

Editorial

Citizenship Education and Civil Society

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Contemporary societies face a range of important challenges, including: climate change; poverty; wealth, income, and other forms of social inequality; human rights abuses; misinformation and fake news; the growth of populist movements; and citizen disenchantment with democratic politics. Citizenship education, properly conceived, seeks to address issues of general concern through both individual and collective action. A key aim is to enhance citizens' levels of political knowledge and understanding, and to educate citizens as actors in civil society so as to promote critical and active citizenship, with citizens able to develop their capacities to engage in civic and political activities to bring about the social changes they wish to see. This Special Issue of *Societies* is comprised of four papers which, in different ways, explore the relationship between citizenship education and civil society. They examine how current forms of citizenship education in different societies, in both formal and informal educational contexts, are, or are not, positively contributing to citizens' levels of political knowledge, understanding, and efficacy.

Marcus Bhargava and Lee Jerome in their article 'Training Teachers for and through Citizenship: Learning from Citizenship Experiences' seek to demonstrate how initial teacher education (ITE) courses can make connections with civil society organisations to facilitate active citizenship education [1]. Bhargava and Jerome discuss the experience in one British university, where ITE students were being trained to become secondary school citizenship teachers (teaching 11–16-year-olds). They situate their discussion within the context of a new discourse that has been developing in recent years around 'Teacher Development 3.0', which advocates a profession-led education that is concerned, among other things, with the importance of community engagement as part of teacher training. The authors examine the impact on the student teachers of working within a local community-organising project and they argue that the students benefitted by being able to understand the challenges for schools working with community organisations to bring about change for citizens; enhance their citizenship subject and pedagogic knowledge of active citizenship; and develop their abilities as active citizens themselves. Bhargava and Jerome argue that the project demonstrates the potential for incorporating experiential learning through active citizenship into an ITE programme.

Moving from the local to the global, two articles in this Special Issue are concerned in different ways with interrogating approaches to global citizenship education (GCE) that have developed in recent decades. GCE emphasises the interdependence of individuals, communities, and societies across the world and aims to provide students with knowledge and understanding, skills, and values and attitudes that enable them to engage in active citizenship at all levels from the personal and local to the global. In 'Enacting Critical Citizenship: An Intersectional Approach to Global Citizenship Education' Maayke de Vries argues in favour of the inclusion of an intersectional approach to GCE as an important means of facilitating greater criticality by practitioners [2]. The author provides a detailed introduction to the analytical framework of intersectionality, explaining how it can be used to understand how different elements of a person's political and social identities merge to produce different forms of privilege and discrimination. She argues that an intersectional approach to GCE would help students comprehend structural oppressions and privileges, which requires critical self-examination, reflection, and the recognition of



Citation: Kisby, B. Citizenship Education and Civil Society. *Societies* **2021**, *11*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11010011>

Received: 26 January 2021

Accepted: 27 January 2021

Published: 28 January 2021

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complicity as well as shared responsibility for addressing structural inequalities through political action. The paper demonstrates the potential of a critical, intersectional approach to GCE, both as a means of promoting social justice and understanding the complexities of forms of injustice at a global level. The author argues that this approach to GCE may cause a degree of discomfort to some students, but that this can lead to positive outcomes through deliberation and action.

Gary Walsh's article 'Challenging the Hero Narrative: Moving towards Reparational Citizenship Education' is concerned with analysing GCE through a critical discussion of what is described as a 'hero narrative' approach, which Walsh discerns in some approaches to GCE [3]. He argues that this hero narrative approach to citizenship education is underpinned by a 'saviour mentality' in which those who wish to help others are not open to advice from those they wish to help. Walsh examines the ongoing partnership work between Scotland and Malawi and argues that a hero narrative has been constructed around David Livingstone, the 19th century Scottish physician and Christian missionary, which this partnership perpetuates. Walsh argues that the hero narrative is damaging to relations between different actors because it distorts frames of reference and obscures the historical and political contexts of civic action. He argues that through critical reflection, these contexts can be brought to the fore and he argues in favour of a reparational approach to citizenship education that can dismantle the hero narrative and repair the damage it causes. This involves symbolic and material forms of reparation and necessitates that the harm done to interdependent cultural identities by problematic cultural discourses is addressed.

A great deal of literature in recent decades has focused on declining levels of youth engagement with traditional political and social institutions in established democracies. For some writers, this is taken as evidence of increased political apathy amongst young people. However, as the author of the final article in this Special Issue, Aleida Cristina Mendes Borges, argues, new trends suggest that, in many parts of the world, young people are actively engaging, individually and collectively, in a variety of forms of civic and political activity. In her article, 'Youth Agency in Civic Education: Contemporary Perspectives from Cabo Verde', she explores recent youth-led civic education initiatives in the Republic of Cabo Verde, an African country made up of a group of islands situated in the central Atlantic Ocean [4]. She examines two projects, Djumbai Libertariu and Parlamentu di Guetto, which have developed in recent years and aim to increase levels of political knowledge and awareness within poorer communities. The author argues that in post-colonial societies, forms of citizenship education face the particular challenge that they can be associated with the legacy of colonialism, perpetuating the privilege of the powerful and masking the disempowerment of others. She argues that the initiatives she has examined, which aim to increase political knowledge by opening up new civic spaces, in contrast, have the potential to make political participation increasingly accessible to all.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

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