

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Pattern number within this pattern set: 6



Links:

[Civic Intelligence \(1\)](#), [Linguistic Diversity \(16\)](#), [Fair Trade \(21\)](#), [Sustainable Design \(22\)](#), [Big Tent for Social Change \(32\)](#), [Opportunity Spaces \(33\)](#), [World Citizen Parliament \(40\)](#), [Strengthening International Law \(42\)](#), [International Networks of Alternative Media \(43\)](#), [Digital Emancipation \(60\)](#), [Free and Fair Elections \(68\)](#), [Transaction Tax \(72\)](#), [Multi-Party Negotiation for Conflict Resolution \(79\)](#), [Service-Learning \(90\)](#), [Citizen Diplomacy \(93\)](#), [Citizenship Schools \(96\)](#), [Engaged Tourism \(107\)](#), [Citizens' Tribunal \(129\)](#), [Activist Road Trip \(134\)](#)

Douglas Schuler, Public Sphere Project, Lori Blewett, The Evergreen State College

Problem:

Rights and responsibilities as narrowly defined by citizenship in a particular nation-state can result in an us-against-them mind-set, leading to biased interpretations of information, and even paranoia and hostility to other countries. This understanding can also be used to deny the reality or meaning of oppression and suffering in other countries and to eschew responsibility for helping to redress these problems. Citizenship also determines access to health care, education, and other rights —rights that arguably should be universal. A narrow interpretation of citizenship implicitly cedes power to national governments whose defense of national interest can sometimes be used against its own citizens who have no legal access to a “higher authority,” and can restrict the participation of citizens in global affairs and problem solving.

Context:

In the waning years of the twentieth century, people worldwide increasingly began to notice the world outside their own. At the same time nation-states, facing the new realities of economic globalization, seemed to be losing their ability—as well as their interest—in promoting the welfare of their own citizens and the natural world. As John Urry (1999) stated, “More generally, global money markets, world travel, the Internet, globally

recognized brands, globally organized corporations, the Rio Earth summit, 'global celebrities' living as global citizens and so on, all speak of modes of social experience which transcend each nation-state and its constitution of the national citizen." Global climate change, natural resource depletion, economic inequity, and other vast problems that humankind now faces can be added to that list.

Discussion:

Citizenship is generally described as the formal relationship, usually codified in law, of a person (the citizen) and a state and often is delineated in terms of rights and responsibilities. Its site has shifted from the Greek city-state, where the idea first took hold, to the modern nation-state, whose birth is linked to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which established the convention that countries and its citizens do not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

Many nationalist political movements —the eighteenth-century American Revolution through the twentieth-century Palestinian Liberation struggle —emphasize national identity and citizenship to assert their right to self-determination and political autonomy from oppressive colonial states. But history is also rife with examples of nationalism used to oppress and remove minority, and sometimes majority, populations. At the same time, the liberal concept of citizenship based on a shared national identity offers the promise of overcoming religious and ethnic divisions. From the perspective of economically disadvantaged and oppressed subpopulations, however, the promise of inclusivity and shared interests has fallen flat.

The transnational realm of global capital in a free-market world, requires global civic response. As national laws are superseded by international treaties and trade agreements, individuals' rights and obligations become governed by global institutions —the reality that citizens of debt-ridden nations are well aware of. The question is not whether we are global citizens. The question is what form our citizenship will take. What are our rights and responsibilities toward global governing institutions and structures. Should governing bodies be directly elected by the governed? How will the rights of the weakest be protected from the strongest in the global polity? What counts as a right? What responsibilities do global citizens have to one another?

We need to ask what types of globalization are empowering to individuals and define and construct ones likely to lead to collective problem solving. Currently there are few opportunities for people to help address shared problems. Unfortunately this lack of opportunity comes at time when many problems are global in nature and require global thinking and acting. In addition to preventing people (and their ideas and other resources) from contributing to the general welfare, narrow versions of citizenship are used to establish arbitrary categories of deservedness. Our narrow version of citizenship makes it less likely that global solutions that work for everybody are developed. The opposite, in fact, is more likely: that collective dilemmas are "resolved" in ways that are relatively bad for everybody—or nearly everybody.

There are two useful avenues for people to explore to make headway toward realizing this pattern. The first is to assume the role and responsibilities without seeking permission from an authoritative source; obtaining permission would of course be impossible given that no authoritative source exists that can bestow such a designation. Assuming this role means thinking—and acting—globally, adopting the perspective that the world is densely interconnected, its general health is important, and well-intentioned and well-informed citizens can play a positive role. The second is to actively work toward some formal recognition of global citizenship by, for example, helping to define and develop the intellectual and administrative scaffolding that does not currently exist. Both of these paths could be undertaken individually or through working with existing or new organizations that work in these areas.

When Diogenes, the Greek philosopher, stated that he was a citizen of the world, he was refusing, according to Martha Nussbaum (1994), “to be defined simply by his local origins and group memberships, associations central to the self-image of a conventional Greek male; he insisted on defining himself in terms of more universal aspirations and concerns.” But to some scholars, the nation-state is the rightful and permanent wellspring of citizenship, and alternative conceptualizations, however tentative and speculative, are damned as heretical. Michael Walzer (2002), for example, finds it difficult to contemplate the idea since “no one has ever offered me [world] citizenship, or described the naturalization process, or enlisted me in the world’s institutional structures, or given me an account of its decision procedures (I hope they are democratic), or provided me with a list of the benefits and obligations of citizenship, or shown me the world’s calendar and the common celebrations and commemorations of its citizens.” As an ironic and unintended side effect of this critique, Walzer provided a useful (if overly formal) laundry list of practical objectives that proponents of global citizenship need to consider.

Ann Florini (2005) builds a case that the Internet may help create a global consciousness analogous to the nationalist consciousness that the printed word helped inspire. The printing press led to a reconciliation of regional differences and a cheaper and faster way to reach constituencies that were too remote for effective collaboration. This then played a strong role in the development of the nation-state and, hence, nation-state-based citizenship. In similar fashion, Florini surmises that a new global consciousness could help usher in broader, more inclusive notions of citizenship. And although these are more likely to be dynamic, idiosyncratic, and short-lived, new Web sites are springing into existence every day. The Internet makes it easier to learn about foreign perspectives, and although they can be as hidebound as their domestic counterparts, they help reveal the immense diversity of viewpoints on earth as well as the universality of concerns facing people everywhere.

Are there examples of de facto global citizenship? Organizations like “No person is illegal” and the “Without Borders” groups are getting closer to that ideal. Are there practical experiments that could be done now? The growth of universal declarations, supporting human rights, for example, helps explain why the time might be fairly ripe for thinking like this. The concept of global citizenship currently lacks the administrative and legalistic trappings of national citizenship. Nevertheless, from Diogenes to the present day, the pursuit and adoption of global citizenship, however demeaned and underinstitutionalized it is at present, continues to provide a compelling vision to millions of people around the world— people who are officially noted as belonging to individual, specific countries. The bottom line, however, for everybody interested in these issues is that people must think beyond the borders of the countries in which they hold citizenship.

As with other patterns in this category, the journey toward the goal will be incremental, perennial, lurching, and met by setbacks as well as successes. There are tasks for many people with a wide variety of roles and responsibilities; professionals like lawyers, think tank and NGO staff, government officials, and academics can engage with the public on these issues in addition to their more specialized and technical concerns. There are hosts of organizations and projects in which people can engage. Communication with people in other countries is especially important because this helps ensure that people realize that people in other countries are not abstract nonpersons. This, of course, represents a major hurdle: many people because of poverty, language barriers, or other reasons cannot easily engage with people outside their region.

Solution:

Martha Nussbaum, in her 1994 discussion on the Stoics in “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” refers to the fact that each of us dwells, in effect, in two communities: the local community of our birth and the community of human argument and aspiration that <http://www.publicsphereproject.org/content/global-citizenship>

“is truly great and truly common, in which we look neither to this corner nor to that, but measure the boundaries of our nation by the sun” (Seneca, De Otio).

Verbiage for pattern card:

Citizenship is the formal relationship between a person and a country and often is described in terms of rights and responsibilities. The idea has shifted over time, from Greek city-state to modern nation-state. Citizenship often determines access to health care, education, and other rights that arguably should be universal. The journey towards global citizenship will be incremental, perennial, lurching, and will be met by setbacks as well as successes.

Pattern status: Released