

Through the eyes of young people: what is the meaning, value and impact of citizenship and youth participation?

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Abstract

Literature produced in the last 15 years stresses changes in citizens' involvement in civic and political participation arising from digital and social technologies. When it comes to young people, literature also hints those concepts such as citizenship and participation, as well as the ways of experiencing them, are different in the eyes of young and older generations. Based on the results of a research that approached school as a privileged space to discuss citizenship themes through media creation and production, this article focuses the meanings adolescents attribute to citizenship and participation, as well as their roles as active citizens with a voice. Three specific questions are analysed: *What do participation and citizenship mean to young people? What do they understand by 'citizen'? How do they think citizens can express their voices?* Action research with secondary school students, aged 15 to 18, attending two Portuguese schools was conducted. This paper explores the results of the exploratory questionnaire (N=197) presented in the diagnosis phase and the group discussions conducted in the reflection & evaluation stage. The results of the univariate statistical analysis of the questionnaire and content analysis of the group discussions indicate that even though young people share concrete ideas about what citizenship means to them. Dataset also points to a lack of involvement in civic/ political movements and associations and a widespread disbelief regarding the impact of their citizen voice, especially when expressed through traditional forms of participation. Moreover, there seems to be a significant - and tendentially negative - impact of adults with prominent roles in their lives on adolescents' opinions and perspectives. The conclusions stress the importance of further exploring concepts of citizenship and participation from a family context point of view and of adopting youth-centric perspectives when reflecting on issues related to youth citizenship and participation.

Keywords: *Youth, Citizenship, Participation, Citizen Voice, Media Education*

Introduction

What does it mean to be an active citizen today?

In its most purely utopian state, the right to citizenship is universal. It refers to a set of rights and duties that an individual from a given society has (Igreja, 2004). With the dawn of the digital world - the optimistic voices say - this idea was brought closer to reality. This new scenario enlightened the promise of positive change, openness and inclusion of all individuals in democratic life. At the same time, it illustrated the possibility of easier ways to participate, be civically engaged, develop critical skills, and debate ideas in spaces that represented extensions of Habermas' idea of the public sphere (Constantinescu, 2012). A new door was opened, presenting opportunities for individuals to contribute to democratic decision-making in prompt, interactive and participatory manners (Livingstone, 2009).

If we delve into the relationship between young people and digital media, several aspects that can contribute to understanding the importance of digital worlds to experience citizenship and participate in a motivated and engaged way emerge. On the one hand, these spaces' dynamic attributes make them especially attractive to younger age groups. Aspects such as hypertext, flexibility, and multimodality pave the digital roads enhancing the possibilities to interact, share (Livingstone, 2009), and co-produce knowledge (Pahl, 2019), ergo portraying a culture that claims to be more participatory than the others that preceded it (Jenkins et al., 2006). Jenkins' concept of participatory culture (2006c) concerns the response of contemporary society to the emergence of the internet. Understanding the internet as a vehicle for collective action - such as problem-solving, public and joint decision-making and alternative creativity - and the digital media as tools for learning, growth, awareness, and citizenship, members of society move away from the condition of passive recipients of information to embrace a more active role in social dynamics. The participatory culture thus encourages individuals, especially young people, to embrace a dual role of information consumers and producers (Jenkins et al., 2016), giving everyone new possibilities to exercise their participation rights.

On the other hand, digital and social technologies are presented as spaces that can promote empowerment (Madra-Sawicka et al., 2020) and a feeling of being heard and able to partake in the societies and communities one is part of (Saura et al., 2017). It becomes clear that the greater media accessibility and higher circulation of media content that the participatory culture advocates (Jenkins, 2006) create new opportunities for content dissemination. It also creates further opportunities for people to intervene and contribute more openly to constructing content and knowledge. Furthermore, it allows for a say in the meanings attributed to media messages/ contents during the (re)creation and (re)sharing process they undergo. Nonetheless, Jenkins warns that members are not obliged to contribute to this participatory culture - "all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that their contributions will be appropriately valued" (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 7).

This article presents partial results of research focused on media creation and production in school as a basis for discussing and reflecting on citizenship. Data presented regards young people's perceptions and practices of citizenship and participation.

Theoretical background

Youth Participation: youth as actors of change and the impact of digital media

Participation refers to the active status of citizenship as social interaction and involvement in community dynamics (Neves, 2010). Participation is then about belonging to a community and contributing to its development and evolution (Bordenave, 1983; Demo, 1996). Looking closely at the literature, thinking about youth participation and reflecting on its importance in contemporary societies requires considering several aspects.

Youth participation is, first and foremost, a right expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). According to article 12, children are full citizens with the right to express their opinions and points of view and get involved in decision-making processes that particularly relate to their lives, such as those taken in schools or communities. It also refers to the right to access essential information about their options

and roles as actors of change that can engage in civic and political dynamics. Besides this, youth participation considers the active roles that young people embrace when they take part in discussions and processes that concern the institutions that make decisions related to their lives. These institutions can be those related to power and politics, but also those that operate in distinct social groups and contexts (Su, 2009; Wray-Lake et al., 2008) – such as non-formal education institutions, NGOs, cultural associations, among other -, commonly more open and egalitarian places.

In its ultimate state, youth participation challenges adult-centric views on the idea of young people as problematic, distanced from social issues or political matters (Barber, 2007; Craney, 2019) and with a merely passive role in democratic processes. Youth participation comprises their effective involvement and influence in these processes. In this line of thought, and as Checkoway recalls, "participation is about the power of young people as a group that is usually underrepresented in the political process. It is the strategy by which they are involved in goal setting, resource allocation, and program implementation. It is the means by which they influence the opportunities and outcomes of the larger society" (2011, p.341)

The literature produced in the last 15 years highlights several transformations and directions regarding the effective involvement of young people in democratic processes and their citizenship experiences. On the one hand, it is evident that young people get involved differently in each context of their lives (European Commission, 2017, 2018); on the other hand, consumption and participation overlap (Pereira et al., 2018; Ponte & Batista, 2019), which leads to doubts, false judgments and different conceptions about what is or is not participation.

Moreover, although local, national, and European communities and institutions have offered opportunities for young people to get involved and develop their civic identities, some barriers pose significant challenges. Namely formal power structures, interests, values, and languages, among others, are not always overcome (Wood, 2009). Consequently, obstacles to participation and citizenship arise, as well as doubts regarding their meanings for young people themselves (Bečević & Dahlstedt, 2022; Cortesi et al., 2020) – these concepts are usually framed within different scopes for adults and youth. Weiss (2020) points out that civic engagement and political participation have several intersections, and that because the various generations have different perceptions of these concepts, there is a need for more research and reflection on these topics.

Furthermore, the rise of digital media presented new opportunities for youth participation - whether in subjects, languages, or media. Young people have been portrayed as a generation that is not only the most exposed to the contents disseminated on the Internet (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021) but also as the one that most uses digital media - especially mobile and social media. The spectrum of uses is broad and strongly focuses on relational purposes. They are standard tools to develop relationships, maintain connections, share their opinions and points of view and be actively involved in causes (Bennett et al., 2008; Jenkins et al., 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). The causes that impel them to actively engage in participation dynamics and the ways they get involved are what distinguishes them from previous generations. Matters related to ecology, sustainability, and human and animal rights are perceived as priorities in the eyes of young people. These are the issues for which they are speaking out (Briggs, 2017) and which give rise to youth social movements highly focused on digital platforms and non-traditional (or conventional) models of participation (Sloam, 2016; Garcia et al., 2019). From a broader perspective, far from the usual reading that describes young people as uninterested and uninvolved from a civic and political point of view (Loader, 2007; Loader

et al., 2016) it is the informal practices that occur in spheres of non-institutional civic intervention (Dahlgren, 2009; Olsson & Dahlgren, 2010) that most interest young people. They prefer personalised ways of engagement (e.g., digital networking, protests, and volunteering) and languages that appeal to affectivity (e.g., humour, memes, satire) (Cho et al., 2020) – something that they don't usually relate to formal politics or structured political participation.

Moreover, these aspects are crucial to, as Dahlgren (2009) stresses, expand the democratic experience and communication beyond the physical spaces where the individual lives citizenship through the media.

Although the relationship is not guaranteed, the link between media and democracy is even more relevant in current contexts. The internet and digital provide new and expanded spaces for political participation (Dahlgren, 2009; 2011), allowing to connect decision makers and political elites to citizens (Delli Carpini, 2000) and creating opportunities to include marginalised or more distant groups or more distant groups – such as youth-in democratic processes (Ribeiro & Menezes, 2009). Buckingham (2020) even stresses that media are inevitable in modern life and for democracy. According to the author, a healthy democracy requires three aspects: well-informed and discerning media users; active citizens participating in civil society; and skilled and creative workers (Buckingham, 2020).

The idea of a generalised disengagement of young people from civic participation (Pontes et al., 2019) is set against the growth of interest in alternative and less institutionalised forms of participation (Banaji & Moreno-Almeida, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019). Some authors even claim that young people's expression through digital media is fundamental to their growth and political identity formation (Crowley & Moxon, 2017). It helps them be social awareness and develop solutions to address everyday challenges in either alternative collective forms (Bennett et al., 2008) or as individual beings (Harris et al., 2010).

What does it mean “to have a voice”?

The idea of having a voice frequently arises in discussions focused on citizenship, participation and the digital age. Voice is described as the element that shapes the individual's sense of identity and belonging (Chabal, 2009) since it displays a person's traits and beliefs. It is, therefore, a relevant element for citizenship - it represents the ability of individuals to convey their views, ideas and convictions. Moreover, through its voice, an individual expresses freedom, assuming civic, social, political and economic positions to make itself heard by power institutions (Rocha Menocal & Sharma, 2008), peers and others outside their influence groups. According to Goetz and Gaventa (2001), the relevance of discovering and promoting the citizen's voice relies on its intrinsic value - it alludes to a range of formal/informal mechanisms and languages. It is then a reflexive form of public agency that precedes the action (Coudry, 2010) and reveals the individual's particular goals and intentions in a specific civic process.

Suppose we dwell on studies about children and young people. In that case, the idea of voice is associated with a respectful attitude - adopted by adults - towards the active contributions of young people to the societies and communities where they live (Serido et al., 2011). School is one of these contexts, and it is noted that exploring citizen voice in both formal and non-formal learning spaces can endorse civic engagement and citizenship education (Fredericks et al., 2001; St. John & Briel, 2017). Promoting civic engagement and critical reflections about citizenship can also positively shape young people's future success (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2016).

In the digital age, social networks and platforms have been contributing to the reconceptualization of ideas such as citizenship and participation and creating new opportunities to participate and make people's voices heard. A study conducted in 2014 by García-Galera et al. showed that young people were using social networks as more than simple extensions of their lives. The authors mention that social media is a lever for young people to mobilize in digital contexts, encouraging them to act and amplifying their voices outside these spaces (García-Galera, 2014). According to Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2016), alongside their significance in out-of-school spaces, in the educational context, digital media also play an essential role. They provide new ways of encouraging young people to express themselves, amplifying their voices and even enhancing the inclusion of marginalized groups. As digital media privilege the use of new languages and formats that are more familiar to younger people - such as videos, gifs, memes, and digital narratives, among others (Amâncio, 2017; Mainsah, 2017; Scolari, 2018; Sefton-Green, 2013) - they meet all the conditions to facilitate expression, creating new opportunities for engagement in democratic processes. Furthermore, as Couldry (2010) stresses, a voice without a platform to be heard has no impact or expression.

However, it is crucial to recognize that being young, having access to digital media and a voice are not inherent features. Aspects such as the fear of speaking out (Pereira et al., 2018), communication difficulties/constraints, limited access to media, lack of diversity in their everyday environments, and even confrontation with highly authoritarian adult figures (Livingstone & Third, 2017; Serido et al., 2011; Third et al., 2014) are factors that can restrain youth participation. Besides this, socio-demographic aspects such as race, gender and class and other specific conditions (e.g., young people with disabilities) are often - and wrongly - ignored in reflections that aim to address the concept of youth participation. They influence how messages are (or are not) expressed (Burke et al., 2017) and can dictate inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization (Paris & Winn, 2014). Shedd (2015) also recalls that personal experience is a relevant trait: individuals are shaped by their experiences, the places they attend and visit, and the social barriers imposed upon them.

Though a certain level of abstraction moulds the idea of voice, the literature underlines that it can play an essential role in the overall citizenship experience. When young people are focused, strengthening, and valuing their voice is fundamental to promoting and supporting a generation of enlightened young adults who are active members of their communities, defend and value universal rights and understand the value of their contributions to society. Ignoring youth voices or failing to take them into account in decision-making processes may lead to silencing young people and, Craney warns, relegating them to subordinate societal positions (2019). This can cause a sense of disbelief in their value as active citizens. Given the importance of young people for the continuity of democratic societies, this discouragement is not at all desirable, primarily when reflecting on the future of democracy.

Methodology

Methodological options

The data analysed in this article results from a doctoral research project carried out with students from two Portuguese secondary schools in the academic year of 2018/2019. Among the various aspects it

encompassed, the research sought to collect data regarding youth's perceptions of citizenship and participation, their roles as citizens, and participation and civic engagement habits. The project also intended to collect information on the perceived value of their voice as active and valued citizens. This article focuses the results related to two questions: *What do participation and citizenship mean to young people? What do they understand by 'citizen'? How can citizens express their voice?*

The methodological option considered the target group and the intention to conduct the research in a formal educational context (school), without promoting changes or alterations to the participants' routine environment. Co-creation and active participation of research participants were also primary concerns in the research design. Given these aspects, we opted to conduct action research.

Action research is an interventional methodology that favours collaboration between researcher and participants, promoting a critical and reflective attitude of all those involved towards the data collected (Amado, 2014; Cohen & Manion, 1989). It was, therefore, considered an adequate methodological option. The research followed the standard structure of action research and was divided into three distinct yet complementary phases – 1) diagnosis, 2) intervention, and 3) reflection & evaluation. The diagnosis phase aimed to portray and deepen the knowledge about the central research subjects (namely media literacy, media creation and citizenship), the context (the school) and the actors involved. The intervention phase took place in two schools between January and June 2019. It aimed to develop and implement, in a collaborative way, media creation and production activities that would contribute to promoting young citizenship and discussions about citizenship issues in the classroom, within a set of disciplines – namely those whose curriculum had a natural predisposition to discuss these topics (languages, and social sciences-related subjects). Last, a reflection & evaluation phase was promoted. Besides the contribution and critical analysis of the activities carried out, participants discussed the place of young people as citizens and their citizenship practices in this phase. This article focuses on the results of the exploratory questionnaire applied during the intervention phase and the group discussions carried out in the reflection and evaluation phase. Both these procedures and instruments will be presented in detail later in their respective section. Data analysis and conclusions were further supported by field notes from the researcher's participant observation. The researcher kept a journal. Notes were taken regarding details and other aspects related to the activities, such as ideas and suggestions shared during the activities and things the participants said throughout the sessions. These field notes supported the analysis of the results obtained through the other data collection instruments.

Research context and target group

Taking into consideration the literature review, the importance of school in the civic formation of individuals, and the changes experienced during the adolescence phase (which shape personality and beliefs), we chose to conduct the research in the school context with students attending Portuguese secondary schools.

In Portugal, secondary education is compulsory and comprises a three-year cycle (10th, 11th and 12th grades). Several modalities of secondary education are available (artistic courses, technological and vocational courses, and scientific-humanistic courses, among others) and aim to provide diversified training and learning. This educational stage is considered the preparatory phase before entering the working world

or higher education. Students usually enter secondary education at 15 and finish this cycle when they reach the age of majority - at 18.

Schools to participate in the empirical work were recruited among the network of institutions with which the researcher had previously collaborated. After several contacts between April and May 2018, two schools agreed to integrate the research project into their annual activity plans. The activities started in January 2019 and ran until June 2019.

a) School 1

The first institution was a public school located in an urban area in the district of Porto. This school taught third cycle and secondary education. 60% of the students attended secondary school. Part of the students attended articulated teaching - a special teaching regime with a pedagogical and logistical articulation between the general education component and the vocational component of an artistic area, such as music and theatre. According to data provided by the school, the students were from different social strata. Students coming from middle-class families were the majority. During the school year, this institution promotes several extracurricular projects in the areas of sport, citizenship, health and Media Education, some of which are within the scope of Erasmus+ projects. Regarding infrastructure, the school had a fully equipped media room (available under appointment) for teachers and students.

At this school, we collaborated with one Portuguese and one English teacher. The activities involved 118 students, aged 15 to 17, from five 10th and 11th-grade classes.

a) School 2

The second institution where we conducted the empirical work was a private school in a rural area of the Aveiro district. The institution hosted students from all levels - from kindergarten to secondary school. According to data provided by the institution, it was primarily attended by students from middle and upper-middle-class families residing in the surrounding municipalities. The school's educational project strongly focuses on young people's personal and citizen development to complement their academic training. The school was part of the Microsoft Education initiative; each student had a laptop, promoting a collaborative work culture using technology.

On an annual basis, the school developed several extracurricular activities and educational projects related to innovation, digital literacy, creativity, multiculturalism, and civic development. The institution also had the routine of actively involving students in creating content for its various communication channels - social networks and website.

In this institution, activities were conducted in collaboration with one Portuguese and one Philosophy/ Civic Education teacher. The activities involved 79 students, aged 15 to 18, from three 10th and 12th-grade classes.

Data collection procedures and Instruments

a) Questionnaire

The questionnaire developed by Pereira et al. (2015) served as a basis for our exploratory questionnaire. Relying on the results of the application of Pereira et al.'s instrument (2015), the exploratory questionnaire adapted some of the questions - namely those related to participation and civic engagement practices.

The exploratory questionnaire was divided into three blocks, with 16 questions (13 multiple-choice questions and three open questions). This instrument sought to describe the population under study, their habits and experiences with media and citizenship practices. The questionnaire also intended to collect data that would later allow a comparative analysis of the two groups (students from school 1 (public) and school 2 (private), to identify points of convergence and divergence in their practices. Before the questionnaire was distributed to the students, we asked two researchers, a teacher and a teenager (who did not belong to either of the two groups of students) to test the completion and evaluate the reading and perception of the questions. According to their suggestions minor adjustments were made. The questionnaire was distributed on paper on the first session of the intervention with each class.

For this article, we considered sociodemographic data (age, gender, school year) and the answers to two multiple-choice questions: 1) In which civic participation activities are you currently involved? and 2) Which creation, production and participation activities are part of your routine?

The data concerning these multiple-choice questions were extracted and analysed using descriptive statistics (namely frequencies) with SPSS - version 24.

b) Group discussions

After conducting the media creation activities with all classes, group discussions were held (N=8). In the impossibility of organising focus groups, these group discussions were an alternative yet crucial step in the research process since reflecting separately on the media products created can foster a spirit of mission or a sense of accomplishment in participants (Gubrium, 2009 cited Mitchell et al., 2017).

The *Wooclap*¹ platform was used to streamline group discussions. This reflection and evaluation activity was guided by a questionnaire consisting of 13 questions - eight open questions, four multiple choice with one answer option, and one multiple choice with several answer options. *Wooclap* allows to create and display dynamic questionnaires on the whiteboard, and participants can follow, answer and discuss the questions in loco using a smartphone, tablet or computer. The results were analysed from a quantitative and qualitative perspective by cross-referencing and comparing the data by student group, subject, and year of schooling. The data concerning multiple choice questions analysed using descriptive statistics, with SPSS - version 24. The content of the open-ended questions was analysed in Nvivo, - version 12. The content analysis aimed to identify patterns and trends (Bardin, 2010; Saldaña, 2016). By defining emerging categories, it was possible to organise the students' answers and describe the emerging and hidden meanings in the content (Pardal & Lopes, 2011). For this article, the answers obtained to three open-ended questions were considered: 1) *What does it mean for you to be a citizen and to participate?;* 2) *How can a citizen express his/her voice?;* 3) *Do you believe young people have a voice and space to participate in society?*

¹ Further information about the tool is available in the website <https://www.wooclap.com>

Ethical considerations

Research in educational settings and with children and adolescents entails a number of ethical issues that must be safeguarded. In the case of this research, and considering the data collection instruments referred to here, several measures were taken. Firstly, it was assumed as a priority to provide information to clarify the young people, the teachers, and their parents about all the activities to be carried out within the scope of the research. Thus, after an initial meeting with teachers, all parents received an informative note about the project. Parents were asked to send written confirmation of their children's permission to participate. Then, in the first session with each class, the initial part was dedicated to explaining the project, the objectives and the activities that would be carried out. In addition, it was explained that all young people, regardless of parental permission, could refuse or abandon the activities at any time. Clarifying the purpose and importance of the project is crucial to emphasize the importance of voluntary participation. Therefore, these aspects can determine young people's attitudes and participation in research projects (Reeves et al., 2007) and are considered essential.

All data were kept anonymous, both in the exploratory questionnaire and in the group discussions - no names were used or pointed out, nor were any notes taken that could help identify the students.

In addition, the platform that was used to conduct the group discussions ensures anonymity by allowing use without email and with the use of an alias. This aspect was considered fundamental in research conducted with (mostly) underaged children (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Morrow, 2008).

Researcher's role during the action research

During this investigation, given the context where it took place, the target audiences in focus and the themes covered, it was considered essential to try to maintain the usual working dynamics of the classroom as much as possible. The role of the researcher is, however, fundamental in any investigation. For this reason, and to promote a favourable and comfortable research environment, the researcher must become familiar with the life of the community they are studying, make themselves known, and establish some bonds of trust (Park, 1994). To this end, we valued the moments of informal dialogue held with teachers and students during the project. These moments allowed us, on the one hand, to know more about their realities, expectations, doubts, and needs and, on the other hand, to start a working relationship with clear and understandable goals from the very first moment.

Thus, we sought to maintain a balance between the active role of the teacher of each class - responsible for conducting the creative activities carried out during the intervention stage - and the researcher's role as participant observer - accountable for promoting the stages of diagnosis and reflection and evaluation.

Results & discussion

In this section we present the results obtained through the two data collection instruments that this article deals with.

The questionnaire

Data presented and table 1 outlines the sociodemographic profile of the exploratory questionnaire's respondents. 197 young people replied to the questionnaire. 68 identified themselves as male, 126 as female. 3 of the respondents did not answer this question.

Of the 197 teenagers, as table 1 shows, 94 attended the 11th grade, 73 the 10th grade and 30 the 12th grade. 118 attended the public school and 79 the private school. 105 studied in Science and Technology areas; the remaining students attended the Languages and Humanities (n=43), Visual Arts (n=36) and other courses (n=13).

Table 1: Participants sociodemographic characteristics gender, school years, type of school and educational area (n/%).

	n	%
Gender		
Male	68	34,5%
Female	126	64%
No answer	3	1,5%
School years		
10 th	94	47,7%
11 th	73	37,1%
12 th	30	15,2%
Type of school		
Public	118	59,9%
Private	79	40,1%
Educational areas		
Sciences and technologies	105	53,3%
Languages and Humanities	43	21,8%
Visual arts	36	18,3%
Other	13	0,1%
Total	197	100%

Source: Created by the author

Questioned about their involvement in civic participation activities, 107 of the respondents reported being involved in at least one of the activities listed. 88 of the adolescents stated not being involved, at the time of the project, in any of the activities listed. Two youngsters omitted their answers.

Analysing the profile of the young people who reported being engaged in participation activities, they are mostly female, attending the 11th grade, at the public institution, in the Science and Technology course.

As Table 2 displays, activities in Associations and Cultural Movements (n = 55) and Volunteering (n = 57) are those in which more young people claim to partake more frequently. On the other hand, only 17 young people reported being involved in Student Associations, 6 in Political Parties or Youth movements and 9 in Scout groups.

Table 2: Answers to the question "In which activities are you currently involved? (n/%)".

Activity	DN/DA	Yes	No	Total
Associations/ Cultural movements	3 (%)	55 (%)	139 (%)	197
Student associations	3(%)	17 (%)	177 (%)	(100%)
Volunteering	3 (%)	57 (%)	137 (%)	
Political parties and Youth political movements	3(%)	6 (%)	188 (%)	
Youth groups and religious movements	3 (%)	30 (%)	164 (%)	
Scout groups	3 (%)	9 (%)	185 (%)	
Other	69 (%)	22 (%)	106 (%)	

Source: Created by the author

The instrument also addressed students' creation, production and participation activities carried out the year before the questionnaire.

As portrayed in table 3, young people stated they were engaged in the creation of multimedia presentations (n = 181), produced photographs (n = 169) and videos (n = 129). In addition, creating and sharing photos on a website or social network (n = 158) and producing audio files (n = 116) are also everyday activities among them. Instead, creating petitions to support causes (n = 16), commenting on social media pages of political parties (n = 15) and creating fundraising campaigns (n = 13) are those activities in which they report less involvement.

When discussing these practices during the intervention and the reflection & evaluation phase, students shared that they prefer spontaneous media creation and production activities. For them, media creation and production are not activities necessarily related to participation or civic engagement - the relationship for them is not direct.

Table 3: Answers to the question "What creation, production and participation activities were you engaged with in the previous year?" (n/%).

Creation, production and participation activities	DN/DA	Yes	No	Total
Creation & Production activities				197
Produce videos	8 (4,1%)	129 (65,5%)	60 (30,5%)	(100 %)
Produce and publish/share a video on YouTube, Vimeo, or other	8 (4,1%)	77 (39,1%)	112 (56,9%)	
Produce photographs	9 (4,6%)	169 (85,8%)	19 (9,6%)	
Produce and publish/share photographs on a website or social network	9 (4,6%)	158 (80,2%)	30 (15,2%)	
Produce an audio file	9 (4,6%)	116 (58,9%)	72 (36,5%)	
Produce and publish/share an audio file	9 (4,6%)	84 (42,6%)	104 (52,8%)	
Write a book or story	9 (4,6%)	53 (26,9%)	135 (68,5%)	
Write an opinion piece for a media outlet	9 (4,6%)	25 (12,7%)	163 (82,7%)	
Write a letter to the director of a media outlet	9 (4,6%)	17 (8,6%)	171 (86,8%)	
Make a presentation using Microsoft PowerPoint, Prezi or other	9 (4,6%)	181 (91,9%)	7 (3,6%)	
Create stories through multimedia platforms	10(5,1%)	48 (24,4%)	139 (70,6%)	
Participation activities				
Comment on a news item/ article on a media outlet's website or social network	9 (4,6%)	70 (35,5%)	118 (59,9%)	
Comment on a brand's website or social network	9 (4,6%)	80 (40,6%)	108 (54,8%)	
Comment on the website or social network of an association	8 (4,1%)	35 (17,8%)	154 (78,2%)	
Comment on a political party's website or social network	8 (4,1%)	15 (7,6%)	174 (88,3%)	
Create a fundraising campaign for a cause or association through a social network	8 (4,1%)	13 (6,6%)	176 (89,3%)	
Engage in a fundraising campaign for a cause or association through a social network	9 (4,6%)	50 (25,4%)	138 (70,1%)	
Create a petition for a cause through a social network	8 (4,1%)	16 (8,1%)	173 (87,8%)	
Reply to a petition for a cause through a social network	9 (4,6%)	53 (26,9%)	135 (68,5%)	
Share/ recommend a brand or product to my contacts in a social network	8 (4,1%)	110 (55,8%)	79 (40,1%)	

Source: Created by the Author

Group discussions

177² young people participated in the group discussions. These sessions, and as previously mentioned, served the purpose of further exploiting the results of the exploratory questionnaire and of the media creation activities conducted during the intervention phase. The analysis of the group discussions reveals that one of the central ideas young people associate with the concept of *citizen is respect for themselves, others, and the space they inhabit*. For most teenagers, a citizen is someone who fundamentally assumes an active role in society and in their communities. Some students referred that being a citizen is

"To participate actively and consciously in society."

(12th grade student, private school)

"To live aware that I am part of a society."

(12th grade student, private school)

"To be aware of society and spread respect for difference."

(12th grade student, private school)

"Is to respect others, the opinion of others, and the space of each one. Being a citizen is also about putting a mark in your presence in the world, mainly for the good of the world."

(10th grade student, public school)

"To participate actively in society, helping to make society a better place to live in."

(11th grade student, public school)

"Not merely being a human being, it is necessary to contribute to the general social well-being! 😊 "

(11th grade student, public school)

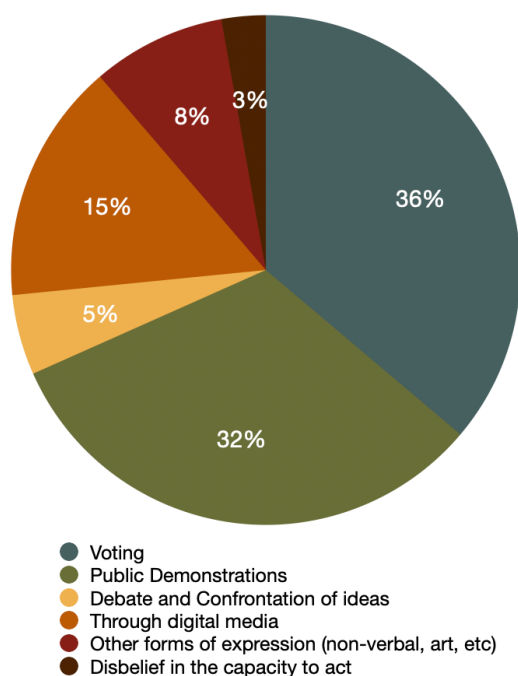
For them, the *citizen is responsible for making and building a better society*, attributing importance, and displaying consciousness towards matters such as the community sense, the feeling of belonging and integration. Young people understand citizens must also be "aware of what surrounds them" (12th-grade student, private school) and live in a community while sharing stories, experiences, and ideals. According to the young people's speeches, it is also clear that they related the idea of being supportive and of perceiving and finding opportunities to participate and take an active part in society with the concept of citizenship. This aspect may be related to the mission of the educational institutions where we carried out this research work. Some students from both institutions mentioned that they had the opportunity to live new experiences,

² Although 197 pupils participated in the intervention phase, we only had 177 participating in the discussion groups. 20 pupils were absent due to illness, absence or other reasons.

grow as people and discover other nationalities and cultures by participating in their schools' initiatives and projects - aspects they value.

During this reflection about the meaning of citizenship and being a citizen, the adolescents also referred to aspects traditionally associated with the concept of 'citizen'. They stated that, from their point of view, *citizenship is related to the set of rights and duties* attributed to a person, to someone's nationality, and to being free but aware of the rules that ensure everyone's well-being. Although the group discussions were held during the campaign period for the 2019 European elections, voting (and the duty to vote) was only mentioned by 5 participants. Inquired about how a citizen can express their voice, the ideas shared by young people can be mainly organized around four groups: *voting, demonstrations (e.g., manifestations), debate and confrontation of ideas and expression through digital media*. As figure 1 portrays, voting and public demonstrations are the two ways that young people most refer to. We highlight that some young people emphasised other forms of expression and others their disbelief in the ability to act. They did not provide examples, nor did they deepen their answers.

Figure 1: Answers to the question "How can a citizen express her/ his voice?"



Source: Created by the author.

As to the collective and individual experience, most *adolescents said they still didn't find their place or space within civic or political groups*. One of the participants, a 12th-grade student, said he had already been interested in joining a citizen movement but did not know how to go about it. Another one, an 11th-grade student, said that she had looked for information about a political party but that what she found was complex

and hard to understand. This student also added that the language used by parties is not attractive to young people. She added that

"I think that most young people get disinterested because they just don't understand what politicians are talking about. We feel kind of dumb, actually."

(12th grade student, private school)

Some other statements also reveal a feeling of disbelief in the power of the citizen's voice and in the capacity for conscious involvement in initiatives. Teenagers refer, for example, that

"In any way, on the scale of an entire nation a single citizen cannot do anything. There's not much we can do differently."

(11th grade student, public school)

"The public opinion is evolving into hate comments, we just have to look at the comments on news in online newspapers. THIS IS SAD."

(12th grade student, private school)

"There has to be someone to listen to you [for a citizen to speak]. We don't always have that."

(11th grade student, public school)

"People doubt us and what we have to say. Especially adults. They don't take us seriously."

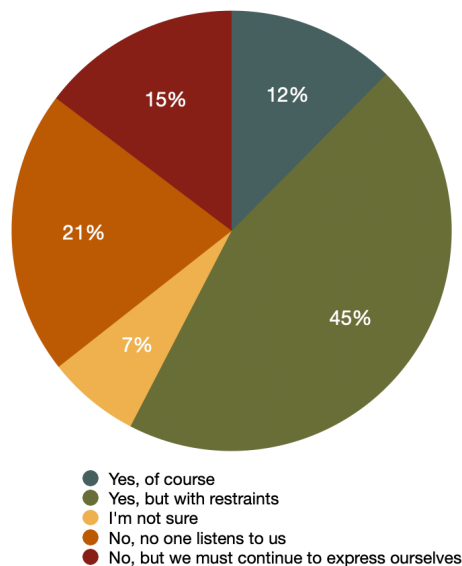
(10th grade student, public school)

The disbelief in the extent, range and of their voice seems to relate to the *lack of attention and consideration they feel from the adults* they expect to listen to them, such as parents and teachers.

Regarding the opportunities and space in society for young people to express their voice, as figure 2 shows, the majority said there is space but also limitations to using their voice. Asked to clarify their opinion about this matter, teenagers manifest scepticism towards their relevance as citizens with a meaningful and authentic impact on society. As a limitation to being heard by power institutions, they refer the attitudes often adopted by adults, parents, and politicians, among others. One 11th-grade student shared that she tried to get in touch with the City Council while participating in another school project. Despite several attempts, she was not able to get a response to her request. This situation made her believe that the political power distances itself from young people as it does not support their initiatives or even tries to listen to them. Other students say they believe that to have an authentic voice in society it is vital to be involved with the political power; they add that, however, there are no spaces in these contexts for young people – particularly those with no family tradition in political circles or with little access to information about political issues. Therefore, they continue, young people have no interest in getting involved with political forces. Still, other students state that age is a factor that sometimes affects how adults listen to them - whether at school, at home or in the different communities they participate in.

During the group discussions it was also evident that some young people have a rather negative perspective about the citizen's role. Some were even provocative, mentioning, for example, that "to be a citizen is to be robbed" or "to be a slave of the state". When challenged to elaborate on these ideas, they fell silent. It is important to note that, according to the teachers, some of the opinions shared by the pupils reflected the views of their own parents. However, some of the young people who demonstrated a more positivist position towards the place of youth as citizens and who affirmed that young people have space to participate, did not want to elaborate on their opinions. Some of them even mentioned that even though they feel it, they cannot explain it in words.

Figure 2: Answers to the question "How can a citizen express her/ his voice?"



Source: Created by the author.

Conclusion

Listening and reflecting about young people's ideas regarding citizenship, participation, and how they use digital media to partake in democratic events can support their integration in citizenship dynamics. This analysis is also relevant to unveiling the potential of online media to develop a strong social conscience, the notions of right and wrong, the ability to foster solutions to face everyday challenges (Bennett et al., 2016) and even political expression (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019). This research focused these aspects, particularly adolescents' perceptions of citizenship and participation.

Data analysis reveals that young people share clear ideas about what they understand by citizenship and the traits that characterise a citizen. Their descriptions highlight aspects related to community integration and experience, solidarity, support, and respect for others. Although voting is the leading platform for citizens expression in several European inquiries (European Commission, 2018; European Parliamentary

Research Service, 2016), data collected during this fieldwork points to a generation whose interests distance themselves from traditional political issues – they refer to voting as a form of citizen expression, but not as something inherent to being a citizen. In line with the research conducted so far, this generation approaches politics, civic and social matters with alternative ways of doing and actively participating (Briggs, 2017, cit. Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010). The dataset suggests that this relates to how young people believe adults see them - immature, lacking good ideas and suggestions and powerless to be heard and to implement change through traditional means. Disruption from traditional participation appears as a valid alternative to being heard.

Data collected do not clarify whether the promise of inclusivity and universality promoted by the advent of digital has come true or not. However, they show an interest in engaging in alternative forms of participation. They point to content creation and production as possible ways for citizens to express their opinions and ideas - though not the preferred way. At the same time, young people also mention that a citizen is anyone who finds ways to contribute to the democratic decision-making process (Coleman, 1999 cit. Livingstone, 2009) - including expression through social networks.

We highlight two particular aspects. The questionnaire's results show that creation as a form of participation and digital participation are not a trend and that some teenagers lack maturity to reflect on some subjects seriously. Adolescents create some multimedia content, but they do not necessarily do it with the aim of sharing their civic and political views. They prefer to enjoy social media for activities related to socialising. Alongside this, we cannot ignore that in the group discussions, the immaturity of some young people to critically reflect on these issues was visible. We find it particularly interesting that teachers associate the discourses of some young people with the stances taken by their parents. Still, the research could not collect data to deepen and clarify this possibility.

Nevertheless, the data lifts the veil on starting points for further reflection. Firstly, the fact that about 45% of the young people who participated in this study assume not being involved in participation activities – whether civic or political -, an aspect that meets the warning made by Jenkins et al. (2006). As the authors state, members of a society are free to be active or not, but everyone must believe that they can do it and that their contribution is valued (Jenkins et al., 2006). Second, 45% of the participants believe that although they have opportunities to express their voice in society, they are subject to limitations. While both schools promoted an environment that was receptive to sharing and encouraged the active involvement of students in activities throughout the year, this environment was not yet evident in the classroom. Although, understandably, the presence of an outsider (the researcher) may have caused some discomfort in the first activities, teachers report a tendency for adolescents to withdraw when allowed and encouraged to express themselves. We cannot help but find it curious that even in Philosophy/Citizenship classes - subjects whose main objective is to promote reflection on citizenship issues and to stimulate the student's critical reflection on their place as a person and as a citizen - this posture prevails. This aspect might be related to the fact that the classroom is still a traditional and controlled environment that tends to be dominated by the teacher's commanding position and that this posture was maintained during the research activities.

Study limitations and future research

Some limitations made the process challenging, highlighting opportunities for future improvement. Some of the issues addressed could have been explored in greater depth, such as how citizenship and participation are addressed in the family context. This would have added more value to an investigation focusing on distinct areas and domains of interest. It would also have been valid to replicate or explore other methods - for example, it would have been interesting to conduct focus groups during the diagnostic to cross-compare results.

The limitations imposed by the school calendar restrained the research. Although we had initially planned to conduct the research for an entire school year, it was necessary to deal with these constraints and the availability of the teachers. Thus, the researcher was present in both schools for 2/3 of the school year. More consistent and in-depth results could have been obtained if the researcher had had the possibility of following the work plan initially defined.

Concerning data interpretation and presentation, given the large volume of qualitative data that this research originated, the analysis process was demanding. Though, the analysis was as critical and detailed as possible. In future possibilities, exploring other approaches and cross-comparisons could be relevant. Besides this, further reflections on the motivations to participate and on the reasons that lead young people to believe that there are restraints to their expression may allow a deeper understanding of citizenship and youth participation, especially in the Portuguese context. Looking at the research and the results obtained, we believe that it contributes to knowledge and opens up the possibility of conducting further comparative research that expands the scientific field.

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