
What Kind of Citizenship for European Higher Education? Beyond the Competent Active Citizen

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ABSTRACT How might European higher education contribute to the promotion and development of European citizenship? In this article, the author addresses this question through a critical discussion of the notions of 'active citizenship' and 'civic competence', which play a central role in current policy and research on the role of education in the development of European citizenship. The author argues that there is a tendency within the idea of 'active citizenship' to depoliticise the very idea of citizenship because it is based upon a consensus notion of democracy and a functionalist understanding of citizenship and the formation of citizens. The author also argues that the idea of civic competence reduces civic learning and political education to a form of socialisation which undermines rather than supports political agency. For these reasons, the author argues that European higher education should not aim to become a socialising agent for the production of the competent active citizen but should seek to support modes of political action and civic learning that embody a commitment to a more critical and more political form of European citizenship than what is envisaged in the ideas of 'active citizenship' and 'civic competence'.

Introduction: higher education and European citizenship

Over the past decades, the question of citizenship has emerged as a major theme on the agenda of politicians, policy makers and civic organisations in many countries around the world. In new and emerging democracies, the focus has been on the promotion of a democratic culture and the formation of democratic dispositions and allegiances. In established democracies, the focus has been on the revitalisation of citizenship, often fuelled by concerns about decreasing levels of civic participation and political involvement, and by wider concerns about social cohesion and inclusion (see Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Lawy & Biesta, 2006). In both 'old' and 'new' democracies, the question of citizenship is particularly important for the legitimacy of democratic governance as this is considered to depend crucially on the extent to which democratic structures and practices are supported and 'owned' by citizens. Whereas the discourse on citizenship initially focused on citizens' rights – see particularly the seminal work of T.H. Marshall (1950) – the emphasis has shifted more recently towards questions about corresponding duties and responsibilities and issues concerning active participation.

The question of democratic citizenship is also a central concern for the European Union. Although the notion of European citizenship was already introduced in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, there have been ongoing discussions about the shape and form of European citizenship. At stake in these discussions are *normative* questions about what European citizenship should look like and *empirical* questions about the kinds of citizenship that are actually emerging within and across the member states of the European Union. A key question in this regard is whether the European Union is best understood as a problem-solving entity based on *economic citizenship*, a rights-based

post-national union based on *political citizenship*, a value-based community premised on *social and cultural citizenship*, or as a particular combination of these dimensions.

A specific problem for the development and enhancement of European citizenship lies in the fact that citizenship is commonly experienced at a national level. This is not only because the nation state is the original guarantor of citizenship rights. It is also because there are more opportunities for citizens to identify with and participate in democratic processes and practices at local, regional and, to a certain extent, national level than there are in relation to something as remote and abstract as the European Union. This partly explains why European citizenship has predominantly developed along economic lines, since for many inhabitants of the European Union the impact of the Union – both positively and negatively – is most strongly experienced in the economic domain, for example, in relation to employment, economic legislation, the single currency and regional development.[1] Compared to the economic dimension, the sociocultural and political dimensions, which have to do with the extent to which inhabitants of the member states see themselves as European citizens and identify with and actively support the European Union as a unit of democratic governance, are far less developed.[2]

The most prominent policy development in relation to the sociocultural and political dimensions lies in the promotion of what is known as ‘active citizenship’ (see Benn, 2000; Wildermeersch et al, 2005). Within official European policy, the idea of ‘active citizenship’ first emerged in the context of the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. Here, the strategic goal was set for the European Community to become ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (Lisbon European Council, 2000). In the communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, the European Commission promoted three major pillars, one of which was ‘learning for active citizenship’ (see Commission of the European Communities, 2001). In the *Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe* (Education Council, 2002), the European Council formulated 13 objectives related to the Lisbon programme. Objective 2.3 was ‘supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion’ (see de Weerd et al, 2005, p. 1). In the wake of this, much effort has been invested in developing indicators and instruments for measuring active citizenship (see Hoskins et al, 2006, 2008; Holford, 2008), thus making the idea of active citizenship a central plank in the European Union’s approach to the development of citizenship.

In this article, I wish to explore the question of European citizenship from the perspective of European higher education.[3] While compulsory education has largely remained tied to national priorities (albeit with increasing efforts to include ‘a European dimension’ in its curricula), higher education is rapidly evolving into a sector that transcends national borders and agendas. The ‘Europeanisation’ of higher education is partly the result of long-standing exchange programmes such as the Erasmus programme, which celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2007 (see also the contribution of Papatsiba in this issue). The main impetus for the transformation of European higher education, however, has come from a series of policy initiatives aimed at the creation of a *European Higher Education Area* (Bologna Declaration, 1999), a *European Research Area* (Commission of the European Communities, 2000), and a *European Area of Lifelong Learning* (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). The Lisbon strategy has been a major driver behind these initiatives. Although the economic imperative is central in this strategy (see Biesta, 2006) – and became even more central in the 2005 relaunch of the Lisbon strategy with its explicit focus on ‘growth and jobs’ [4] – policy makers are aware of the wider potential of higher education in relation to questions of social cohesion and European citizenship (see Commission of the European Communities, 2003, 2005, 2006; London Communiqué, 2007; see also Zgaga, 2007, pp. 99-111). This potential has also been emphasised by representatives from European higher education institutions, who have stressed that their role encompasses more than only the creation of the next generation of workers for the knowledge economy, and that it includes a responsibility for cultural, social and civic development at a national and European level (see European University Association, 2002, 2003, 2005; see also Simons et al, 2007).

The question this raises is what kind of citizenship might be promoted in and through European higher education and also what kind of processes – educational and otherwise – might contribute to this. What, in other words, is the particular potential of European higher education for the development of European citizenship? To ask the question in this way suggests a rather

straightforward framing, in which it is assumed that it is clear what kind of citizenship is desirable for Europe, so that the only questions with regard to European higher education have to do with the particular curricula, pedagogies and extra-curricular activities that might contribute to the development of this kind of citizenship. There is, indeed, a strong tendency within policy and research to frame the question in this way (see, for example, Fernández, 2005) and, more specifically, to ask how European higher education can and does contribute to the development of the competences necessary for active citizenship (see Hoskins et al, 2008; Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009). In this article, I wish to question this particular framing. On the one hand, I wish to challenge the near hegemony of the idea of active citizenship by raising some critical questions about this particular construction of citizenship and the underlying notion of democracy. On the other hand, I wish to problematise the conception of (political) education implied in the idea of (civic) competence. My intention is not to dismiss all the work that has been done in this area. Rather, I want to highlight the *choices* implied in the particular constructions of citizenship and civic learning at stake, so as to be able to expose the limitations of the prevailing view in order that alternative constructions and configurations can be considered. As I will argue in more detail below, I am particularly concerned about three issues: (1) the depoliticising tendencies in the idea of active citizenship; (2) a too strong emphasis on consensus in the underlying conception of democracy; and (3) the reduction of citizenship education and civic learning to forms of socialisation. The question this raises, then, is whether European higher education should become one more socialising agent for the production of the competent active citizen, or whether there could and should be a more critical role for higher education in relation to European citizenship.

Active Citizenship and its Limits

The main discourse that has emerged in the context of European citizenship is that of 'active citizenship'. The key idea of active citizenship is that of *participation*. In the project on 'Active Citizenship for Democracy' (Hoskins, 2006), active citizenship for democracy was defined as 'participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy' (Hoskins, 2006, quoted in Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 10). De Weerd et al (2005, p. ii) define active citizenship as 'political participation and participation in associational life characterized by tolerance and non-violence and the acknowledgement of the rule of law and human rights'. 'Associational life' refers to 'all associations and networks between family and the state in which membership and activities are voluntary' (p. ii). Active citizenship is therefore, first and foremost, about participation in civil society. De Weerd et al (2005, p. ii) emphasise that the notion of active citizenship that should be promoted according to European Union policy is not neutral, but is characterised by the values of 'tolerance [and] non-violence' and by 'the acknowledgement of the rule of law and of human rights'.

Hoskins et al (2006, p. 9) locate the idea of active citizenship within the wider discussion about social capital, quoting Putnam's claim that active citizenship is 'strongly related to "civic engagement" and that it plays a crucial role in building social capital'. According to Hoskins et al (2006, p. 10), active citizenship is 'partly overlapping with the concept of social values' and is a phenomenon that is mainly located at micro- and meso-level, i.e. the 'horizontal networks of households, individual households, and the associated norms and values that underlie these networks' and the 'horizontal and vertical relations among groups'. Active citizenship is explicitly *not* restricted to the political dimensions. Rather,

It ranges from cultural and political to environmental activities, on local, regional, national, European and international levels [and] includes new and less conventional forms of active citizenship, such as one-off issue politics and responsible consumption, as well as the more traditional forms of voting and membership in parties and NGOs [non-governmental organisations]. (Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 11)

The limits of active citizenship, according to Hoskins et al (2006, p. 11), 'are set by ethical boundaries', which means that people's activities 'should support the community and should not contravene principles of human rights and the rule of law'. This means that participation 'in extremist groups that promote intolerance and violence should therefore not be included in this

definition of active citizenship' (Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 11; see also Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009, p. 462).

Work on the development of indicators for active citizenship so that active citizenship can be measured (Hoskins et al, 2006) has focused on four dimensions of active citizenship that together constitute the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator (ACCI).[5] These are: 'participation in political life, civil society, community life and the values needed for active citizenship (recognition of the importance of human rights, democracy and intercultural understanding)' (Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 11). Participation in *political life* 'refers to the sphere of the state and conventional representative democracy such as participation in voting, representation of women in the national parliament and regular party work (party membership, volunteering, participating in party activities and donating money)' (p. 12). Participation in *civil society* refers to 'political non-governmental action' (p. 12). This dimension is based on 18 indicators with the subdimensions of 'protest, human rights organisations, environmental organisations and trade union organisations' (p. 12). Participation in *community life* refers to activities 'that are less overtly political and more orientated towards the community – "community-minded" or "community-spirited" activities' (p. 12). What distinguishes these activities from participation in civil society is that they are 'more orientated towards community support mechanisms and less towards political action and accountability of governments' (p. 13). There are seven subdimensions under this dimension, namely 'unorganised help, religious organisations, business organisations, sport organisations, cultural organisations, social organisations, [and] parent-teacher organisations' (p. 13). In each case, the indicators look at membership, participation, donating money and voluntary work. The indicators for the *values* needed for active citizenship are subdivided into democracy, human rights and intercultural competences (see p. 15). With regard to democracy, the five indicators have to do with opinions about how important it is for a citizen to vote, to obey laws, to develop an independent opinion, to be active in a voluntary organisation, and to be active in politics (see p. 15).[6]

Although the work on the development of indicators for active citizenship is primarily being conducted in order to measure levels of civic participation across the European Union, it is also a helpful source of information for gaining a better understanding of what active citizenship stands for and how it is being conceived and operationalised within the European policy context.[7] This makes it possible to characterise the particular assumptions in the idea of active citizenship, which, in turn, makes it possible to articulate what is and what is not included in the particular notion of citizenship put forward. With regard to this, I wish to suggest that the idea of active citizenship as articulated in these documents is distinctive in three ways. Firstly, it tends to be *functionalistic*; secondly, it tends to be *individualistic* in that it focuses on the activities and responsibilities of individuals rather than activities of collectives or responsibilities of the state; thirdly, it tends to be based on a *consensus* rather than a conflict notion of democracy.[8]

Functionalism

To begin with, the first point: the view of citizenship expressed in the idea of active citizenship denotes a set of activities which, as Hoskins et al (2008, p. 389) have put it, 'are considered necessary for a stable democracy and social inclusion'. They add that although active citizenship

is specified on the individual level in terms of actions and values, the emphasis in this concept is not on the benefit to the individual but on what these actions and values contribute to the wider society in terms of ensuring the continuation of democracy, good governance and social cohesion. (Hoskins et al, 2008, p. 389)

This is one of the reasons why active citizenship is different from social capital as the reason for promoting active citizenship lies first and foremost in 'assuring the democratic, human rights and social good at the country level' (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009, p. 463). The concept of active citizenship thus 'has much less of a focus on the benefit to the individual' (p. 463). The functionalist orientation of active citizenship also comes to the fore in relation to its role in social cohesion. Hoskins & Mascherini (2009, p. 463) note that '[o]ne could hypothesise that the role of active citizens within social cohesion is to be the force involved in maintaining the values of equality and diversity through the activities of civil society'. Yet the question this poses – and that is posed by

Hoskins & Mascherini – is to what extent ‘protests and unconventional forms of Active Citizenship [are] *allowed* within a socially cohesive society’ (pp. 463-464; original emphasis). The functionalist tendency is also visible in the ‘community life’ dimension, which focuses on ‘participation in activities that support a community’ (p. 465), and where being actively engaged in a community is seen as an indicator of active citizenship. Being ‘in’ a community is therefore considered to be more desirable than being ‘outside’ of a community – although it does, of course, matter what kind of community one is involved in. This is the reason why the active citizenship indicator also has a values dimension, as this specifies the particular values that should underpin participation in community life and community life itself.

All this suggests that the idea of active citizenship approaches the idea of citizenship very much from the ‘needs’ of the socio-political order. It specifies the kinds of activities and ‘investments’ that individuals need to make so that the specific socio-political order can be reproduced. Active citizenship, to put it differently, emphasises the duties and responsibilities of individuals that come with their status of citizenship more than it being a discourse about citizenship rights. One could, of course, argue that the two complement each other, but it is important to acknowledge that the idea of active citizenship mainly emphasises one side of the citizenship ‘settlement’ and has very little to say about the rights dimension.

There are two further points to be made in relation to this. Firstly, it could be argued that the relationship between citizenship rights and citizenship duties and responsibilities should be seen as a reciprocal one. One could argue that citizenship rights can only be guaranteed if there is sufficient (active) support from citizens for structures and practices of governance and the law. Yet this would provide an even stronger reason for a broader notion of citizenship than one which emphasises just one part of the citizenship settlement. What also should not be forgotten in relation to this is the specific political history of the idea of active citizenship, at least in the Anglo-American context. The idea of active citizenship emerged strongly in the wake of Thatcherism and Reaganism as the ‘answer’ to the vacuum that was created after the demolition of welfare state provision. In this context, the active citizen was first and foremost the person who, through active involvement in the local community, would provide those ‘services’ that were no longer available through welfare state provision (for a penetrating analysis of these developments in Britain, see Faulks, 1998). This indicates that the idea of the active citizen is not just about the legitimacy of democratic governance. It is closely linked to a neo-liberal view of the good society, in which individual action is considered to be the main ‘solution’ for collective problems.

Individualism

This also helps to explain the second characteristic of the idea of active citizenship, which is the tendency to emphasise the activities of *individuals*, i.e. their ability and willingness to participate actively in civil society, and social and community and political life, rather than to focus on collective action or the responsibilities of the state. Hoskins & Mascherini (2009, p. 461) do indeed acknowledge that active citizenship highlights a ‘shift towards examination of individual action’. While there may be good reasons for highlighting the contribution of individuals, the individualisation of citizenship becomes a problem if it becomes the sole foundation for effective political action. This is a point most forcefully made by Zygmunt Bauman (1999) in his *In Search of Politics*. In this book, Bauman argues that what our post- or liquid modern society seems to have lost are spaces, places and opportunities where ‘private worries’ can be translated into ‘public issues’ (see p. 2). These are spaces

where private problems meet in a meaningful way – that is, not just to draw narcissistic pleasures or in search of some therapy through public display, but to seek collectively managed levers powerful enough to lift individuals from their privately suffered misery. (Bauman, 1999, p. 3)

The key question here is whether active citizenship always starts from private motivations – a form of citizenship which Bauman refers to as ‘consumerist’ (p. 4) – or whether citizenship, or, more specifically, *democratic* citizenship, is actually motivated by a concern for the common good, even if this were to require ‘self-limitation’ (see Bauman, 1999; see also Biesta, 2004). Although active citizenship places a strong emphasis on participation, the question is, in other words, whether participation is understood as a *political* process – in which case, participation involves the

translation of private worries into collective issues – or whether it is understood in *consumerist* terms – in which case, collective action would be nothing more than the aggregation of individual preferences. The operationalisation of the idea of active citizenship does pay attention to representative democracy and democratic values but says relatively little about the content of such processes and, in this respect, does locate the responsibility and motivation for participation first and foremost with the individual.

This relates to a second problem with the individualistic tendency in the idea of active citizenship, which has to do with the question of the resourcing of civic action. Civic action, after all, does not simply depend on what individuals decide to do or not to do; it also crucially depends on the opportunities they have for participation. Again, the work on indicators acknowledges that such things as access to (public) transport do impact on the extent to which citizens can actively participate. The more fundamental question here, however, is whether societies – and in the case of European citizenship, the European Union as a whole – see it as their responsibility to make resources available for active citizenship or whether this mostly depends on individual initiative.

An ‘interesting’ example of this – and one, moreover, that combines the two issues I have raised – is the field of adult education (see Biesta, 2005, 2006). Historically, adult education has been one of the places in society that allows for the development of an understanding of how structural processes impact on private problems and opportunities, and for the translation of ‘private worries’ into ‘collective issues’ (see, for example, Fieldhouse, 1996; Martin, 2002). Support for adult education is, therefore, an important investment in civil society with crucial spin-offs for the quality of political life. Yet in many Western countries, adult education has become reduced to only one of its functions, namely that of employability or ‘learning for earning’. Any other forms of adult education – particularly those with potential political and politicising significance – have been rebranded as ‘leisure learning’ and have become (almost) completely dependent on tuition fees rather than being seen as an investment in the common good and the quality of political life. This development is a telling example of the lack of resourcing of the conditions that make meaningful citizenship possible, and shows the dangers of a conception of citizenship that only focuses on individuals and their actions and activities.

The functionalist and individualist tendencies within the idea of active citizenship both locate active citizenship more towards the social than towards the political end of the citizenship spectrum (for this, see also Biesta, 2008a). Although there is an acknowledgement of the political dimensions of citizenship, there is a strong emphasis on activities that serve the needs of the community and society at large. What is far less emphasised is a notion of citizenship that is about collective political deliberation, contestation and action. This is why the idea of active citizenship runs the risk of depoliticising the very idea of citizenship itself. This risk is also reflected in the underlying conception of democracy.

Consensus

The third distinguishing characteristic of the idea of active citizenship has to do with the underlying notion of democracy. The tendency within the idea of active citizenship is to see democracy in terms of consensus rather than in terms of conflict. In the documents, democracy is predominantly depicted as a value-based order. Active citizenship is not simply about *any* participation in civil society, community and/or political life but about participation ‘characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy’ (Hoskins, 2006, quoted in Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 10). Hoskins emphasises, as we have seen, that the boundaries of active citizenship are of an *ethical* nature, which means that people’s activities ‘should support the community and should not contravene principles of human rights and the rule of law’ (Hoskins, 2006, quoted in Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 11). Active citizens are those who subscribe to this order and actively contribute to its reproduction.

This line of thinking seems to hint at a consensus notion of democracy – and I say ‘hint at’ because the literature on active citizenship indicators actually says very little about underlying conceptions of democracy. Although there is a *prima facie* plausibility in the idea that a democratic society is based on certain values and that citizenship therefore entails support for such values, there is a deeper question about the justification of such values. This is, of course, first of all a

question for political philosophy – but it is at the very same time a very practical question, particularly when the ‘borders’ of the democratic order are being challenged or contested. This is what Hoskins & Mascherini (2009) hint at when they ask to what extent protest and unconventional forms of active citizenship can be allowed within a socially cohesive society.

Within the literature on (liberal) democracy, there is a strong tendency to see democracy as being based in rationality and morality, i.e. as ‘the model which would be chosen by every rational individual in idealized conditions’ (Mouffe, 2005, p. 121). On this account, everyone who would challenge the democratic order would automatically have to be positioned on the other side of rationality, i.e. either as irrational or, in case an educational perspective is taken, as pre-rational (see also Honig, 1993). Similarly, if the justification of the democratic order is conceived of in moral terms – such as respect and tolerance – those who challenge the democratic order are automatically seen as immoral. This easily leads to a situation of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and labels those who challenge the particular democratic order as ‘evil’. One of the practical disadvantages of such a positioning of those who are outside of the democratic order is that there is little basis for any meaningful exchange. This is one of the reasons why Chantal Mouffe has argued that we should understand the borders of the democratic order in strictly *political* terms, rather than in moral or nature terms. This not only allows for a different relationship between those who are ‘inside’ and those who are ‘outside’ – a point Mouffe has developed specifically in her earlier work (see Mouffe, 1993). It also allows for a contestation of the borders of the democratic order itself, rather than assuming that any currently existing democratic order is – perhaps even by definition – the ideal order.

This does not mean that Mouffe would advocate democracy without borders – or ‘pluralism without any frontiers’, as she calls it (Mouffe, 2005, p. 120). She does not believe ‘that a democratic pluralist politics should consider as legitimate all the demands formulated in a given society’ (p. 120). She argues that a democratic society ‘cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries’, but emphasises that exclusions should be envisaged ‘in political and not in moral terms’ (p. 120). This means that when some demands are excluded, it is not because they are evil, ‘but because they challenge the institutions constitutive of the democratic political association’ (p. 121). However – and this ‘however’ is crucial – for Mouffe, ‘the very nature of those institutions’ is also part of the debate. This is what she has in mind with her idea of ‘conflictual consensus’, which is a ‘consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation’ (p. 121). ‘A line should therefore be drawn between those who reject those values outright and those who, while accepting them, fight for conflicting interpretations’ (p. 121). All this implies that, for Mouffe, ‘our allegiance to democratic values and institutions is not based on their superior rationality’, which means that liberal democratic principles ‘can be defended only as being constitutive of our form of life’ (p. 121). They are not the expression of a universal morality but are thoroughly ‘ethico-political’ (p. 121).

Beyond the Active Citizen

What these observations begin to reveal is not only that there are specific choices implied within the particular conception of active citizenship that is being pursued – and measured – within the European Union. They also hint at a different conception of active citizenship, one that is much more political and much more politicised, and where the focus of civic activity is not simply on the reproduction of the existing democratic order but is also concerned about different interpretations and articulations of liberty, equality and democracy. Such a form of citizenship is less functional for the existing order, is more driven by political and collective than strictly individualistic concerns, and is more aware of the fact that different interpretations and articulations of the democratic values of liberty and equality point at real alternatives. It would, therefore, be a form of citizenship which acknowledges the possibility of a plurality of democratic settlements. Rather than aiming for one, overarching European conception of citizenship, it would contribute to what Mouffe (2005, p. 129) describes as ‘an equilibrium among regional poles whose specific concerns and traditions will be seen as valuable, and where different vernacular models of democracy will be accepted’. Such a form of citizenship will no doubt be active, but it hints at a different set of activities than those encapsulated by the currently dominant notion of active citizenship.[9]

Civic Competence, Learning and Education

The idea of 'active citizenship' is closely connected with a particular view on civic learning and political education. The central idea in this view is that of 'civic competence'. The idea of competences emerged in European policy in the wake of the Lisbon strategy. Whereas the language that was used originally was that of 'basic skills', this evolved over time into the language of 'competences'. Rychen (2004, pp. 21-22) explains that skills 'designate an ability to perform complex motor and/or cognitive acts with ease and precision and an adaptability to changing conditions', whereas competence is a more holistic concept referring to 'a complex action system encompassing cognitive skills, attitudes and other non-cognitive components'. A competence thus refers to 'a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understandings, values, attitudes and desires which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, in a particular domain' (Deakin Crick, 2008, p. 313). Activities from a large number of working groups led to the formulation of the *European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*. A version of this was eventually adopted by the European Parliament in 2006 (European Council, 2006). It identified the following eight key competences (see Deakin Crick, 2008, p. 312): communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression. Within this framework, civic competence is conceived as the competence which 'equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation' (Education Council, 2006, quoted in Hoskins, 2008, pp. 328-329).

Just as with the work on the measurement of active citizenship, it is the work on the measurement of civic competence that provides most detail about how we should understand civic competence and its constituting dimensions. In a recent report, *Measuring Civic Competence in Europe* (Hoskins et al, 2008), civic competence is defined as 'the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to enable individuals to become an active citizen' (p. 11; see also pp. 22-23) and as 'the ability required for enabling individuals to become active citizens' (p. 13).[10] More importantly for the current discussion, civic competence is understood as a set of *learning outcomes*, i.e. as 'the individual learning outcomes required for active citizenship' (p. 12). Whereas *civic competence* is characterised as the set of 'individual outcomes' of relevant learning processes, *active citizenship* is seen as belonging to the 'social outcomes' of civic competence (see p. 14). The literature thus gives the impression that civic competence is seen as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for active citizenship. Hoskins et al write, for example, that 'the ideal relationship between learning, civic competence and active citizenship' is one 'where the learning develops certain civic competences that drive active citizenship' (p. 13). It is, however, only 'in an ideal world' that civic competence translates into active citizenship as there may be 'barriers that prevent young people who have the capacity for active citizens [*sic*] from participating' (p. 13).

The foregoing reveals that the acquisition of civic competence is seen as the key 'learning task' for the development of active citizenship. Although there may be 'barriers' that prevent the successful translation of civic competence into civic action, the idea is that *without* the possession of the specific set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that make up civic competence, no active citizenship will follow. Civic competence and active citizenship thus seamlessly hang together. This also means, however, that the problems related to the idea of active citizenship return in the idea of civic competence. The acquisition of civic competence is clearly meant to 'insert' individuals into the particular 'order' of active citizenship. In this regard, the acquisition of civic competence is functionalistic. It is also individualistic. Civic learning, understood as the acquisition of civic competence, is, after all, not depicted as a collective learning process, not as a process of collective politicisation and political contestation, but much more as an individual 'achievement'. It is the acquisition by the individual of the particular set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are supposed to turn the individual into an active citizen, i.e. the citizen who will contribute to the reproduction of the existing political order. It thus exemplifies a *socialisation model* of civic learning and political education rather than a *subjectification model* of civic learning and political education. Whereas a socialisation model focuses on the 'insertion' of individuals into existing socio-political orders – and thus sees the purpose of civic learning and political education predominantly in terms

of the reproduction of the existing order – a subjectification model is concerned with modes of civic learning and political education that support and promote political agency (for the distinction between the two models, see also Biesta, 2009). The crucial question, therefore, is whether the idea of civic competence would allow for forms of civic learning that foster political agency and critical citizenship or whether its aim is mainly to ‘domesticate’ the citizen and channel his or her political agency into a very specific direction.

Conclusion: what kind of citizenship for European higher education?

In this article, I have addressed the question as to what kind of citizenship might be promoted in and through European higher education and how, through this, European higher education might contribute to the development of a truly European citizenship. Rather than providing a positive and programmatic answer to this question, I have looked at one possible framing of the issue, namely the one that would argue that higher education should help individuals to acquire the competences they need in order to be or become active citizens. I have tried to argue that this is not just one possible answer amongst many to the question of the contribution of higher education to European citizenship, but that there is a strong tendency within policy and research to define European citizenship *as* active citizenship, and to see civic and political learning for European citizenship in terms of the acquisition of the competences necessary for active citizenship. I have suggested that this is only one possible articulation of citizenship and civic learning, and I have indicated some of the problems related to this particular framing of citizenship and learning. These problems have to do with depoliticising tendencies within the idea of active citizenship, a too strong emphasis on consensus in the underlying conception of democracy, and a reduction of civic learning to a form of socialisation aimed at the reproduction of the existing socio-political order. Against this background, I have argued for an articulation of citizenship that is more political than social, more concerned about collective than individual learning, that acknowledges the role of conflict and contestation, and that is less aimed at integration and reproduction of the existing order but also allows for forms of political agency that question the particular construction of the political order. The underlying idea here is that citizenship should, first and foremost, be seen as a *public* identity and not as an individual one. Citizenship is about our *political* existence, our existence in the *polis*, that is, in the sphere of plurality and difference (see Biesta, in press [b]). This is why the individualisation and domestication of citizenship runs the risk of undermining rather than promoting citizenship and civic action. There is, therefore, a real choice for European higher education. It can either become one more socialising agent for the (re)production of the competent active citizen, or it can seek to support modes of political action and civic learning that embody a commitment to a more critical and more political form of European citizenship.

Notes

- [1] Historically, this is also where the origins of the idea of European citizenship can be found, as the idea of European citizenship first of all emerged in the context of the question of free movement of economically active persons. In the Treaty of Paris (1951), this was restricted to workers in the European coal and steel industries. In the Treaty of Rome (1957), it was extended to all workers and services. Eventually, this developed into a general right ‘of free movement and residence throughout the Union’ (see Article 45 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/32007X1214/htm/C2007303EN.01000101.htm>).
- [2] Results from *Eurobarometer 69* (June 2008) indicate that just over half of those polled (52%) believe that membership of the European Union is a good thing; that 54% believe that their country has benefited from membership; and that 50% tend to trust the European Union (compared to only 34% who trust their national parliament and 32% who trust their national government). Moreover, there are significant differences between the different member states and between different segments of society within each member state, and on several indicators a downwards trend seems to have set in recently (see European Commission, 2008).
- [3] My analysis in this article focuses on the particular conception of citizenship promoted within the context of European higher education. Although there are also important questions to ask about the particular ways in which the governance of citizenship takes place within the context of European

higher education, this topic falls beyond the scope of what I am to achieve in this article. For the question of governance, see, for example, the contributions in Nóvoa & Lawn (2002) and Lawn & Lingard (2002). For a more explicit discussion of some of the links between governance, education and citizenship at European level, see Nóvoa (2007).

- [4] See 'A New Start for the Lisbon Strategy (2005)'. <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11325.htm>
- [5] It is important to bear in mind that although the development of dimensions was mainly driven by a particular conception of active citizenship, the identification of indicators was also driven by available data, and the most important data source for this exercise has been the European Social Survey.
- [6] In a further iteration of the ACCI (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009), there is a slightly different set of indicators comprising protest and social change, community life, representative democracy and democratic values. 'Representative democracy' is a slightly more specific version of 'participation in political life' as it focuses on 'voter turn out, participation in political parties and representation of women in parliament' (p. 466). 'Community life' covers the same areas as 'participation in community life' in the earlier version. 'Protest and social change' covers aspects of 'participation in civil society' with a particular emphasis on activities 'to "improve things" or "prevent things from going wrong"' (p. 465) – which includes items such as 'participating in a lawful demonstration, signing a petition, boycotting products and deliberately buying certain products', but also refers to 'participation or volunteering activities organised by civil societies that work towards government accountability and positive social change' (p. 465). 'Democratic values' covers the same areas as the indicators for 'values needed for active citizenship'.
- [7] Most of the work done on active citizenship indicators is conducted at the European Commission's Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL).
- [8] I would like to stress here that I speak of *tendencies* within the notion of active citizenship in order to emphasise particular aspects more than others. It is not, as I will make clear later, that other aspects are in all cases completely absent.
- [9] I do not have the space to articulate this different conception of active citizenship in much detail. Besides Mouffe's insights, I consider the work of Jacques Rancière on democracy and democratisation highly relevant for this discussion. Elsewhere, I have started to explore the implications of Rancière's work for our understanding of democracy and democratic education (see, specifically, Biesta, 2008b; in press [a]).
- [10] The measurement model of civic competence differs slightly from the definition of civic competence. Whereas the definition of civic competence consists of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, the measurement model consists of cognition about democratic institutions, participatory attitudes, social justice (values and attitudes) and citizenship values (see Hoskins et al, 2008, pp. 35-36).

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