

A Citizen's Europe: Measuring progress on active citizenship and civic competence across European Countries.

By Bryony Hoskins and Agnes Hubert

The debate on an EU of the elite versus a people's Europe was revived by the results of the Irish referendum. While commentators continue to stress the limited legitimacy of the EU, a pragmatic way of considering how to enhance democracy in the EU is to reflect on the way people exert their citizenship rights and duties. Of course there is no quick fix for encouraging people to become more active EU citizens. However, the problems that the European Union faces are similar to many of those faced by national forms of representative democracy. Although the policy approach could be differentiated, encouraging citizens to be active in their community, civil society and political life is a crucial policy issue at all levels (from the local to the European) if democracy, social cohesion and a peaceful Europe are to be sustained for future generations.

The culture of democratic participation is not necessarily fixed (Janmaat, 2006) and, as a result, can be improved via policy. Examples of changing levels of citizenship are the gradual development of representative democracy and civil societies in post-communist countries in Eastern Europe and post-authoritarian countries in Southern Europe. However, the fact that a change in values and participation is possible also means that Northern and Western Europe cannot be complacent concerning their levels of democratic participation.

What should be kept in mind is that creating change to the culture of democratic and value-based participation is a long-term process. Civic values are shaped by a multitude of factors such as the level of economic and social inequality (Muller, 1997) and the transition from industrial to post-industrial societies (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005); but education is one of the most important determinants (Lipset, 1959 and Putnam, 2000). As Jean Jacques Rousseau pointed out in 1762 in "Emile ou de l'éducation", both learning through practical experience (travels) and theoretical teaching is necessary to become a citizen.

However, for education to be effective in promoting civic values and participation we first need to know and identify which values and actions are at stake and how they can be

measured. Only in this way can we chart the patterns of value differences and democratic participation across regions and social groups, and develop effective education packages tailored to the needs of each group. With this purpose in mind researchers from EC CRELL¹ in cooperation with the Council of Europe have carried out research in composite indicators designed to monitor progress on active citizenship.²

The first composite indicator is an index to measure active citizenship. (Hoskins et al., 2006 and Hoskins and Mascherini, 2008) It measures value-based engagement of adults in political life, civil society and community life combined with measures of individuals' democratic values in the areas of human rights, intercultural understanding and citizenship values (for example indicators on understanding the importance of volunteering, voting and civil society action). It encompasses 61 indicators from the 2002 European Social Survey data, a household survey carried out on about 2000 persons in each of the participating European countries every two years.

The results of the composite indicator show that active citizenship rates were the highest in Northern Europe followed by Western Europe. Southern and Eastern Europe gained much lower results (Figure 1) reflecting a two speed Europe.³ However, it should be recognised that although this indicator is broad in terms of voluntary, political and non governmental forms of participation it is limited predominantly to those activities, that are formally organised and different results may be obtained if data for more informal actions were available.

In a second exercise, the research team defined and measured civic competence, the qualities needed to become an active citizen. Civic competence has been defined in the European Commission Framework of Key Competences.⁴ The measurement model

¹ The European Commission Centre for Research on Lifelong learning based in Ispra.

² Active citizenship has been defined in this CRELL project 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)

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⁴ agreed by the Education Council Dec 2006

(based on this definition) for the Youth Civic Competence Composite Indicator (Hoskins et al., 2008) (Figure 2) was based on a framework composed of 4 dimensions: citizenship values (defined above), social justice values and attitudes (predominantly indicators on attitudes towards women's and minority rights); participatory attitudes (for example, interest to participate and ability to influence actions in the community and political life); and cognitions about democratic institutions (knowledge and skills such as interpreting political campaign messages).

The data used was from an international study in 1999 on citizenship of 14-year olds that tested their knowledge and skills on democracy and asked questions about their attitudes and values towards engagement (IEA CIVED).⁵

The results of this composite indicator are in stark contrast with the participation rates of adults presented in the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator. One possibility is that this could be attributed to a generational effect. The results showed that in countries with long standing stable democracies with high levels of adult participation, young people's attitudes towards participation are quite low, for example in Northern and Western Europe. The opposite results hold for less stable and more recent democracies that can be found in Southern and Eastern Europe. In these countries young people are found to have more positive participatory attitudes and values. In summary, in countries with less political stability young people see a greater need to participate.

One of the questions that remain unanswered is to what extent these active young people from Southern and Eastern Europe continue to be active citizens later in life or adopt the same low participation patterns as their parents? It is often argued that in post-communist countries young people have a greater possibility to influence the political development of society as they have been involved in the nation rebuilding process.

However, Eastern European countries scored the lowest results for cognition about democratic institutions and the values of social justice. The lack of a history of democratic citizenship education is likely to be a contributory factor. For these indicators, North, South and West Europe fared better.

To give direction to policy, the following conclusions have been drawn from the research project.

First, the role of education (formal and non-formal) as a prime driver for active citizenship is confirmed. This is the case for formal education with tertiary education having the greatest impact on civil society development (Hoskins et al., 2008). There is evidence that non-formal education also plays a major part. Learning by doing through simulation activities or other methods developed in non-formal education such as the EC "Youth in Action" programmes, where young people volunteer and exchange with young people from other countries, has a positive effect on citizenship behaviour.

Second, education is part of the answer but opportunities to be effectively involved must be available too. As people learn by doing they need to have the opportunities to be involved on a regular basis in discussions on local, national and European policymaking. The input from citizens' involvement needs to be shown to create real change in policy as opposed to legitimization of policy in order to encourage further participation. In addition, feelings of ownership and identity that come with a deliberative process can be helpful towards a positive response in a referendum.

Third, a lifelong learning approach is necessary to promote active citizenship, in particular a policy that targets certain age groups according to their specific needs. In addition, a regional policy approach applying different strategies to address the specific challenges of the different regions would be most effective. Not all parts of Europe face the same challenges. In Eastern Europe adult participation rates are low and it is thus necessary to focus on this age group, for example, through adult education. For young people in these countries it is the raising of awareness of gender equality and equal opportunities for minorities that is the most prominent issue along with education on knowledge and skills for citizenship. Conversely, in Northern and Western Europe the focus should be more on young people. The suggestion is to try to raise the levels of understanding of the importance of participation in civil society and political life and give them the opportunities and confidence that they can make a difference. In Southern Europe there is a need to address adult participation rates in particular in the domain of civil society. Young people have the competence and the desire to participate and the need is to focus on the development of the

⁵ New data to be published in 2009 is being collected for the IEA International Citizenship and Civic education Study. The Commission is helping to fund European countries to participate.

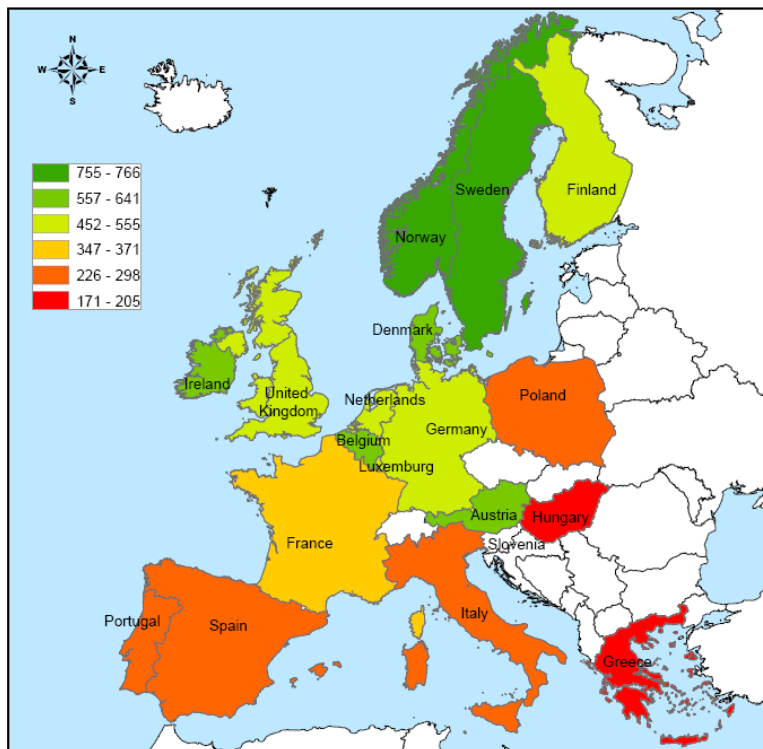
relevant structures and opportunities that give the young people the chance to successfully engage now and in the future.

For further information on this research project visit:

<http://Active-Citizenship.jrc.it/>

Key References:

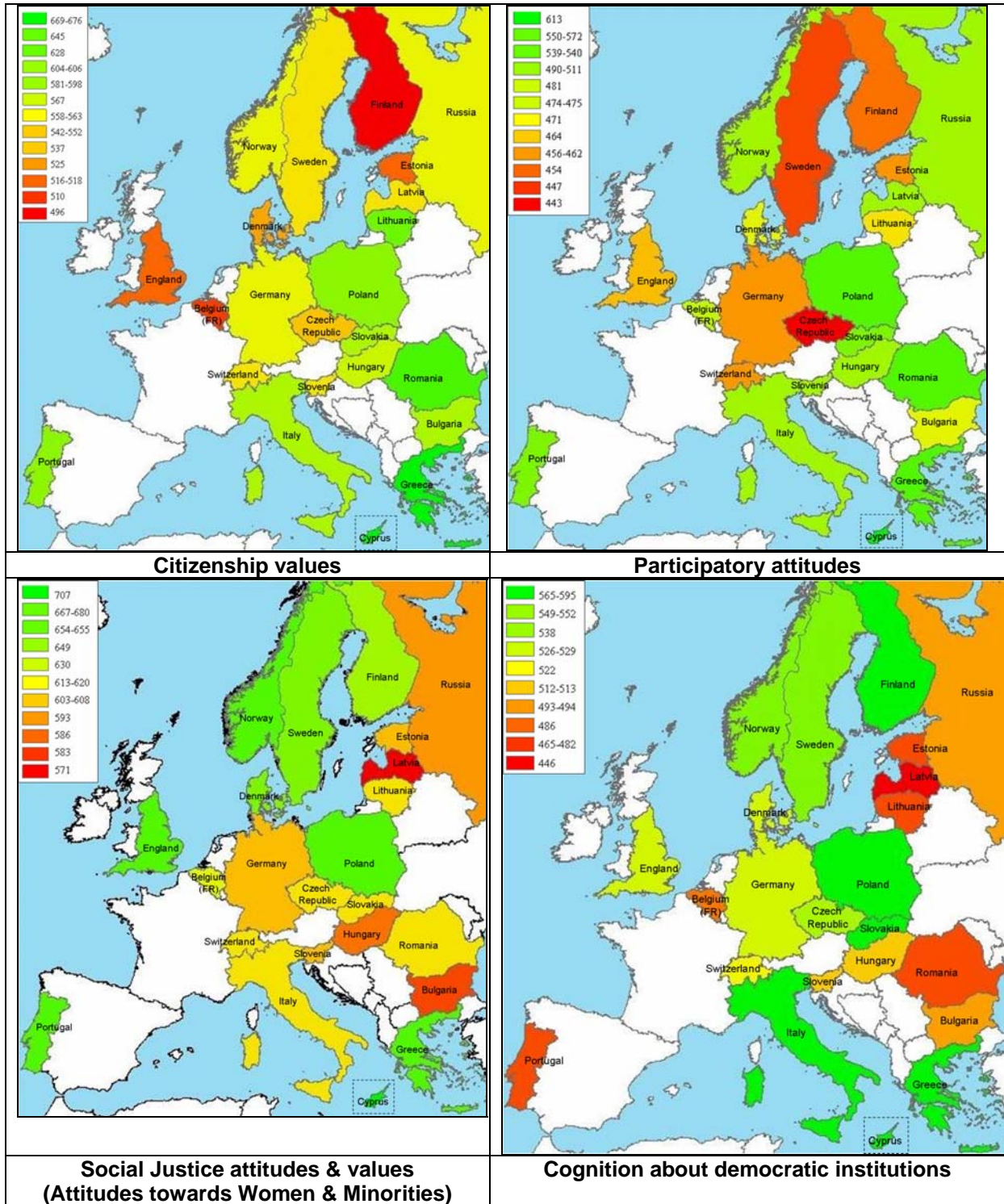
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Active citizenship

Figure 1. Results for the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator based on adult participation rates from 61 indicators from the European Social Survey 2002 (green top scores –red lowest scores)

Figure 2. Maps of the Civic Competence Composite Indicator Results (Data 1999/Age group 14)



Results of the All- European Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship Policies

Gaps between policies and practices

Bruno Losito, Roma Tre University