Challenges of Citizenship in Higher Education – Shifting Visions, Roles and Outcomes

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1 Why Thinking About Citizenship in Higher Education

1.1 Citizenship for Democracy

There is no doubt that a different kind of political regime demands a different kind of citizenry (Heater, 2004). Be it the fictional Oceania or the One-State of Orwell and Zamyatin, or some less sophisticated and earthly alternative, they all strive for a regime-specific individual who best matches the state's system of government. If the citizen is supposed to mobilise support for the regime in the tyrannical rule of Big Brother or the Benefactor or any other kind of such rule, classical monarchic systems need passive and obedient subjects, while democracies require autonomous, active, competent and virtuous citizens. As a result, whether via direct state intervention or not, citizens are shaped in accordance with the needs of their rulers and/or the needs of the system they are living in.

In Almond and Verba's (1963) terms, a democratic civic culture is inherent to a functioning democratic political community. Hence, every democratic society[1] requires a political culture in which political activity, involvement and rationality exist, particularly those ones that experienced a transition to democracy in the recent past. Each democratic society's civic culture is differently balanced with passivity, a devotion to tradition, and a commitment to parochial values – thus also inducing a regime-specific conception of a good citizen – however, the recent experience of a non-democratic citizenship regime leaves a long-term imprint on the functioning of state and societal institutions, actors and their behaviour. Slovenia is an example of a state that experienced a sharp break in a desirable political culture – from subject-oriented to participatory – with its transition to the capitalist mode of production and a liberal democracy. A different quality of citizenry to the one under communist rule means that a good citizen is no longer required to be submissive and supportive of the monist political elite but, on the contrary, they need to be critical guardians of the political community. Yet such immense shifts that redefine the position of an individual in a given society cannot take place overnight and by the citizenry itself since this demands a change in the content and process of political socialisation – an informal learning process by which individuals acquire knowledge and attitudes about political figures, processes and systems (Almond and Verba, 1963).

This lifelong process that is most relevant during early adulthood in terms of the acquisition of a sense of civicness (Dreher and Dreher, 1999) can, however, be significantly shaped by the education process. Education has proved to be an instrument for nurturing social cohesion and deepening democracy ever

1 We have to stress that a vibrant debate developed regarding the validity of this thesis among political philosophers and political scientists (see Pateman, 1980; Seyd and Whiteley, 2002).

since the introduction of compulsory education (Dewey, 1916) and has been credited with a significant contribution to the development and sustainability of democracy (*e.g.* Lipset, 1959).

It is the function of formal, non-formal and informal educational processes to provide the necessary tools for citizens to perform their roles in a competent manner. To be precise, regardless of socialisation in or an allocation outlook on citizenship education, educational attainment has been shown to have an important demographic effect on political attitudes (Ichilov, 2003), as confirmed by the positive correlation between formal education and active citizenship (see Hoskins *et al*., 2008).

When looking at the age of early adulthood, universities play a vital role in the political socialisation and shaping of virtuous citizens. Hoskins *et al*. (2008) stress the importance of higher education by indicating the increased political participation of individuals with a higher education compared to individuals with a lower educational attainment. The authors conclude that

> the benefits associated with education are numerous. While most of the economic literature emphasises the monetary returns to education both at the individual and national level, our analysis also indicates that formal education, in particular tertiary education, promotes Active Citizenship (Hoskins *et al*., 2008:19).

According to the authors (*ibid.*), the statistically significant correlation of educational attainment with the composite indicator "active citizenship" is especially interesting since that indicator includes the dimension of community life and democratic values. Building on the Machiavellian and Rousseauian tradition of civic education, as well as Condorcet's (1982) deliberation on education for democracy, education has therefore become a common tool to shape the citizenry also from the perspective of higher education. This is also one of the main reasons for the common justification of the massification of higher education, which is as strong as the economic argument (Hoskins *et al*., 2008).

When examining the effects of higher education, Hillygus (2005) established that higher education influences the political engagement of graduates in the future in line with their studied curriculum since students of the social sciences and humanities are more likely to become politically engaged than others. However, Galston (2001) argues that participation in the university community itself may socialise individuals to become politically engaged or impart some of their basic associational skills required to function in public. In effect, both participation in an educational community and specific curricular content geared towards the liberal arts provide an important link between higher education and democratic citizenship, hence indicating that higher education contributes to the quality of citizenship in a myriad of direct and indirect ways. This has been consistently established by a number of authors and studies (*e.g.* Gardner *et al*., *eds*. 2000;

Crick, 2001; Arthur and Bolin, *eds*. 2005; Ahier *et al*., 2003; Scott and Lawson, *eds*. 2002; Colby *et al*., *eds*. 2003). Precisely in what manner and to what degree is something we shall elaborate on more after examining the main determinants of the general link between education and citizenship.

1.1.1 The Need for a Virtuous Citizenry and the Way to Attain It

Citizenship literature across the spectrum – from liberalism with Rawls as a frontrunner to civic republicanism and communitarianism – is concerned with the creation of a virtuous citizenry as a precondition of a functioning democratic society. Along this rationale, Barber (1992) warns against the rule of the mob – a classic Aristotelian ochlocracy – if the empowerment of the masses translates into the empowerment of the uneducated, *i.e.* supported by a range of educational reforms raising the societal and political literacy of the population to create viable conditions that are prerequisites of a democracy. According to Dewey (1916:99), a democratic society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and habits of the mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder. It is only then that society will make provision for participation in its good governance for all members and on equal terms. This, in turn, secures the flexible readjustment of its institutions via the interaction of different forms of associated life.

Yet there are two general paths to 'make' citizens with the desired levels of civic virtues for a democracy to function properly. The first concentrates on the participatory nature of citizenship and, in line with the participatory democracy tradition of Mill and Pateman, regards politics in a non-instrumental view, thus constituting it as an end in itself. To be precise, participating in politics itself provides for the transformation and education of participants (Elster, 2003), thereby constituting the experiential basis for learning in line with the Aristotelian argument of "learning by doing". An example of the participatory nature of learning politics and civic virtuosity is the ancient Athenian practice of learning citizenship by performing it at the level of *demes* (see Thorley, 1998).

Meanwhile, the second path for 'making' virtuous citizens focuses on education for citizenship as a deliberate learning process to attain the knowledge and skills needed to competently perform the role of a citizen. Gutmann (1987) distinguishes between the two when deliberating on the difference between political socialisation and democratic education. For her, the former constitutes an unconscious social reproduction allowing for the perpetuation of societies, while the latter denotes the conscious shaping of future democratic societies. Therefore, political socialisation denotes processes that foster the transmission of political values, attitudes and modes of behaviour to citizens in a democratic