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Resources for (successful) active citizenship

The starting point of this contribution is to shed light on the importance of the resources needed for successful active citizenship. The discussion of these resources is based on the following assumptions:

- o The successfulness of citizens' activities depends on individual, i.e. personal, capacities, as well as on a supportive social environment.
- o The individual capacities of active citizens can be broken up into three groups: possession of inborn dispositions ('born' into a certain family, social, national environment) and the possession of acquired capacities (know-how, skills etc.); the successful management of individual and environmental changes; and successful involvement in social relationships, institutions, networks at the different levels of the social structure.
- o The possession of these capacities can be addressed in the context of the availability of active citizens with certain types of social capital.

Although the concepts of active citizenship and social capital came from different origins and follow different theoretical and analytical paths; comparisons between them are becoming more common. One reason for such endeavours can be seen in the compatibility of the aims inherent to both concepts. Active citizenship should contribute to the 'revitalisation' of citizens' fading participation in national democratic institutions, which has represented one of the most important features of the democratic tradition over the centuries. Likewise, social capital should 're-collect' the social ties and patch up the social networks that have been patterned through centuries of Western culture and perforated in a few decades of globalisation and hyper-cybernation. The other similarity may be found in the interrelatedness between structural and dynamic characteristics of the social world which are taken into account by both concepts. The correlations between active citizenship and social capital are also obvious when the concepts' structure, i.e., the indicators and main components of both concepts are compared.

For the purposes of this presentation selected indicators and components of the active citizen and social capital concepts are presented in the table below.
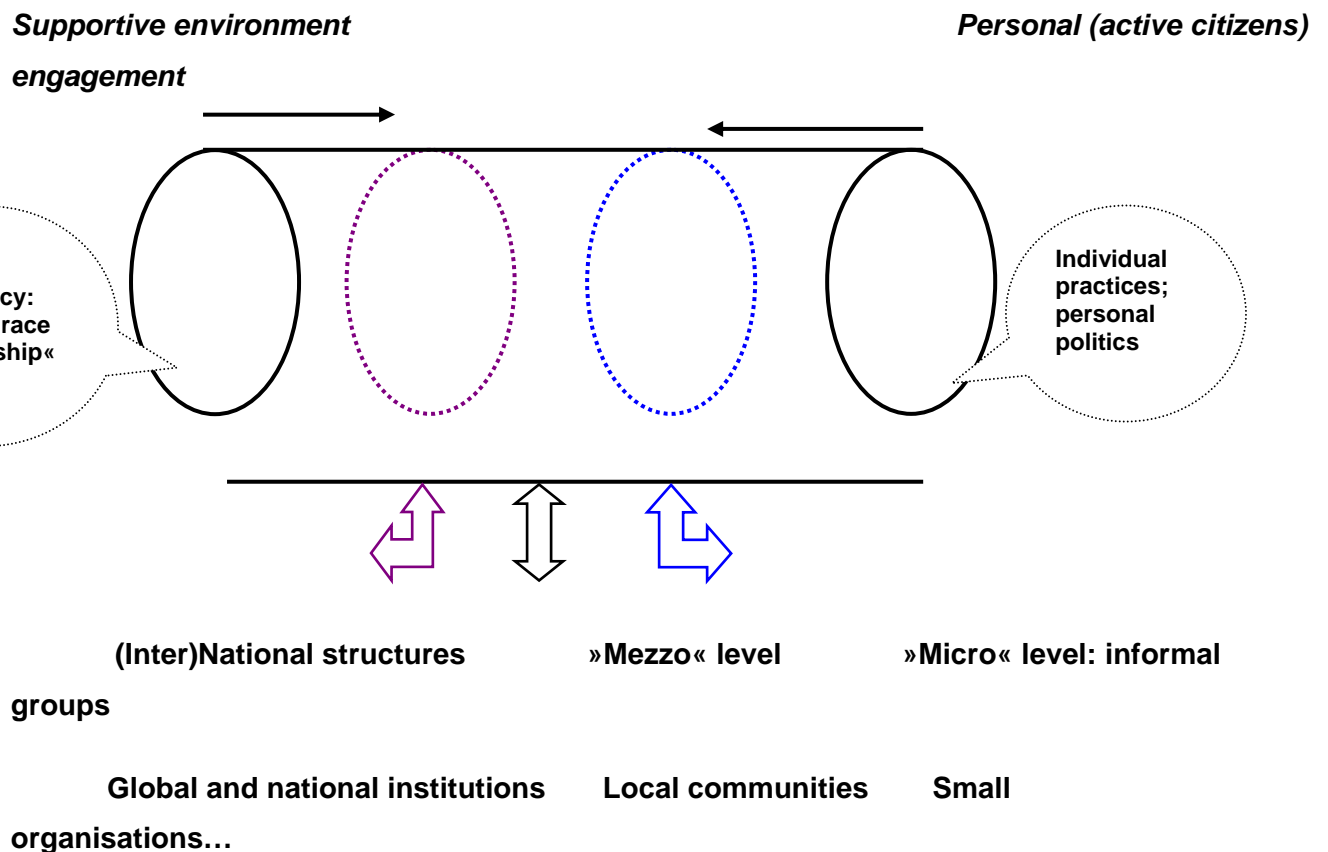
Correlations between the characteristics of active citizenship and social capital

Active Citizenship	Social Capital
Environmental resources; 'supportive' environment at different levels of the social structure	Interdependence of institutional effectiveness and participants' engagement (participation)
Personal /individual resources: Family background, cultural capital, 'habitus' (Bourdieu)	Family belonging, inherited knowledge and skills from generation to generation (Coleman) Behavioural attitudes (Putnam)
Knowledge and skills; formal education, informally gained skills; 'Learning by doing'	Education and academic capital, reputation (Bourdieu)
'Micro' level of sociability; personal ties: friendships, informal groups, partnerships	Social networks (Bourdieu) Social reciprocity
Local community member… Membership in organisations (NGOs, professional, political etc.)	Norms, obligations, trust in formal institutions and structures (Putnam)
National and international institutions membership National and worldwide public engagement	Civic and civil society engagement. Bridging and bonding capital
Engagement for universal principles and values Widening the spaces of freedom (H. Arendt)	

From the above comparison we can see that different kinds of social capital are available to active citizens or, in other words, that effective active citizens should be well equipped with different types of social capital. Besides the individual and social sources which should be

provided by different sorts of social capital, a supportive environment is needed. This means that individual or group initiatives should encounter a responsive institutional structure to become realised. Since active citizens are engaged on different levels responsiveness is expected to be the general characteristic of democratic societies' structures. The picture below shows the main structural levels which enable active citizens' engagement and support their effectiveness.

Levels of interrelatedness between active citizenship and a supportive environment

Supportive environment engagement

Personal (active citizens)

Abstract democracy: »Human race membership«

Individual practices; personal politics

(Inter)National structures   »Mezzo« level   »Micro« level: informal groups

Global and national institutions   Local communities   Small organisations…

In both the table and picture above we used some definitions of active citizenship which are found in the international project *Education and Training for Active Citizenship and Governance in Europe* conducted in six European countries[1] (ETGACE 2000-2003). In the continuation of our presentation the results of this project will also be used for gaining an

insight into how available certain types of social capital are to active citizens. One of the ETGACE results reveals that Slovenian active citizens are very successful in comparison with those from other countries. Advantages of the Slovenian sample are the high level of pragmatism (goal orientation) and effectiveness. These favourable results can be partially ascribed to structural changes in the wider social environment, namely, the transition period and restructuring of the institutional system.

A supportive social environment

Data about Slovenian citizens' active life histories show that for almost everyone in the sample the transition has opened up new possibilities for public and organisational involvement. The biggest change in the social environment was the formation of new institutions and reshaping of old ones. In the transition period some Slovenian respondents were activated in political parties, some established non-governmental organisations, while others co-established private enterprises. In such favourable institutional circumstances some active Slovenian citizens became active in more social domains – politics, the economy, social welfare, the local community etc.. Respondent R. provides an example: he is a successful manager, the co-founder of a private charity fund and the initiator of various environmental and professional initiatives.

With political pluralism the establishment of new political parties and democratic institutions opened up possibilities for new political activities. Almost every Slovenian respondent is active in some way in the public and/or political domains. Among politically active citizens a sort of political activism prevails, which could be connected with the previous communist tradition of activism in the communist party, trade union and other highly centralised and hierarchically organised public activities. Since the transition from a non-democratic socialistic system and its institutions to a parliamentary democracy happened sporadically, the 'old' cultural-value systems, institutional praxis and lifestyles have been prevailing during the transitional period.

Social networks

Although the formal-structural and institutional framework was changed radically, social networks, like the abovementioned cultural-value patterns, did not undergo the same kind of changes. It could be argued that social networks became wider, more complex, more democratic with regard to organisational patterns and reshaped by the competitive principle,

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[1] United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Spain, Slovenia. See: www.acs.si/projekti

which started to function in the pluralistic environment. But from the viewpoint of personal ties the preservation of the old patterns and connections prevailed during the transition period (see the discussion of 'old' and 'new' elites in Slovenia).

Family background

Although Slovenian active citizens came from different family backgrounds (rural, semi-proletarian, white-collar, intellectual), almost all mentioned that their family background had an important influence on their life practices and important decisions about being publicly active. With regard to the three prevailing family patterns: A - peasant with catholic religious beliefs; B - intellectual, white collar and semi-proletarian with prevailing autonomous, i.e. neutral beliefs; C - intellectual and (semi)proletarian with prevailing 'Marxist' beliefs. Respondents from peasant catholic families (A), who are characterised by having more children and an upbringing which follows the catholic doctrine, said that already in their families they encountered a pattern of solidarity and social engagement which directing them to later social and political involvement. Respondents from family pattern B mentioned that family support was given to them sporadically and through behavioural examples, like in the case of respondent P., an intellectual who described his father and how he 'always read something by the big stove'. Or respondent A., a politician from a white collar family, whose parents had been involved in the local community politic and she followed their example. The family influences on respondents from pattern C vary. One respondent from this pattern mentioned a 'non-supportive' influence of the family, but later this conflictive family situation motivated her to become politically active. It could be stated that respondents with this kind of family background developed a critical perspective of social injustice and non-solidarity.

Solidarity

Almost half the respondents recognise the motives of solidarity and/or endeavours to correct social injustices as important factors in their involvement in active citizenship. Solidarity as the motif and the contents of involvement are accentuated more with women than with men, in the older age cohort and more often in the civil society domain than in the other two.

Frequently, activity arising from solidarity is connected with correcting social injustices that the respondents experienced in their childhood or later. Solidarity-related activity also appears for other reasons, for instance donation activity. Some respondents stated solidarity

due to reasons arising from their professional work. Their solidarity motives were set more 'pragmatically' – such as resolving common professional problems and exchanging experience.

Being part of a community

Most of the interviewed Slovenian citizens who are active in the field of civil society and the state justified their activities as being beneficial to the community. Some respondents identified as part of their active citizens' engagement a contribution to improvement of the situation in the local and/or regional community. Some began to be active in narrower, informal groups which grew into associations. Others activated themselves in organisations at the local level or identified their interests as being beneficial to the local community and gradually became active in political organisations. In this move from the local community space to the political arena, they were guided by their tendency to achieve wider and more efficient results by means of their political engagement.

For several active citizens, primarily in the field of civil society and labour, the basic motto for engagement is aid to marginalised groups. Their activity arose from their own experience – (greater or lesser) marginalisation in early periods of life, or as a replacement for a professional activity or qualification.

Attitudes to education

Almost all active Slovenian citizens accept a high degree of responsibility for informal societal learning as well as for formal and informal advanced professional training. They learn as they go along, on the basis of any experience, and use the knowledge gained in their further engagement. They do not ascribe great importance to primary and secondary formal education, although they almost all have a relatively high level of formal education. It is possible to assert that they take formal education as something inherent and focus on gaining new knowledge and skills through learning by doing.

Efficiency and individual capacities

Almost all active Slovenian citizens in the sample studies assess their active citizens' engagement as successful. Most are also optimistic with regard to the continuation of their activities in the future. The respondents' positive self-evaluation and the social significance of their roles indicate that the strategies they used in realising their motives and goals were

successful, and that the results were also successful for the social environment in which they operate.

The data on individual achievements confirm the self-assessments of active Slovenian citizens. More than one-half participated in successful initiatives for the establishment of new institutions, including a new Slovenian Constitution and national programme. On their own initiative, one-third began to introduce and organise new activities, which gradually institutionalised to become an association, a magazine of national importance, private companies, a branch of an international humanitarian organisation and communities.

The respondents who implemented individual initiatives mostly had significant knowledge and experience. Several were active even before transition in some then legal organisation in which they obtained knowledge in the areas of organisation, leadership and governance. Several were also technically and/or professionally qualified for activities within which they gave initiatives.

One-fifth of the active citizens from the Slovenian sample participated in the emergence of new political parties. Several respondents became members of political parties because they saw in them the possibility of the organised expression and promotion of their views and values, and an opportunity for a more efficient influence on the flow of social happenings.

Some respondents successfully introduced organisational, technological and managerial innovations into existing or new institutions. They primarily used their technical and professional knowledge and experience gained during their activities in the institutions of the previous system.

Some of them successfully animated and organised socially marginalised groups: female farmers, war refugees, drug addicts, the lonely and the aged, the difficult-to-employ, or the politically prosecuted. In addition to the strong personal motivation to help others and correct injustices, these respondents mostly also had personal experience or direct contacts with those who are marginalised, as well as specialist knowledge and experience in the field of aiding the marginalised.

Conclusion

The characteristics described above of the sample of active Slovenian citizens clearly confirms the high level of correlation between successful active citizenship and social capital,

i.e. the initial presumption that successful active citizens possess different types and large amounts of social capital.

The descriptions also highlight the great importance of a supportive social environment, in the Slovenian case represented by institutional changes characteristic of the transition from non-democratic to democratic systems. This raises the question of the opportunities for and forms of active citizenship in the 'non-transition' period. Comparisons with other countries show that in countries with a longer democratic tradition their system structures are continuously more open to the introduction of innovative civic and civil society practices, and that active citizens' practices are part of the political tradition in these countries. The results of the ETGACE project also demonstrate that the future of active citizenship lies neither in formal education nor the informal training of potentially active citizens, but in maintaining and opening ever more new 'spaces of freedom', as H. Arendt calls them. While during Slovenia's transition these spaces opened due to both system and global changes, one could assert that in the future they will have to be maintained and preserved by the (active) citizens themselves, initially by establishing active citizenship as a continuous independent individual and group practice. Namely, through creating a 'tradition' of active citizenship and by continuously following and learning new active citizen skills.

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