

# Chapter 15

## Project We Propose! Building Territorial Citizenship From School

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### ABSTRACT

*In 2011, the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning (IGOT), University of Lisbon, launched the We Propose! project. In the subject of upper-secondary school geography, making a case study that focuses more in particular on local problems is compulsory. However, it would go against school routines. The We Propose! project was designed in order to encourage work on a case study and it has taken up the challenge of promoting young people's territorial citizenship by means of overhauling school practices and forging partnerships among universities, schools, and the community, especially the municipalities in local government. Pupils have to identify what the problems are in their own residential areas, carrying out field work on them and putting forward proposals to help solve them. Their proposals are then shared with the local community. Apart from Portugal, it has now been disseminated in Spain, Brazil, Mozambique, Colombia, and Peru.*

### IGOT-UL: SPATIAL PLANNING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

In 2011-12, the Project called *We Propose! Citizenship and Innovation in Geography Education* was designed at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning/IGOT, University of Lisbon. The IGOT is the successor of the former Geography Department at the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon and its origin as a Higher Course in Letters goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1901, an *importante reform* (Claudino, 2005, p. 70) passed that was particularly concerned with training high school teachers, offered the first subjects in Pedagogy. Moreover, it officially introduced Geography education with the aim of producing teachers in this subject which had already been taught since the first half of the 19th century. In 1930, the first independent degree courses (*licenciaturas*) in Geography opened and the pedagogical-didactic training of future geography teachers was provided, the focus being placed more on secondary schools. At university, the idea was that geography education would transpose

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## ***Project We Propose!***

young student's university knowledge. This view was, nevertheless, criticised on the basis that a school subject has educational goals that are not exhausted in the abbreviated transmission of academic production: "school content is simply to be useful for the training of people who... will not be specialists" (Lestegás, 2002, p. 174).

In 1987, owing to educational policy dictates, the universities were once again made responsible for the initial training of geography teachers as well as teacher training in other subjects. In 2008, the IGOT-UL was set up where its name reflected the importance attributed to spatial planning in the sphere of Geography – although, at the same time, the institute continued to exercise its duties to educate geography teachers.

Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 2000s, in the Portuguese educational system and in the subject of Geography, the need has arisen to promote education that is committed to training for citizenship. It is in this context that the project called *We Propose! Citizenship and Innovation in Geography Education* has come about.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**

The calls made by civil society to build a democratic society are increasingly more insistent; its members want to take part in the destinies of their communities and exercise effective territorial citizenship – a concept which we prefer to *spatial citizenship*, owing to the fact that the territory is an appropriated built space with which the communities living in it, identify.

The aim is "to rescue the democratic spirit of societies" in which decision-making has been removed from the population" (Ferrão & Dasi, 2016, p. 237). Encouraging the population to exercise its own public decision-making in favour of *governance*, is linked to "networks of partnerships and multiple agentes" (Fernandes & Chamusca, 2009, p. 29) where everyone is free and should be able to take part in the process leading to development. This social participation is a key factor in order to consolidate democratic government and foment intermeshing among the actors working for development. In being particularly aware of the problem involving a democratic deficit, the European Union launched a White Paper on European Governance in 2001, and in 2013 it declared the European Year of Citizens. The number of Agendas 21 multiplied and people took part in discussing budgets which aimed at funding and designing action plans based on sustainable local development in joint work organised between local governments and community actors.

However, the apparent academic consensus about the importance of public participation in decision-making as regards the territory, and the relevance that the school could have in citizenship education, has not often been put into practice. In its on-going *Reports on Human Development* issued by the United Nations Development Programme or in the reports compiled by other international institutions and organisations, education is deemed to be a priority aim but it is not viewed as a way in itself, of transforming citizenship practices. Apparently, the effective contribution the school might make does not inspire confidence when building a more participative democratic society.

## **Educating in Citizenship**

Citizenship is closely associated with "personal and collective responsibility in searching for solutions" (Carmo, 2014, p. 26) to collective problems within the framework a modern state in which, in addition

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