge of the English language. (Cinganotto, Mosa, Panzavolta, 2021).

# **3 WORLD AND EUROPEAN SCENARIOS**

A few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1994 the Open Society Institute (now called The Open Society Foundations - OSF) launched its first online debate program. In 1999 the International Debate Education Association (IDEA <http://idebate.org/>) was founded in Amsterdam, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and democracy globally, supporting dialogue and active citizenship and is currently made up of a network of members who are involved in the organization of debate events and tournaments for young people, with activities in over 50 languages and in more than 50 countries. Other offices were opened in 2001 in the United States and the United Kingdom (London), in 2012 in the Balkans (Skopje, Macedonia), in 2013 in Asia (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) and in 2014 in the Middle East and North Africa (Tunis, Tunisia). This is not the only association that aims to

spread the debate around the world; we also remember the Association for Global Debate (AGD <http://www.agdebate.com/>), the World Debate Institute in Vermont, the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA <http://www.speechanddebate.org/>) founded in 1925 in the USA, initially called the National Forensic League, and the Lawrence Debate Association. Gradually, the regulated debate spread to many countries, such as Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain; today it is practiced above all in Asia with China, India, Singapore and Australia. In some it has become deeply rooted, with the development of associations designed precisely with the aim of bringing the population into contact with the world of debate.

### **3.1 *The origins of the debate in England***

England is the cradle of the Debate; there are many associations and organizations founded for the diffusion of the debate and above all it is the nation that has the longest relationship with these associations. We remember the English Speaking Union (ESU <http://www.esu.org/>) which was founded in 1918 by Sir Evelyn Wrench; it was immediately open to both men and women. In 1927, ESU bought Dartmouth House in the Mayfar district, which was inaugurated the following year by Stanley Baldwin, with the aim of using it as a club. In 1928, eleven British students left for the first time for America, offering them the opportunity to spend a year away from their country for study reasons. In 1945, the ESU pledged to further promote relations between the Commonwealth and the United States through the application of cultural exchanges, scholarships, educational articles and debates.

The first ESU office in Europe was founded in 1976 in Belgium and the following year the Charity Commission recognized it as an educational charity. The first Public Speaking competition took place in 1981 and saw the start of a competition between Australia, England and Wales. In 2004, the doors of the Debate Academy, the ESU summer school, were opened for the first time. Since 2019 all UK primary schools have been given the opportunity to take part in the Discover Debating program for free.

### **3.2 *Spread to other countries***

In Bulgaria there is a debate association called the Bulgarian Debate Association (BDA <http://www.debate.bg/>) founded in 2011 by representatives of the Technical University of Sofia to try to disseminate the debate within society starting from schools. It is a non-governmental organization that annually organizes training courses, tournaments and debate meetings. In recent years the BDA has been trying to unite debate clubs across the country with more than 5 members to achieve an increase in the development of hearing practice.

Since 1994, the Estonian Debating Society (<http://debate.ee/en>) has been founded in Estonia, a non-profit educational association which brings together students, teachers, debate coaches, trainers and volunteers. Most of the activities are carried out in either Estonian or Russian and the most widely used debate protocols are the Karl Popper Format and the British Parliamentary. There is a subdivision into three branches: youth organization for education, social training company for companies and public and private institutions, notice the argument with the aim of encouraging the improvement of the level of reasoning in all forms of social dialogue.

In Finland, Debate is widely used in the university context, thanks to the Finnish Debate Association (FINDA, <http://debate.fi/>), which was founded in 2015 by some debate companies belonging to different universities. Many teams from Finland have participated in international debate championships, such as the European University Debating Championships (EUDC) and the World University Debating Championship (WUDC); the

most widely used and practiced format is the British Parliamentary. FINDA organizes training courses with the aim of improving the argumentative ability of its citizens.

In 1993, a debate association was founded in France, the French Debate Association (FDA, <http://frenchdebatingassociation.fr/>); the rules of the association are related to the procedures of the House of Commons, therefore also here of English inspiration. The FDA organizes tournaments that involve teams consisting of at least one manager and no more than eight members per group. Each team has four days to prepare the arguments to be presented during the debate, while for the final of the tournaments the preparation time is 7 days. For the evaluation of the debates, the FDA provides five criteria: arguments (contents and research carried out, relevance), form (the presentation of the arguments, respect for times), teamwork (team spirit, collaboration, respect for roles), engagement (interaction between teams, quality of rebuttals), star quality (body language, facial expressions, gestures).

In Germany there is the Debating Society Germany e. V, one of the most active and well-structured debate associations at international level based in Stuttgart. It was founded in 1996 with the aim of carrying out debates on issues of a political, social, economic and ethical nature. The association coordinates the application of the regulated debate within schools, also dealing with the supply of materials and financing for the premises. The activities are carried out to achieve and develop methodical skills (research, speaking skills, improvement of self-esteem, communication skills) and intercultural skills (tolerance, free exchange of views, diplomacy).

In Greece there is the Debating Society of Greece which is made up of a group of debate coaches with the aim of providing appropriate training to students in universities, schools and community centers. It was born with the idea of wanting to contribute to creating a culture based on dialogue in a historical moment in which the economic crisis and its consequences have led to a split in the social fabric and an increase in violent demonstrations within the nation. The association supports university debate clubs by providing useful educational materials, organizing tournaments and workshops.

The Asociaci debatních klubů (ADK, <http://debatovani.cz/web/>) is the organization that aims to disseminate the debate in the Czech Republic; it is often used to improve French, Russian, German and Spanish students. Some debate tournaments are also organized for primary schools, for children with special needs and for secondary schools and universities. The Open Society Fund Prague introduced the Karl Popper protocol in 1995 and managed and financed the program until 1999, when the ADK was born.

The Za in proti association was founded in Slovenia (ZIP, <http://www.zainproti.com/web/>); it is a non-governmental non-profit and deals with the promotion and development of debate in primary, secondary and universities. It was founded in 1998 from a debate program initiated in 1996 by the then Open Society Institute. Today it brings together over 50 clubs operating across all grades of school and around 1000 students are actively involved each year. The association aims to increase the level of cultural dialogue in the country by involving young people in this activity, with the aim of achieving a better world and society.

### **3.3 *The Debate in Italy***

In Italy, too, great strides have been made in recent years in the desire to spread and adopt the Debate as a teaching methodology. It all started in 2008 from meeting young debaters in an international forum organized in Busto Arsizio (De Conti, Giangrande, 2017). The following year the ITE Enrico Tosi planned an experimentation of application of the regulated debate also within the Italian panorama, with the help and collaboration of the Trafalgar School of Montreal and in 2012 of the Padma Seshadri Bhavan Senior Secondary School of Chennai (India). The initial project met with great success and great adhesion and

in 2013 the WeDebate Lombardia network was born and the Enrico Tosi school held the reins. The Network is supported by the *Giuseppe Merlini Cultura Formazione e Innovazione* Foundation, which has as its mission the desire to promote culture among young people, with an eye to the world of education. L'INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation, Educational Research), the oldest research center of the MIUR, headquartered in Florence, together with the *Avanguardie Educative* movement, aimed at analysing and observing the most significant experiences of transformation of the system scholastic, has initiated manoeuvres to disseminate this methodology throughout the peninsula. For some years now the Provincial Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation (IPRASE) of Trento, in collaboration with the Faculty of Law of the University of Trento, the Municipality of Rovereto and the SFI Trentino-Alto Adige, have started a project from name "To the sound of words", which provides, in line with the idea of the regulated debate, tournaments based on the ability to create valid arguments on topics of a social and civic nature. The debates are held not only in Italian, but also in English and German.

### **3.4 Debate associations in Romania**

Asociația Română de Dezbateri Oratorie și Retorică (ARDOR, <http://ardor.org.ro/>) is the Romanian association founded in 1998 to promote debates as an educational tool for high school students. It is organized in a network of 100 discussion clubs, which are coordinated by six member federations: ARDOR Muntenia, ANED, Asociația Cluburilor de Dezbateri din Vest, AES, ACORD, ARGO Debate. The action plan provides for the accessibility of education programs to regulated debate for all students who want to take part, also because this practice manages to promote education for democracy, which is neglected or treated only privately in the Romanian education system. Turneul Campionilor în Dezbateri takes place every year in Bucharest, a competition that includes a debate tournament between the best Romanian debaters. The "Debate Education Network 2.0" project was launched in 2018, moving in three directions: increasing the quality of debates in Romania, increasing the financial sustainability of the association, maintaining relations with the Ministry of Education and school inspectors, improve the productivity of the ARDOR network.

## **4 Conclusions**

The regulated debate finds wide acceptance in several cultural and political contexts, as it is considered at an educational and didactic level one of the fundamental tools for the development of democracy and critical thinking. It is also used on a large scale for the teaching of civic education, precisely because of its flexible and transversal characteristics. Following the study of the reference literature and the various formats and associations of debate existing on the European and global territory, it is necessary that the existing protocols adapt to the needs of the reference class group. It is possible to create a mixture of multiple formats and multiple ways of using the debate, always keeping the fundamental characteristics of a good debate firmly in place: active listening, the ability to analyse and the active construction of one's knowledge. A solution was identified by De Conti (2022) in the modular conception of the protocol through which "the teacher re-appropriates his design and creative nature as he is free to design, in full autonomy, the format through which to carry out the teaching", providing a greater flexibility according to the needs of users who are involved in a debate.

### Acknowledgments.

This work is supported by Agora University from project POSDRU/161/2.1/G/137526.

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