

Chapter 12

Ways of Citizen Learning: Political Deliberation on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

Citizens talk, act, relate. In these processes, political deliberation emerges as a citizen exercise tool, and nowadays, also as a phenomenon of learning and training susceptible of being mediated through Web 2.0 tools. For the citizen to practice as such in full, he must, therefore, assume a political training process which contributes to his recognition in a broad and plural institutional context. What actions must be carried out by the institutions to account for the needs and expectations of citizen training? This paper pretends to reveal the pertinence of initiating the debate regarding the training needs of the citizens with the goal of understanding the use of ICT as a tool for deepening citizenship exercise.

INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE CITIZEN SENSE OF BUILDING THE CITY

Western logic and common sense brings us near to the notion of a citizen defined by its normative character and which understands him as a receptacle of rights and duties that the State and institutions give to the individual. In this sense, a citizen is that individual that, referred to a determined territory and by means of laws, acquires a civil rights and duties package in the first place, then a political one and finally a social package consecrated like that

in the document that orders the social and political endeavors in such territory. This classic vision of the citizen is, also restrictive and excluding on the very same rights that it pursues to guarantee, in the same way in which the genesis of the use of the term—the ancient Greek polis—also was.

This is a vision of the adjectived citizen: the citizen that it is understood as such if and only if there is a territory that determines it and if he can be ascribed as an individual in full use of his political rights. The citizen is of the territory, and not the opposite. In this perspective, not all the individuals that dwell in the same geographical space are citizens its citizens and besides, some may be citizens of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-860-4.ch012

several territories simultaneously. Thus, to be a citizen is a condition linked to the nationality. The citizen defines himself and in front of others as long as he enjoys a geographical reference more than a cultural one, although the latter is also present even if it is a little unclear. Without that reference, the citizen condition is not only lost but it becomes inapprehensive from an analytical and experience of life point of view. This notion of citizen concept results insufficient to account for the social processes of today which emerge marked by the prevalence of the global over the local and furthermore, it makes possible anonymity and passivity of groups socially excluded of key processes like political decision making (Bañez Tello, 2003).

There is, however, an emergent logic—although it is not recent—that brings us close to a more anthropological vision of the citizen in which any individual that enters into a conscious relationship with the surroundings in which he dwells (the city) is considered as such, without nationality mediating in that relationship as a pre-condition. From this vision, the citizen is understood as a unity which influences its surrounding and not as an additional element of it. We are talking about the vision of substantive citizen, that is to say, the individual that without nationality or territorial affiliation of the place he inhabits as pre-conditions (citizenship in normative terms), he is committed to the preservation of these spaces (social and environmental, for instance) and he does it in a more intense, active and constant manner than the adjectived citizen.

In essence, it is the same citizen who has been seen first from an exclusive perspective and strictly circumscribed to civil and political rights, and later under a holistic and integrating vision that, if in fact it does not completely spin off from the former, it has been able to surpass it and advance towards a more responsible and conscious idea regarding its role in the determination of the destiny of the social space (city, community) in which he dwells. The city becomes a physical and social place that

is the subject of the collective construction by part of active citizens and it also becomes a space that influences directly in the citizen's endeavors. In one way or another, citizens that practice what in another place has been called active citizenship (Bañez Tello, 2003; Petrizzo, 2005), defined by a set of processes that mark the citizen with the sense of belongingness and co-responsibility with the surroundings, seek to make the city a space in permanent construction in such a way that it allows holding and protecting that which is conceived as good for all the members of that community and which hereafter we will call: public good. It is, as Oliveira says (cited by Wainwright and others, 2007), an exercise of total autonomy in order to know how to decide, to decide and carry out the decisions with which he has a compromise. In short, it is about a process of democratic and social deepening, where participation and deliberation are not only activities of the individual but that it is supposed citizens conceive them as a subject of their participation in the social endeavors that they know well and of which they are main actors.

Several authors like Tomás Rodríguez Villasante (1994), insist on that justification of citizen participation as the active exercise of citizenship, considering it as something more than delegating in some specialists of politics or in some economic agents. It is an exercise of the free game of initiatives of different groups that feel responsible and give their own solutions, generating a dynamic and creative society. J. Ibáñez also insists on the significance of social participation in contributing to overcome exploitation in the following frames: in the economic frame with initiatives of social economy, with the democratization of the labor world, with cooperativism, etc.; in the ecological frame setting limits to growth in order to make it compatible with the ecosystem; and finally, in the cultural frame with respect of civil rights, participative democracy in the context of cultural multiplicity and with recognition of the right to be different (Bañez Tello, 2003).

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