

How young people conceptualize the citizenship and political engagement: The case of Czech Republic

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How do young people conceptualize the citizenship and political engagement

As former quantitative research suggests (Šerek, 2008; Šerek & Macek, 2010), young people in the Czech Republic do not resent political participation per se.

Rather, they perceive it as a controversial activity. They see it as an efficient tool how to express one's own attitudes and have an influence on society. At the same time political participation is traditionally linked with conformity, loss of personal freedom, and pursuit of personal advantages.

However, these results are based on questionnaire data where we define some specific concepts which we see as a relevant of political and civic participation.

This study examines young people's conceptualization of political, civic, and public issues. We focus on differences and specifics of political and civic engagement of cultural and ethnic majority (Czechs) and two minorities (Roma people, Ukrainian).

TARGET GROUP: CZECH

- Czech
 - population - 10,4 million people
 - 7 % age group 20 – 24; 6% age group 15 – 19
 - only about 19% religious: 83%Christian; about 10% of adolescents: believers with no particular denomination
 - 20-to 24-year-olds: about 50% working, about 30% students, about 8% unemployed
 - declared beliefs and values -most Czech young people are very liberal and tolerant (e.g., regarding drugs, abortion, sexual freedom)

TARGET GROUP: ROMA

- Roma (Census 2001)
 - population 150,000-300,000 (10,000-30,000 South Moravia region)
 - just over 50% religious: 82% subscribe to Catholicism.
 - 22 % attended secondary school; 5 % graduated, 1.6 % in higher education
 - 90% of low socio-economical status; high unemployment rate (about 80 %)
 - segregation
 - prejudice and discrimination
 - evaluation 5.5 (on a 1-very likeable, 7-not very likeable scale)
 - general stereotypes of majority
 - status : minority

TARGET GROUP: UKRAINIAN

- Ukrainians (Census 2001)
 - population 130,000 to 250,000
 - 51 % religious: Orthodox or Catholic
 - 62% attended secondary school, 35% graduated; 12 % attended higher education; 15% of Ukrainians attended a college
 - Socio-economical status - unskilled workers, the qualifications may be higher
 - negative perception (by majority)
 - prejudice and discrimination
 - evaluation 4.5 (on a 1-very likeable, 7-very not likeable scale)

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

■ Czech

- 20-26 years
- 4 female, 3 male
- enrolled in or finished college

■ Roma

- 20-26 years
- 5 female, 1 male
- employed in NGO

■ Ukrainians

- 20-26 years
- 6 females, 3 males
- in Czech 6 months – 8 years
- enrolled in or finished college

OVERLAPS

Young people's understanding of civic and political engagement and participation

- **Preliminary results:**
- **Interest/concern**
 - "Caring about what's happening in society." "...this interest is like engine that forms one's future actions"
- **The ability of person to think critically and make independent decisions**
 - "I think that voting is preceded by at least person being interested in state issues...following the news, reading newspaper. Basically, knowing what is going on and based on that the person decide"
 - "I'm not saying that it [other people and their actions] doesn't influence me, but still, the opinion is mine, therefore the decision is my own too"

OVERLAPS

Young people's understanding of civic and political engagement and participation

- **Importance of young people's participation**
 - "Who else than young people should care, they are the ones that can influence further future"
- **No need to participate unless personally affected by the problem**
 - "Most people start to participate...or get interested, when they get affected [by the problem]"
 - "If the opportunity arises, I go for it. But I can't say that I would voluntarily surf the web at home looking for benefits or other events, where I could participate."

OVERLAPS

Young people's understanding of civic and political engagement and participation

- **Talking about problems is not sufficient solution, real solution lies in the action**
 - “I see something is wrong, so I get up and go and do something about it and not just sit and yank about it”
 - “Most people just sit and talk about it [the problem/particular issue]. But very little people actually get up and do something”

OVERLAPS

Forms of engagement and participation

- **Interest in current issues, being informed**
 - e.g. Internet, joining groups on Facebook, talking with friends
- **Being active**
 - e.g. Sending money to charity, adopting dogs, volunteer activities
- **Voting**
- **Demonstrations, petitions**

OVERLAPS

Sources of information and influences

- **Family and other people (peers, colleagues, specialists)**
- **Media (internet, TV, newspaper, radio)**
- **School**
- **Information/ resources**
 - available, but depends on one's interest whether they search for them
 - problem finding relevant information
 - "...there is rather too much information than too little...problem is not to find something, but find relevant information"
 - effective use of information

OVERLAPS

Sources of information and influences

- **Parents as a important source of influences**
 - “Parents in the first place, like about politics, most parents discuss it at home and kids take some ideas from them and gradually transform, sort them...”
 - “I personally believe that it comes from family ...civic engagement of any person is most influenced during first two years of one’s life, if one learns that when trying something, it has some effect”
 - “It [the interest in public issues] depends on where one grew up, what were his parents like”

SPECIFICS

Young people's understanding of civic and political engagement and participation

- **Main topic**
- Roma and Ukrainians - focused on specific problems of minority (discrimination, racism, prejudice, immigration problems)
- Czechs - different problems more generally, none of the issues they mentioned seemed to more important than the others.

SPECIFICS

Forms of engagement and participation

■ Czech

- Radical forms of participation
 - “all those things that are being somehow radicalized...are connected to that ethos of youth”
- “Nonpolitical politics”
 - “...the younger the person is, the more they are willing to join non governmental sector”

■ Roma

- Enthusiasm/ perception by minority and majority
 - “Really engaged Roma, who is doing things on 100% is going to burn out twice as fast as you[majority]”
- Group membership
 - “...the group is offering more opportunities about when, where, and what for to engage”
- “Power of anonymity”
 - “...demonstrations are better for some people, it is collective action, one can hide behind someone else and feel that power [of the event]...people are afraid that they will be traceable by signing petitions”

SPECIFICS

Forms of engagement and participation

- **Ukrainian**

- Motivation

- “If someone wants to engage in something...he can, it’s about that motivation”

- everyday life- care about one’s surroundings, community

- “ If someone is interested in the issue, he pursue it every day”

SPECIFICS

Opportunities to participate/ perceived barriers

■ Czech

- **Opportunities**- plenty but ambivalent evaluation of political activities

■ Roma

- **Resources** "...I live somewhere, receive some education, based on that is my finances for living and so if I live on survival's budget, I'm not going to have energy for some civic engagement"
- **Opportunities** "...its about meeting the right people"

■ Ukrainian

- **Opportunities** - lack of opportunities was not mentioned
- depend on personal activity/ motivation

" I think that it [opportunities] depend on one's motivation. If one really wants to [participate], he will find a way, whether it takes a year or fifty"

SPECIFICS

Proposal for inclusion and increased engagement of young people

- **Czech**
 - accessible education
 - school activities
 - family influence
 - positive example from minority
- **Roma**
 - system of education
 - solving the social problems
- **Ukrainian**
 - attitude of the majority
 - educating majority about minorities
 - implementation of minorities into state and public sphere

CONCLUSION

- Problems/issues reported were perceived by minorities on more personal level
- Roma: when engaged they are trying to help their own community
- Ukrainians: connect engagement and participation with personal responsibility for one own life
- Czech: engagement is presented as general interest in current issues or stems from personal interests, hobbies
- For future analysis:
- Dimensions of engagement
 - Cognitive
 - Emotional/ Attitude
 - Behavior

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