

Citizens in the making

Mini-conference

University of Tampere, May 9, 2016

Opening words

Eeva Luhtakallio

Good morning, and welcome everybody to this first day of Citizens in the making mini-conference. I am very happy to welcome you all to what I believe will be a rich exchange of viewpoints, tools, and academic experience on studying citizenship, politicization processes, and aspects of participation.

First, a few words on what has initiated this event.

There is a lot of malaise concerning citizens in today's world.

Certainly, some of this malaise has to do with statuses or lack thereof: citizens of some countries migrating or seeking refuge in others, resulting in a complicated power game of international diplomacy on the one hand, and a wide range of practical troubles, policy challenges, and human tragedies on the other.

But apart from all this, if we look at citizenship from a sociological or anthropological angle and focus attention on the practices and processes involved in the business of being a citizen, wherever one is and with whatever status for formal citizenship is or isn't available, there is plenty of trouble there, too. In the eyes of governors, it seems often that citizens do it all wrong: they vote lazily, they don't participate enough, at all, or not in the right way, they rant in the social media instead of taking part in debates organized for them by various levels of governance, just for them, to participate, and if they take part, they have the wrong opinions, if they act autonomously, they cause all kinds of hassle.

At a moment in time where the average level of education is higher than ever before, and where simultaneously national and local instances of governance – the ones that citizens often solely are touched by – are in great difficulties in the face of multiple problems they

can't solve, from the series of financial crises to climate change and from migration to increasing inequality within societies, it is no surprise citizens make trouble. The opinion polls hint to ever declining trust towards politicians, and bubbles of like-minded people are in steep conflict with each other. Following the tradition the Finnish political culture has in relation to citizens, the former objects of civilization and paternal education are no longer so easily governed and kept silent, or their efforts to build the nation and contribute to the common good shatter into a thousands of projects that may have a plethora of differing conceptions of what the common good is, and how it should be pursued.

To say being a citizen is not about statuses would be missing the point – of course it is about statuses too, of statuses of multiple levels, and of struggles to gain statuses, be it a status (of a legalized refugee or migrant) that grants one the right to stay in a country or a status (of a legitimate, recognized participant) that enables one's voice to be heard in decision making. But in order to understand also the statuses of citizenship we need to look at, first and foremost, the variety of practices and processes involved.

Our project, *Citizens in the Making*, took as a first point of departure the processes and practices – and, as our theoretical framework suggests, engagements – of young citizens. They have experinced citizenship processes typical in children's lives – the ones with perhaps the least voice in the society, although a lot of attention cast onto them – and are now taking, or have recently taken, the first steps in the arenas of citizenship as assumingly legitimate participants. We want to know what do young people in particular learn and experience as they enter arenas of civic engagement, political participation, and society at large in this age, marked by all the above-described troubles. There is reason to expect that today's young people will do citizenship differently from their parents, and that the practices they adopt will have consequences to political cultures. What may the young citizens' engagements to pursue politicization tell us about the future of democracy?

The research group that acts as the organizer of this event – and the members thereof you will be able to hear more from tomorrow – is characterized by two things in particular. First, we are all political sociologists by and large, with different areas of specific expertise, but with also a rather wide shared ground in terms of theoretical

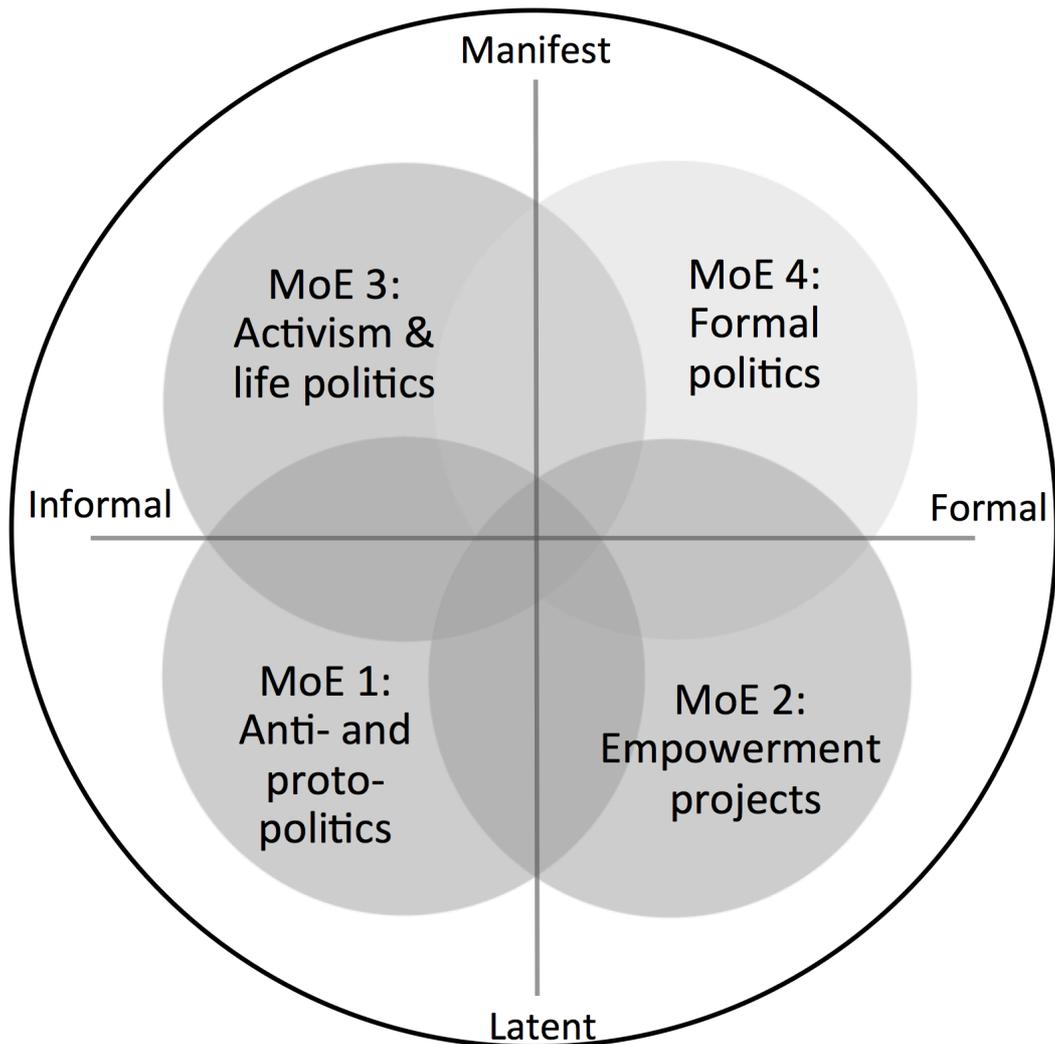
background and general objectives of research. Secondly, the group is characterized by a bit of a division of methodological expertise between members who are first and foremost ethnographers, and members who have, in addition to skills in various form of non-ethnographic qualitative sociology, also a strong interest towards quantitative, and notably computer-assisted big data research.

Our project is, thus, an effort on two levels: a research project with a substantial objective of producing in-depth knowledge on young people's modes of engagement as citizens in Finland in the 2010s, and with an ambition to test and learn from new combinations of methodologies. In this project we will experiment a lot, and we hope to learn things that will be useful also to others in the futures, notably those interested in in-depth analyses of experiences and practices, and in finding solid ways to study social media and online realities in intertwinement with offline ones, the way these two actually intertwine in people's lives nowadays, in particular in the lives of the online native generations.

As a starting point, we identified four analytical fields we call *modes of civic engagement* through which the experiences of citizenship can be tackled.

Informal modes of engagement, such as house-squatting, do not take place through institutions, while *formal* modes of engagement do, whether through party organizations, youth councils, or public-empowerment projects, such as participatory budgeting. *Latent* modes of engagement do not display overtly politicized stances, even though these engagements may be loud and public, like spontaneous acts of ruckus or resistance, hard language in online discussions, or even urban riots characterized by looting. *Manifest* modes of engagement refer to visibly politicized modes of action and talk, like taking part in a political demonstration, or publicly arguing for or against a claim.

So, these analytical fields are not groups of people, but different, yet interdependent modes of engagement. In principle, one person could engage in each of them at different times and in different places. Our objective is to analyse these modes and the ways in which people move between them, and the porousness of their boundaries. The figure displays the four fields of empirical analysis we will address.



First, on the lower left field, are the latent and informal engagements that we analyse by studying anti- and proto-politics, or de-politicized and marginalized citizenship positions. We will explore ethnographically how young people in a disadvantaged neighbourhood establish an understanding of their citizenship or its lack, in interaction with institutional actors – youth and social workers, the police, volunteers – whom they encounter in their daily lives, but also horizontally, in interaction with their peers, and with neighbourhood-specific engagements. In parallel, we ask how young people’s expressions of resentment, dissent, or anger towards elements of the establishment may be embedded in everyday, informal discussions online.

Secondly, on the lower right field, are what we identify as latent but formal engagements. These are engagements that are often addressed as public empowerment projects, like in Nina Eliasoph’s work that has influenced our approach here greatly, or “topdown” organized processes of participatory democracy, aimed specifically at young

people. These include an ethnographic study of a participatory-budgeting process provided by the city of Helsinki Youth Department, and computational discussion analysis of a state-initiated website on which youth and youth organizations post “ideas” for action or policy.

Thirdly, on the upper left field, are the manifest although informal engagements that we will address by studying activism and life politics among young people. The empirical cases focus on activist engagements that have some characteristics of “new social movements”, yet also represent locally-popular forms of political activism. Hence we study two urban youth movements ethnographically: radical house-squatting and an urban neighborhood event network. To obtain a wider view of forms of talk and vehicles of politicization typical in this mode of engagement, we analyze radical activist discussions online.

Finally, on the upper right field, are the manifest and formal engagements that we will study through empirical cases of young people participating in formal politics. We will address representative means of youth participation: modes of engagement that come closest to the political establishment. First, we focus on youth councils based in the Helsinki metropolitan area – which will allow us to compare how engagement in participatory budgeting differs from these more traditional means of participation. Secondly, we shall conduct text-analysis on municipal-elections-related discussions in social media, including those in party youth organizations and groups collected around particular advocacy issues.

This will be our task in the coming years, along with theoretical development on the ideas presented here – that, naturally, for the time being are mere thought experiments that need to be put into work both in terms of empirical study and theoretical work. We hope to be able, as we go, to discuss with specialists of citizenship theorizing, as well as with specialists of the two types of methodological approaches, both those present here today and of course many others as well. As a result, we hope to provide food for thought for further studies, and a clearer picture of how do young people of the 2010’s experience different modes and levels of citizenship, and how do they act upon these experiences.

This mini-conference, however, is, rather than our show alone, an opportunity for us to learn from our distinguished guest speakers and from the debate that the presentations provoke during these two days. Today, we will here the presentations by Catherine Neveu, Dhiraj Murthy, Marion Carrel, and Mathieu Berger, as well as a commentary by Semi Purhonen.

Catherine Neveu is the senior researcher at IIAC-TRAM, CNRS and EHESS in Paris, France. She is a leading scholar in citizenship studies in France and internationally. She has published widely on the relational and action-based concept of citizenship, as well as conducted several studies under the framework of anthropology of citizenship and political ethnography. She is the author of *Disputing Citizenship*.

Dhiraj Murthy is reader of sociology in University of Goldsmiths, UK. He has written extensively on the uses of big data for sociological research, notably in his new book entitled *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*.

Marion Carrel is a lecturer at the university of Lille 3 in France. She is a specialist of studying participation in the context of working class neighbourhoods, and among “ordinary citizens.

Mathieu Berger is professor at the catholic university of Louvain, Belgium. He has studied and theorized instances of deliberative and participative democracy extensively.

Semi Purhonen is assistant professor here at the university of Tampere. He is among the first Finnish sociologists to have taken the challenge of big data seriously, and together with Arho Toikka who will present on the second day of this conference, he has published the first Finnish language article discussing the benefits and challenges of big data to sociology. Purhonen has also a long record of studies in cultural sociology, and for example on the concept of generation.

So, without taking more time of our distinguished guests, I would like to once again, and on behalf of the entire Citizens in the Making group, warmly welcome you to this mini-conference. Thank you, and please welcome Catherine Neveu as the first guest speaker.