

Civic Education and Competences for Engaging Citizens in Democracies

Murray Print and Dirk Lange (Eds.)



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CIVIC EDUCATION AND COMPETENCES FOR ENGAGING CITIZENS
IN DEMOCRACIES

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Civic Education and Competences for Engaging Citizens in Democracies

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy depends on all of us: the price of liberty is not just ‘eternal vigilance’, as Abraham Lincoln said, but eternal activity. (Sir Bernard Crick, 2008)

Modern democracies face many challenges including the ability to sustain themselves particularly in times of crises. Over the past few years Europe has faced many challenges to sustaining democracy across a diverse range of cultures, countries and political traditions. Yet a common theme to all democracies in Europe is the need for active, informed citizens who will sustain democracy.

In acknowledging that the future of their democracy rests with educating the young, European societies have engaged in some form of educative experience to prepare their future democratic citizens. Evidence abounds that young citizens, though generally supportive of institutions such as parliament and the courts, are distrustful of politicians and political parties. They are supportive of the idea of and need for government, but invariably perceive governments as unresponsive, inflexible and ideologically driven by political party ideologies and special interests.

Many elements of traditional representative democratic processes are ignored by the young potentially ‘preparing’ them for poor citizenship. Young people vote less than previously, rarely join political parties, don’t contact politicians and they don’t support them at election times. What competences do young Europeans need to be active citizens in the 21st Century?

An invited research symposium drew together leading civic and political educators from Europe as well as social scientists and educational administrators to address the above question through two key issues:

1. Identify key competencies required for active citizenship of young people in Europe of the future.
2. Translate those competencies to school-based activities in the form of curricular and pedagogical strategies.

To address these issues a group of invited researchers participated in a three-day symposium in Hannover, Germany funded through a program by the Volkswagen Stiftung. The participants then engaged in a modified Delphi Method (explained later in this book) to determine the amount of consensus achieved on the competences. This book is about exploring what those competences are and how they relate to civic and citizenship education in schools, particularly in the context of Europe.

The task of the participants for this book was to prepare, in conjunction with their participation in the symposium and the Delphi, a chapter on an aspect of

INTRODUCTION

competences for European citizens in the context of civic education in European schools. The book has been divided into two sections: the first contains an overview of significant issues addressing youth participation in politics. The second section includes several approaches to civic and citizenship education from an education perspective.

To commence the publication Gerhard Himmelmann helps set the scene through his chapter titled “Competences for teaching, learning and living democratic citizenship.” He argues that the work of the shift symposium reflected two key factors: First, the shift within the field of citizenship education towards active democratic citizenship as a preferred outcome and second, a new understanding of democratic theory useful to citizenship education.

In Chapter 2 Jan van Deth from Mannheim grounds the notion of citizenship in the participation of citizens in everyday life. He argues from a set of propositions that participation of citizens should be enhanced and elaborated through citizenship education in order to strengthen democracy

The experience of working in the field of competences for some time is clearly evident in the chapter from Bryony Hoskins. Provocatively, Hoskins asks in Chapter 3: “What does democracy need from its citizens?” In this chapter she identifies the qualities needed for active citizenship with a focus on the explicitness of the required values. In the process she reviews key models of citizenship to produce an inventory of civic competence that explicitly states the values needed for active citizenship.

In Chapter 4 Murray Print addresses the key issue of what is a competence and second, what competences are needed for citizens in a democracy. Reviewing the literature he identifies three main groupings revolving around knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and dispositions. Research in the field has identified some areas of agreement within these groupings as to what should constitute the components of a ‘competent citizen’.

Germ Janmaat from the Institute of Education, London University has critically reflected on competencies in Chapter 5. He has identified the contested nature of civic competences and he employs the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study to help make his case. He also makes suggestions for citizenship education in the light of the issues raised.

In Chapter 6 Dirk Lange and Holger Onken explore the effects of social characteristics and social psychological factors on political attitudes of young people and their civic consciousness. On the basis of a survey with about 1200 respondents they show that socioeconomic status has major impact on attitudes and consciousness. Another outcome of the analyses implicates great importance of personal expectations for the future and aspired educational achievement on political interest.

Part II examines applications of the concept of competences to aspects of civic education in schools. In Chapter 7, Andreas Petrik from Martin-Luther-University, Halle-Wittenberg, links an alternative approach to competences with citizenship education and then links with knowledge, skills and values required for those

competences. He then applies these concepts to the pedagogical strategy of simulations to build democratic learning.

Another German educator who argues for teaching for democratic learning is Sibylle Reinhardt. She argues that democracies need specific teaching strategies to help students become competent democratic citizens. In Chapter 8 she draws upon the Beutelsbach Consensus of the 1970s for strategies to teach citizenship education including three basic principles for democratic learning.

In Chapter 9 Beatrice Ziegler, co-director of the Zentrum für Demokratie, Aarau ZDA (Center for Democracy, Aarau) examines the relationship between competences, stabilization in democracies and self-empowerment. She argues that competences in citizenship education are linked to the disciplines and then modeled for the school curriculum. Ziegler posits eight provocative ideas about the nature of citizenship education, distinguished from civic education, based on competences.

Using critical incidents for the assessment of citizenship competence is a challenging task taken on by Hermann Abs from the University of Giessen and Tina Pyka, a postgraduate student. In Chapter 10 they apply the critical incident methodology devised a half century ago to modern issues in citizenship education.

The final chapter by Murray Print reports on the use of the Delphi Method as a research tool in this project. The Delphi was modified in two key ways: First through an intensive symposium and publication requirement of all participants, and second through the use of modern technology namely the internet and email, to conduct the process of the Delphi development of statements.

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PART I

COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS

GERHARD HIMMELMANN

1. COMPETENCES FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND LIVING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

This chapter would like to draw attention to two basic aspects addressed by the symposium in Hannover. As such it serves as an introduction to the remaining chapters in this book. First, the shift of concerns and concepts in the field of citizenship education towards active democratic citizenship and second, the new understanding of the underlying theory of democracy useful for democratic citizenship education.

CHANGE OF EPOCH

In the last ten to fifteen years we have witnessed some remarkable efforts to 'revise' or 'revitalize' the tradition of citizenship education within schools and education systems. There have even been demands to 'reinvent' or 'recivilize' civic education. Often they deplored the still existing neglect and disregard in the field of citizenship education and asked for a new and specified form of "democratic citizenship education" beyond just "civics," for a new way of "teaching democracy" beyond teaching institutional political settings or a new "education of, for and through democracy" beyond mere teacher-centered instruction in politics.

Thus, the European Union pointed out the leading term of "active citizenship," the Council of Europe highlighted the model of "democratic citizenship" and the Eurydice-network pleaded for the guiding term of "responsible citizenship." Since 1995 many countries around the world have passed new educational laws and new national curricula confirming democratic citizenship education.

All these efforts and initiatives reflect – in each special way – the disturbing developments in the real world of politics, economics and ethics as well as religious fundamentalism.

The collapse of the European communist regimes set up the agenda in 1989 and thereby deeply challenged eastern as well as western countries. Other factors were the extension of globalization in economics and cultures, new forms of media communication and new risks of terrorism, of social fragmentation, of racism and of xenophobia. All these developments caused insecurities and ambiguities in the moral, ethical and civic self-interpretation of western democracies – though they still serve as models for democratization of the newly developing countries.

The new affirmations of democratic citizenship education claim on the one hand to be a strong response to the far-reaching changes in politics and economics since

1989 on the other hand they want to meet the undesired shortcomings and deficits of our own traditional political, social and cultural life as well. In fact, the central point is: we are in search of new forms of social cohesion – balancing individualism and common needs, preserving individual human rights as well as public security of the society as a whole.

The changing use of terminology in the field of citizenship education correspond to the changes in concerns and concepts of citizenship – as conceived to meet actual and future challenges of democratic societies. Over and beyond the different vocabulary and approaches the focus of modern citizenship education has shifted from mere state-centered, nation-centered or even narrow political “instruction” to a broader “citizenship education,” more specially, to a new “education for democratic citizenship.”

This development reflects two types of conceptual change in civic education, firstly, the transition from an approach in which the main priority in teaching was knowledge and instruction – particularly about local, regional or national political institutions – to an approach that emphasizes personal attitudes and individual, moral and social behavior as well as common values and dispositions of the citizens themselves – showing due regard for human rights and democratic “living together” in a world full of conflicts. Secondly, the change mentioned brings about a considerable extension of contents in this field of education. No aspect of community life is considered being irrelevant to citizenship education – though political institutions and the process of democratic decision making in politics still remain of high priority. But the call for democratic citizenship education highlights at the same time the moral and affective approach often neglected in citizenship education. This demand goes far beyond the school and beyond a single subject in school to which citizenship education has traditionally been confined.

Instead of fostering passive and affirmative learning we find emphasis on active, social, cooperative and critical learning. Instead of call for more obedience and loyalty to the ruling powers, new concepts strive for experimental and practical, for social, moral and responsible self-government and participation of the learners in the society they belong to. Instead of nationalistic, patriotic, ethnic, tribal, racial or even mono-religious learning we find the call for intercultural and environmental education, of peace education, moral and social as well as media learning. Instead of accumulation and testing of mere knowledge, future citizenship education should stress equal efforts on (1) democratic knowledge and understanding, (2) democratic values, attitudes and common awareness. These competencies should be accompanied by (3) practical skills like problem solving, conflict solution, service learning, entrepreneurial or project learning and civic engagement.

So we find the triplets of competences as follows:

- Cognitive social and affective competencies,
- knowledge, skills and understanding,
- knowledge skills and attitudes,
- knowledge and understanding skills and attitudes and values and dispositions,
- knowledge (what/about) awareness (why) and skills (how).

COMPETENCES FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND LIVING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Many concepts of modern citizenship education follow not only a forementioned triplet of competences to be achieved but also try to set up:

- more or less detailed *content* standards and
- variable *performance* standards.

These standards should cover at least

- *four key stages* with each specified focus.

The latter is evidently necessary to relate the established standards of learning to the talents, abilities and capabilities of the learners in different classes from primary school to secondary school I, secondary school II and even college. In literature the least discussed problem has been that of

- standards for teachers.

RELATED THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

The rising international interest in education for democracy has stimulated fresh thinking including the question what the essential elements of good education for democracy are.

I repeat in this paper an interpretation of democracy already published in 2001 adopted by the Council for Cultural Cooperation (CDCC) of the Council of Europe (CE) in 2004.

The first topic of education for democracy is a systematic and continual emphasis on teaching and learning “knowledge of democracy” set up by a democratic constitution, confirmed by human rights and organized by a democratic government – based on the sovereignty of the people. This includes people’s representatives in government elected in free, fair, open, equal and competitive elections. It includes the rule of law, the rule of majority and the protection of minorities. And it includes the separation and the balance of powers, effective party-system etc.

This institutional interpretation of democracy is a rather thin, a minimal or an elementary interpretation of democracy. It concentrates – important enough – on the “high” institutions of democracy and the democratic procedures of political decision making on the different levels of local, regional and national politics.

It may be appropriate to describe these institutions and procedures of political democracy by the term “Democracy as a form of government.”

But serious interpretation cannot interpret and teach democracy without including the broader level of society. This broader interpretation of democracy should include the social pre-conditions underlying the institutional democracy. These preconditions can be identified as a pluralistic system of parties, interest groups or civic initiatives; as a free, pluralistic and manifold media-system; as a broad public sphere of civil society activities; as a social moderated system of free

market economy; as a peaceful conflict system in the industrial relations sector and at last some self government in social security systems.

It may again be appropriate to name these social preconditions of political democracy by the term “Democracy a form of society.” Political democracy cannot really and enduringly function without the basis of a democratic form of society. Effective democratic government depends on democratic society.

In third position we should remember that neither democracy as a form of government nor democracy as a form of society will really and enduringly function without the basic human factor that combines democracy with the personal attitudes and relationships of the citizens themselves. In this respect civic virtues and responsibilities come into sight. Democracy as a practical and daily “living together” of citizens needs democratic habits and dispositions as there are tolerance, courage, fairness, charity, compassion for others, civility and respect in dealing with others. These characteristics of behaviour constitute the moral of democratic citizenship and of democracy as a whole.

It may again be appropriate to characterize this third level of democracy by the term “Democracy as a form of living.”

I should stress: none of these levels of democracy should be over- or underestimated, none level should be isolated or separated from the others. These three levels or forms of democracy can easily be transformed into a concept of teaching democracy on primary, secondary I and secondary II level – with differentiated emphasis for competencies or aims of Democracy Learning. These competencies should combine:

- self-learning and self-competence with focus on the primary level,
- social learning and social competence with focus on the secondary I level, and
- political learning and democratic competence with focus on the secondary II level.

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APPENDIX

- Forms of democracy, application to citizenship education

COMPETENCES FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND LIVING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

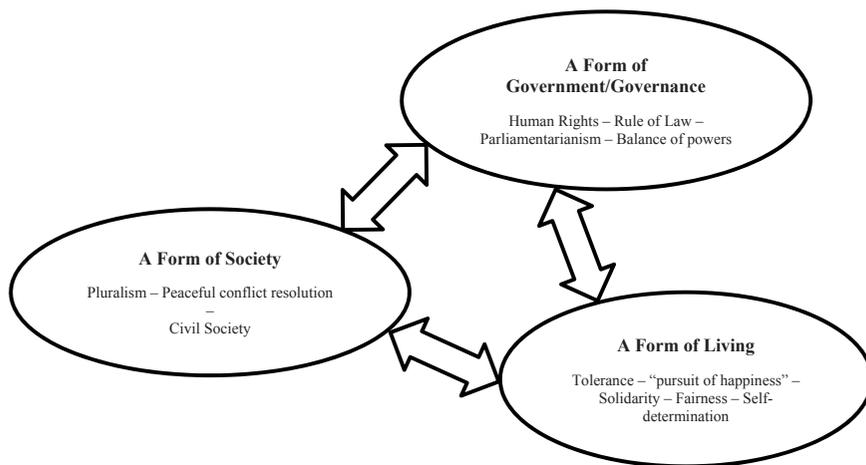


Figure 1. Democratic competencies in the educational context. Source: Duerr, K. (2004). *The school – A democratic learning community*. Council of Europe, DTIV/EDU/CIT (2003) 23 Final, Strasbourg, 26 April (pp. 17-19)

Table 1. Forms of democracy as elements of the learning process. Source: Duerr, K. (2004). *The school – A democratic learning community*. Council of Europe, DTIV/EDU/CIT (2003) 23 Final, Strasbourg, 26 April (pp. 17-19)

Democracy as a form of living	... a form of society	... a form of governance
Aims of Democracy Learning			
↓School levels	“Self-Learning“: self-competence	“Social Learning“: social competence	“Political Learning“: democratic competence
Primary level	xxx	xx	x
Secondary I level	xx	xxx	x
Secondary II level	x	x	xxx

x = Degree of Focus

JAN W. VAN DETH

2. CITIZENSHIP AND THE CIVIC REALITIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Democracy doesn't deserve its name without citizens' participation. Ever since Pericles this claim has been defended and discussed. The question is not *whether* citizens should be involved in democratic decision-making processes, but *how much* engagement and participation is required for a vibrant democracy. Citizens' involvement, however, cannot be taken for granted but depends heavily on resources, motivations, and social contacts. Orientations and activities of citizens that strengthen democracy and which, in turn, are strengthened by democratic experiences are summarized under the label *active citizenship*. The Council of Europe defines active citizenship briefly as the power of people "... to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life."¹ Citizens cannot fulfil these ambitious tasks adequately without specific competences; that is, citizens need to have "... a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values" at their disposal enabling them "... to become an active citizen" (Hoskins, Barber, Nijlen et al., 2011, p. 84). Extensive programmes for "citizen education" have been developed in order to promote these competencies in many countries in recent years.

Empirical research shows considerable distinctions between the ideals of active citizenship and active citizens on the one hand and the political orientations and activities of average citizens in advanced democracies on the other. In this contribution some of these empirical findings are briefly summarized in order to link citizenship with "the civic realities of everyday life" (Kennedy, 1997, p. 3). Of the extensive list of political knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and activities required for active citizens the focus here is on norms of citizenship and political and social participation as important attitudinal and behavioural aspects of citizenship respectively. What images do citizens have of citizenship? How are norms of citizenship distributed in democracies? Still, not much empirical information is available to answer these questions. The picture looks better for social and political participation. Yet available evidence on political orientations and behaviour is strongly focused on liberal democracies in Europe and North America. The last part of this chapter discusses briefly the various opportunities and challenges for "citizenship education" with respect to the empirical findings presented.

NORMS OF CITIZENSHIP

Normative aspects of citizenship from a citizens' perspective can be explored by looking at the support for so-called 'norms of citizenship.' These norms refer to the images of a 'good citizen,' which is characterized by support for such divergent norms as being active in public life, being open and tolerant towards other people, and showing solidarity. Support for more practical norms such as paying taxes and fees, and obeying laws and regulations also can be considered features of a 'good citizen.' The question is not whether people indeed are tolerant or actually obey the laws. Instead, attention is paid here to normative considerations about the attitudes and activities of citizens in democratic political systems (cf. van Deth, 2007).

Which norms characterize a 'good citizen'? Are these norms widely spread among the citizenries of mass democracies? Pamela Johnston Conover and her collaborators relied on focus groups to explore ideas about citizenship among British and American citizens (Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991, 2004; Conover, Leonard, & Searing, 1993). The results of these studies provide very interesting information about the ways citizens think about citizenship and the language they use to articulate normative ideas in this area. A 'good citizen' understands his or her rights mainly as civil rights (US) or social rights (Britain) and does not consider political rights to be equally important (both countries). Duties are mainly conceived as responsibilities required to preserve civil life. A 'good citizen' surely values social engagement and active involvement in community matters, but citizens do not agree about the reasons for these activities. This 'liberal' understanding of citizenship is remarkably limited since citizens' rights and duties are mainly understood as individual rights and duties. However, it should be noted that more sophisticated arguments about the need for social concern and collective actions are also frequently mentioned by the British and American discussants.

As Conover and her collaborators showed support for norms of citizenship can be fruitfully explored by using focus groups. By definition this approach does not provide information about the distribution of support for various aspects of norms of citizenship in mass democracies. Only representative surveys and structured interviews can convey this kind of evidence. Here, too, the amount of available empirical evidence is rather disappointing. Major examples of international studies covering at least some aspects of norms of citizenship among the populations of democratic politics are the Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy project (CID) and the first wave of the European Social Survey (ESS).² Both studies are based on national representative samples. In these studies, from the beginning a straightforward question directs the attention of the respondents to the contested meaning of the concept citizenship as well as to his or her personal opinions about the 'good citizen:'

As you know, there are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. I would therefore like to ask you to examine the characteristics listed on the card. Looking at what *you personally* think, how important is it

On the showcard used a number of aspects of a ‘good citizen’ such as “... to show solidarity with people who are worse off than yourself” or “... to be active in organisations” are listed. Respondents express their opinion for each aspect on an 11-point scale ranging from “very unimportant” (0) to “very important” (10).

The results obtained with these questions are summarized in Figure 1 for a number of European countries. In spite of the use of different items and different sets of countries the results of the two studies are remarkably similar. Autonomy and law obeying are unreservedly supported by about 70 per cent of the respondents, whereas voting and solidarity are considered to be important by about 60 per cent. On the other hand we see that the Tocquevillean idea that engagement in voluntary associations is an important aspect of being a ‘good citizen,’ is supported by about one out of every four respondents only. Even more remarkable is the clear lack of support for the idea that a ‘good citizen’ should be active in politics: only ten per cent of the respondents support the norm that a ‘good citizen’ is – generally speaking – a political active citizen beyond voting.

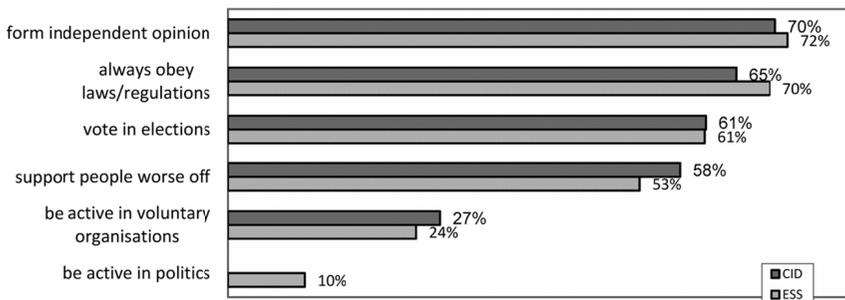


Figure 1. Aspects of being a ‘good citizen’ (CID and ESS-1). Percentages of respondents scoring 8, 9 or 10. Weighted with design weights and weights for country size

As Figure 1 makes clear, in the eyes of many citizens a ‘good citizen’ is someone who visits the ballot box – not someone who is engaged in public and political affairs. Representative surveys show that large majorities of citizens in democratic polities support norms and obligations related to solidarity, obeying laws, and autonomy both from an individual and a societal perspective. Much less support is available for the participatory aspects of citizenship; that is. Apparently, people are reluctant to place much value on both social and on political participation as core aspects of being a ‘good citizen’ (cf. Dekker & Hart, 2002; Rossteutscher, 2004, p. 184; Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005, pp. 242-245; van Deth, 2007). Analysing similar outcomes for a number of European countries Denters and van der Kolk conclude that “... the general statement of a good citizen being one who is active in politics is, on average, least supported in all European countries” (2008, p. 138). The fact that especially political activities beyond voting are seen as a rather unimportant aspect of citizenship is also reflected in the reasons

US-political activists give for political inactivity: the neutral response “I don’t have enough time” is followed immediately by “I should take care of myself and my family before I worry about the community or nation” and “the important things in my life have nothing to do with politics” (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 129). Dalton, on the other hand, stresses the rise of “Engaged Citizenship” as opposed to “Duty-based Citizenship” among American citizens, but his results also clearly show the lowest levels of support for “be active in social or political associations” and for “choose products for political, ethical or environmental reasons” (Dalton, 2008, p. 30). All these findings suggest that many citizens support a remarkably restricted conception of citizenship – or at least a conception that is far away from ideas presented by political theorists from Pericles and Plato to Benjamin Barber and officials at the Council of Europe.

PARTICIPATION

As mentioned, democracy does not deserve its name without citizens’ participation. In all established democracies the modes of participation expanded rapidly since the 1950s, reflecting the growing relevance of government and politics for citizens in modern societies, the rise of skills and competences among citizens, as well as a continuing blurring of the distinction between political and non-political spheres. In the 1940s and 1950s political participation was mainly restricted to casting a vote and campaign activities. By the early 1960s it was broadly understood as activities concerned with campaigning by politicians and parties, and contacts between citizens and public officials. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the modes were further expanded due to the growing relevance of community groups and direct contacts between citizens, public officials, and politicians. Besides, the idea was challenged that political participation only consisted of widely accepted forms: protest and rejection joined the domain of participation as activities used by all kind of grass-root groups and social movements. In the 1990s the disappearing borderline between political and non-political spheres and the revival of neo-Tocquevillean and communitarian approaches ushered in an expansion of political participation to include ‘civil’ activities such as volunteering and social engagement. The most recent expansion has been characterized by the spread of individualized, ethically- or morally-based acts of participation such as political consumption, flash mobs or guerrilla gardening. From voting and campaigning in the 1940s political participation in the 21st century now includes almost every conceivable form of activity (cf. Norris, 2002; van Deth, 2010).

The rapid expansion of the political action repertoire of citizens in democratic societies does not imply that political activities beyond voting have become a major concern of many people. On the contrary, Table 1 summarizes the survey results in many countries, starting in 1974 and presenting more detailed information for the last decade. As can be seen casting a vote still is the only widely spread mode of participation with usually about seventy per cent of the population voting in national elections. All other modes remain minority-

phenomena with only a few per cent of the citizens participating in party activities or attending demonstrations (cf. Teorell, Torcal, & Montero, 2007, p. 349; van Deth, 2010, 2012, pp. 118-121). The limited spread of ‘new’ modes of participation is underlined by the fact that the percentages of people using at least one mode of participation are only slightly higher than those who casted a vote in the last election. Although numerous cross-national studies on political participation are available conclusions about long-term developments are not easy to validate empirically. Table 1 shows that between 1974 and 2002 only the use of boycotts for political reasons has increased strongly and significantly. The recent stabilization at a relatively high level, however, casts doubts on the expectation of a continuous rise in the use of this kind of actions as a political activity. For all other modes of participation the percentages of active citizens declined sharply between 1974 and 2010. Sophisticated analyses of the developments in many countries show that especially young people nowadays participate less in ‘institutional’ (voting, party-related activities etc.) and more in ‘non-institutional’ (protesting, political consumption etc.) modes of participation. Yet both modes of participation display lower levels of participation among young people now as compared to the 1970s. As a result, average levels of participation are going down in many countries since the use of ‘non-institutional’ modes of participation does not compensate the decline in ‘institutional’ activities (García Albaceta, 2011).

Table 1. Forms of participation in Europe (Political Action Study and ESS)

	PA	ESS 1-5				
	1974	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Voted in last election	77	73	71	69	72	67
Contacted politician	28	15	12	12	11	12
Worked in political party	15	4	4	4	3	4
Worked in another organisation	–	14	12	11	10	13
Worn badge/sticker	–	8	8	6	5	6
Signed a petition	26	26	21	20	17	20
Demonstrated	9	9	10	7	7	7
Boycotted products	3	17	14	13	13	15
At least one mode used	86	83	81	77	79	77
None of the modes used	14	17	19	23	21	23
N (weighted)	10,869	37,793	47,799	49,207	58,456	45,819

Percentages ‘have done’ of the total number of respondents. ESS weighted with design weights and weights for country size; PA not weighted. ESS-5: first release with twenty countries (November 2011)

Following the neo-Tocquevillean revival in the last two decades the expansion of the action repertoire also includes voluntary activities in associations, clubs or movements (cf. Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Putnam, 2000; van Deth, Montero, & Westholm, 2007). As we have seen in Figure 1 the support for

associational engagement as a feature of being a ‘good citizen’ is much lower than support for others aspects of citizenship – both “being active in politics” and “being active in voluntary organisations” are at the bottom-end of the list. Besides, engagement in voluntary associations varies strongly between different countries (cf. Rossteutscher, 2008; Wollebæk & Strømsnes, 2008; Morales, 2009). Figure 2 presents the percentages of people in various countries indicating that they are active in one or more associations listed (a total of eight or nine organisations such as ‘religious organisation,’ ‘sport or recreational organisation’ and ‘any other organisation’ was presented). As can be seen, associational engagement is widely spread especially among citizens in North-western Europe. Yet country differences are evident and in many countries somewhat more than half of the population is involved in one or more associations, with France and Germany showing relatively low levels of engagement. Based on much more sophisticated analyses taking into account the degree and breath of associational involvement Morales and Geurts distinguish between “northern and central Europe” where “citizens are highly integrated in civil society” and “newer democracies in eastern and southern Europa” where “involvement is far lower” (Morales & Geurts, 2007, p. 153). The differences between these two groups “... are dramatic” (ibid.). These findings suggest the relevance of contextual factors for explanations of voluntary engagement.

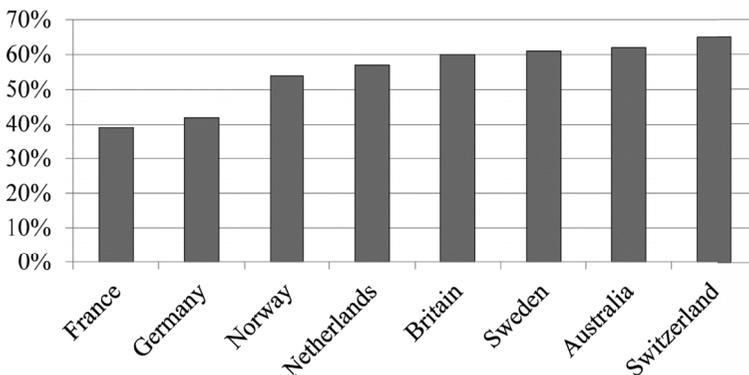


Figure 2. Engagement in voluntary associations (WVS-4). Percentages of people being active in at least one voluntary association

The most recent development in the action repertoire of citizens concerns the rise of modes of participation that are used individually; that is, without the need for some form of organisation or coordination. Refuting to buy specific products or brands in order to express discontent, say, with the destruction of rain forests as such does not require any organisation or collective action. To be effective, it is certainly helpful that a large number of people behave in a similar way – but they can all act individually and separately. Internet technologies make these modes of

participation very attractive and conventional modes of coordination and organisation even more obsolete. The strong reduction of organisational costs by using these modes of participation allow all kind of concerns and aims to be articulated which would not have been voiced before. Micheletti (2003) coined the phrase “individualized collective action” for modes of participation – especially political consumption – used by single citizens and driven almost completely by ethical and moral reasoning. Important for these modes of participation is that they are more aimed at venting opinions than taking part in decision-making processes (Newman & Bartels, 2010) and allow individual citizens “... to express their sense of justice as citizens of the world” (Follesdal, 2004, p. 19).

A closer look at citizens using individualized modes of participation reveals a remarkable aspect: relatively low levels of support for norms of citizenship characterize these participants (van Deth, 2012, p. 134). Their idea of ‘responsibility taking’ is evidently self-centred and based on clear support for the norm to form your own opinions and a reluctance to support solidarity and social engagement. As a consequence, the spread of individualized modes of participation probably comes with a weakening of support for norms of citizenship. In spite of fashionable (post-modern) claims about the evaporation of the borderline between private and public affairs, people using individualized modes of participation seem to be characterized by exactly this distinction; that is, they have more in common with the stereotypical consumer than the image of a ‘good citizen.’ Yet a simple distinction between political participation and shopping – or between political and private actions – is not of much help here. What is needed is more attention to the similarities and distinctions between the two phenomena. As Schudson reminds us most clearly:

The distinction between citizen and consumer remains a stand-in for the difference between the self-centered and the public-spirited. But this is misleading. Both consumer choices and political choices can be public-spirited or not; both consumer behavior and political behavior can be egalitarian and tolerant and respectful of others, or not. (Schudson, 2007, p. 247)

The rapid and considerable expansion of the action repertoire available to citizens in democratic countries has been documented extensively. In a similar way, one of the most well established findings in empirical research on participation has been confirmed over and over again: social inequality is a persistent feature of participation. Any type of participation still is more common among better-educated groups or, more generally, among citizens with a higher socio-economic status. Besides, women still participate less than men; citizens with a migration background less than autochthones (Verba & Nie, 1972; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999; Stolle & Hooghe, 2010). Remarkably, the rapid expansion of the action repertoire in the last decades has not resulted in an accompanying rise of participation among less privileged groups. The evident social inequality related to the older modes of participation seems to be somewhat less clear for newer, ‘non-institutionalised’ modes of participation, which especially contribute to a reduction

of gender- and age-based inequalities (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). Recently, Stolle and Hooghe summarize their empirical evidence in strong terms: “Overall, the emerging political action repertoires are certainly not more exclusive than the conventional political action repertoires have been” (2010, p. 139). Especially differences in skills and competences – next to cultural and mobilizing factors – seem to account for these persistent social and political differences. This conclusion is underlined by the restricted function of the Internet as a new means for participation: the new opportunities are mainly used for mobilization and hardly as a new mode of participation; that is, a “Net Delusion” (Morozov, 2011) seems more likely than a radical change in participation habits among average citizens.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

In general, empirical research on citizenship orientations and political participation among citizens in advanced democratic societies show that not many people meet the ambiguous ideal of being an “active citizen.” In its attempts to promote “active citizenship” the Council of Europe strongly stresses the need to develop “Education for democratic citizenship.” Whether this need is based on the rather limited support for “active citizenship” among citizens in many countries as documented in the brief overview presented here cannot be clarified. For the Council “Education for democratic citizenship,” too, is a very broad and aspiring concept including:

... education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law.³

Scarce empirical research on the consequences of citizenship education suggests that these programmes have an indirect effect on young citizens’ intentions to participate only (cf. Lopes, Benton, & Cleaver, 2009; Schwarzer & Zeglovits, 2009). Besides, formal education – and not necessarily citizenship education – has an impact on democratic orientations (cf. Dee, 2004; Milligan, Moretti, & Oreopoulos, 2004; Hoskins, D’Hombress, & Campbell, 2008). These rather modest empirical corroborations of the expectations of citizenship education might be a fruitful starting point to refocus the main goals of these efforts. For that purpose, the empirical findings on citizenship orientations and political participation among average citizens in advanced democratic societies presented here can be used to formulate a few discussion points for future developments. In combination with the continued social inequality in participation, especially the increasing self-understanding of people as consumers instead of citizens seems to imply the most important challenge. The main points for discussion on the further development of democratic citizenship can be summarized in six propositions.

Firstly, we have seen that in current democracies important aspects of the image of a ‘good citizen’ are widely shared and supported. Yet social and political involvement beyond voting hardly belongs to this image. Only relatively small parts of the population support the norms that a ‘good citizen’ should be politically active or be involved in voluntary associations. Besides, individual-centred norms seem to be more important than norms referring to social rights and duties. Apparently, many citizens lack the competences and knowledge to deal with the tensions between individually and socially centred norms and obligations. “Education for democratic citizenship” should include attempts to challenge the rather limited visions citizens have about the main characteristics of a ‘good citizen.’ Using the terminology of the Council of Europe, especially “education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities” could be used for this purpose:

Proposition 1: Support for norms of citizenship should be improved by increasing the understanding of the concept, especially for (a) the importance of forms of democratic decision-making beyond voting, and for (b) the coherence and tensions between distinct norms.

A second point concerns the active involvement of citizens in democratic decision-making procedures. Although many modes of political participation are available, most citizens still rely on voting only. The rapid and extensive expansions of the action repertoire in current democracies in the last decades hardly resulted in the recruitment of new parts of the population to become active. This seems to apply for many ‘new’ modes of participation. No matter how the concept “active citizenship” is defined, it is clear that democratic political and social activities cannot be restricted to visiting a ballot box every four or five years. Besides, a much broader understanding of political and social engagement could provide opportunities to evaluate advantages and disadvantages of specific modes of participation for a democratic society. For that reason, a second proposition reads as follows:

Proposition 2: Since political participation still is mainly restricted to voting, available other modes should be emphasized. Besides the coherence and tensions among distinct modes of political participation (and other forms of engagement).

The recent rise of individualized modes of participation – especially boycotting and buycotting – presents the third challenge for citizenship education. Since these new forms are strongly based on ethical and moral reasoning a strengthening of normative citizenship orientations can be expected. Yet first empirical results show that the rise of individualized modes of participation comes with a reduction in support for norms of citizenship. Remarkably, the normative orientations of citizens using individualized modes of participation have more in common with consumers than with citizens. Citizenship education should not uncritically support new modes of participation. Instead this spread offers a unique opportunity to strengthen important aspects of “active citizenship” by dealing with potential

tensions between different modes of political participation and its consequences for democracy:

Proposition 3: Stimulating individualized modes of participation should be accompanied by attention for the potential disruptive aspects of these actions. Individualized modes of participation are to be seen as extensions – not as alternatives – to other modes of participation.

Fourthly, engagement in voluntary associations in democratic societies is an important aspect of citizenship. Stressing the relevance of social engagement and civil society conventional, institutional-oriented ideas of citizenship and politics can be avoided. However, not many citizens attach much importance to engagement in voluntary associations as an aspect of a ‘good citizen.’ Actual engagement in voluntary associations appears to widely spread, but covers about sixty per cent of the population at most. Moreover, large country differences in this mode of participation are evident with remarkably high levels of participation in North-western European countries and much lower levels in eastern and southern Europe. Exploring reasons for these dramatic cross-national differences offer good opportunities to strengthen support for social engagement and to avoid the evident geo-political bias:

Proposition 4: Since engagement in voluntary associations varies widely between countries not much is gained by idealizing the situation in North-western Europe. Instead, contextual factors – cultural as well as institutional – should be taken into account to strengthen support for social engagement.

A fifth important empirical finding has been long established. In spite of the rapid and extensive expansions of the action repertoire of citizens it is clear that social and political participation are still distributed unequally: less privileged groups still lack skills, competences and networks to become active. General programmes to reduce these inequalities have not been very successful. Citizenship education offered without any differentiation even runs the risk of strengthening and sanctioning these inequalities. Especially “Education for democratic citizenship” should be based on the recognition of actual inequalities and the social and political consequences for democracy on the one hand, and a strong focus on disadvantaged groups in society on the other:

Proposition 5: Social and political participation are still highly biased and reproduce social inequality. Citizenship education should emphasize the development of special programs for disadvantaged groups (groups with low socio-economic status, migrants, girls etc.).

A final proposition is not directly based on empirical findings on citizenship orientations and participation. By definition, the concept of citizenship addresses people in their role as citizen. The limited interpretations of citizenship and politics among the populations of democratic societies underline the relevance of other roles people perform (parent, commuter, sport fan, vegetarian, etc.). Increasingly, people are confronted with new roles and a continuous fragmentation of societal

areas (so-called functional differentiation). As we have seen, especially citizens using new, individualized modes of participation tend to conceive their role as consumer and not as citizen – or more specific: tend to reject a clear line of demarcation between the two roles and between the political and economic spheres in society. Citizenship education, then, should avoid a restricted view of people in their role as citizens only:

Proposition 6: Citizenship education should not only deal with the position of citizens, but also with other types of self-understanding (especially consumerism) and explain the tensions between these distinct types as well as the opportunities for citizenship.

The tasks for citizenship education summarized in these six propositions are immense and realizing only parts of it will be already very difficult. Yet these tasks are much more limited and much less ambitious than the goals for “Education for democratic citizenship” as presented by the Council of Europe. Although the value of attempts to strengthen democracy by stimulating “active citizenship” cannot be overestimated, not much is gained by presenting extremely ambitious goals without considering empirical evidence about actual democratic orientations and engagement. Instead, a policy of “muddling through” based on the “civic realities of everyday life” could contribute much more to the development of a vibrant democracy and its active support among its citizens.

NOTES

- ¹ Council of Europe, Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights. See http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/1_what_is_edc_hre/what_%20is_edc_EN.asp.
- ² Detailed information and data for the studies used in this article can be obtained from the following sources:
 ESS: <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/index.jsp?year=-1&module=download&country=>
 CID: <http://info1.gesis.org/dbksearch13/SDesc2.asp?no=4492&search=CID&search2=&db=E>
 PA: <http://info1.gesis.org/dbksearch13/SDesc2.asp?no=0765&search=political%20action&search2=&db=E>
 WVS: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>
- ³ Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Adopted in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec (2010) 7 of the Committee of Ministers, pp. 5-6. Notice that concepts such as “citizen education” or “civic education” are highly contested (cf. Callan, 2004, p. 73).

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