

## TOWARDS AN INDUCTIVE METHOD TO RESEARCH THE FORMATION OF VALUES REGARDING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

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**Abstract:** Challenging economic and political conditions are appealing people to get involved in civic engagement. Some of these actions are creating new ways of participation and widening active citizenship, which is desirable, but some others are threatening democratic values. Moral education research has the key role of finding out the relationship between unprecedented ways of active citizenship and the formation of democratic moral values. This paper proposes an inductive research process aimed to trace the formation of moral values in active citizenship, having as mainstays the epistemology of the Actor-Network Theory, and the general researching process of the Grounded Theory.

**Keywords:** Active citizenship, moral values, inductive research process.

### **Introduction**

Challenging economic and political conditions, such as poverty, inequality and the crisis of the representative democracy, are appealing people to get involved in civic engagement. Some of these actions are creating new ways of participation and widening active citizenship, which is desirable, but some others are driven by violent actions and are threatening democratic values. Thus, institutions are implementing three main strategies to guarantee the development of desirables forms of active citizenship, through mutual respect and non-violence, in order to strengthen the values of the democracy and the Human Rights.

First, educational institutions have promoted Citizenship Education in compulsory and non-compulsory education. However, empirical data suggest that active citizens do not find a close relationship between their formal education and the political activities they perform. Informal learning processes seem to be far more important when it comes to moral learning and becoming an active citizen.

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Second, the idea of improvement in the active citizenship are linked to traditional practices, such as political participation, and bottom-up processes in the design of public policies. However, researchers suggest that unprecedented ways of active citizenship, driven by leading edge technology, mobile devices and networks, are emerging. So far, we have no ways to trace and register new evolving forms of active citizenship and, as a result, we have no suitable analytical categories to explain the formation of moral values in current active citizenship.

Finally, some composite indicators on active citizenship have been designed in order to measure how societies have improved in this regard. However, the input data are obtained from secondary information sources, and the composite indicator is designed through a deductive process. Thus, hardly some general inferences and speculations can be made regarding the factors that might encourage the active citizenship development, social inclusion and democracy.

Considering the foregoing, moral education research has the key role of finding out the relationship between unprecedented ways of active citizenship and the moral learning that fosters the formation of democratic values. Some clues could be taken into account: a) new scenarios of formation of active citizenship require inductive methodological approaches in order to build new analytical categories, rather than verify previous the orison citizenship; b) the role of leading edge technology, mobile devices and networks in the formation of current citizenship compels to take into consideration human and non-human elements as equally relevant educational factors of moral learning; and c) the traditional scopes of formal, non-formal and informal environments of moral learning might be replaced by a dynamic concept capable to trace actions of formation of citizenship through out those three scopes.

The epistemological point of view of Actor-Network Theory, and the general researching process of the Grounded Theory, are the main sources that inspired the idea of building an inductive process capable of trace and register how groups of active citizens are formed, what kind of values help them to kept alive, how they change (if they do), how they accept and reject new members, and how they disappear.

### **New ways of formation of values regarding active citizenship**

Active Citizenship has been considered an essential element in the revitalised Lisbon strategy in order to tackle the growing problem in most modern democratic societies of political and social disengagement, loss of community, and a decline in trust. Active Citizenship has been formally proposed by the European Union as a desirable form of

participation in civil society, the community, political life and participative democracy, because it implies mutual respect, non-violence, and guarantees human rights, and strengthens the values of the democracy (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2006, 2009; Mascherini & Hoskins, 2008).

Thus, so far there are several programs that promote and train the competencies of the Active Citizenship, such as the network of research for the development of indicators on education for citizenship, developed by the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL), with the support and assistance of the Council of Europe - where Eurydice provides information about the European educational policies-, the institutionalization of the European Year of the Citizenship and the Education, in 2005, and the Composite Indicator to measure Active Citizenship in Europe (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009).

According to research undertaken regarding the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator (Hoskins et al., 2006: 58-59), it is widely accepted that:

1. Active Citizenship is an evolving concept and new forms of active citizenship were excluded, that is, some variables, like informal or non-formal citizenship participation are poorly or not at all represented from that analysis, although they might be very relevant, due to lack of comparable data.

2. Due to available data, the interpretation of the findings describes the relative performance of countries regarding the mentioned Active Citizenship Composite Indicator, but regions within the countries are not described, nor small groups of active citizens.

3. The behavior of the domain Values needs more attention with respect to the other domains. Whereas the dimensions of Civil Society, Community Life and Political Life move together, the dimension of Values seems to demonstrate different and autonomous behavior, suggesting a gap between intentions and actions that deserves more analysis.

Due to the above, Active Citizenship is also considered as a crucial process in order to foster moral values as it enhances social cohesion in democratic societies. The challenge is related to the fact that the new growing scenarios of formation of active citizenship require inductive methodological approaches in order to build new analytical categories, rather than hypothetical deductive processes to verify previous theories on citizenship.

For instance, the role of leading edge technology, mobile devices and social networks in the formation of current citizenship compels to take into consideration human and non-human elements as equally relevant educational factors of moral learning. Likewise, the traditional scopes of formal, non-formal and informal environments of moral learning might

be replaced by a dynamic concept capable to trace actions of formation of citizenship throughout those three scopes.

## **Towards and inductive process to trace formation of values regarding active citizenship**

### ***The epistemological basis of the Actor-Network Theory***

According to Bruno Latour (2008), the epistemological basis of the Actor-Network Theory are stated as follows: when social scientists add the adjective “social” to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, maybe mobilized to account for some other phenomenon. The above concept designates what is already assembled together, without making any superfluous assumption about the nature of what is assembled. Problems arise, however, when “social” begins to mean a type of material, a context. At that point, the meaning of the word breaks down since it now designates two entirely different things: first, a movement during a process of assembling; and second, a specific type of ingredient that is supposed to differ from other materials (Bruno Latour, 2004).

Thus, the aims of the Actor-Network Theory is to show why “the social” cannot be construed as a kind of material or domain and to dispute the project of providing a “social explanation” of some other state of affairs. This is made by redefining the notion of social by going back to its original meaning and making it able to trace connections again (B. Latour, 2009). By doing so, it will be possible to resume the traditional goal of the social sciences, that is, to trace the formation of societies, but with tools better adjusted to the task (Serres & Latour, 1995).

The starting point is to state that Society does not exist. Not by itself, at least. This statement claims that there is nothing specific to social order; that there is no social dimension of any sort, no “social context”, no distinct domain of reality to which the label “social” or “society” could be attributed; that no “social force” is available to “explain” the residual features other domains cannot account for; that actors are never embedded in a social context; and that “society”, far from being the context in which everything is framed, should rather be construed as one of the many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits (Bruno Latour, 2001). From this point of view, “social” is not some *glue* that could fix everything; it is what is glued together by many other types of connectors.

The society is, in fact, associations of heterogeneous elements, where humans and non-humans get in touch. In this associations, technology, electronic devices, abstract concepts, illusions, moral values, as well as humans, or even animals, could get articulated in

order to create a group. The group, then, is not just a cluster of people, but also a cluster of non-human elements. Actor-Network Theory considers that all these articulated elements should be treated symmetrically, since all of them are necessary to form the group, to keep it alive, to strengthen it, to differentiate it from other groups, or to disappear it. The ability of a member of the group to influence other is called agency. But the ability to become an element that receives influences, is also agency (Jackson, 2015).

Active Citizenship, in this sense, is the articulation of heterogeneous elements. This cluster is kept alive, is strengthened, is differentiated it from other groups, through the application of some sort of agencies. As soon as the agencies stop doing their work, the group disappears. Moreover, taking into consideration all the above, it could be state that Active Citizenship is a cluster of heterogeneous elements with one main aim: to get engage in public concerns performing mutual respect, non-violence, and democratic values.

### ***The general process of the Grounded Theory***

It has been stated above that one challenge for the moral education is related to the fact that the new growing scenarios of formation of active citizenship require inductive methodological approaches in order to build new analytical categories, rather than hypothetical deductive processes to verify previous theories on citizenship. Grounded Theory methodology is an inductive and full research method that tries to understand the action in a substantive area from the point of view of the people involved. This understanding revolves around the main concern of the participants whose behavior continually resolves their main concern (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Grounded Theory differs from many qualitative methods such as ethnography, case studies, and others, as these methods do not generate theory but focus on descriptions of phenomena. Meanwhile, Grounded Theory is considered as a full research method that can produce theoretical notions more completely grounded in data.

Grounded Theory methodology consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative or quantitative data to construct theories "grounded" in the data itself. This process is in direct contrast to common deductive methods mainly in three aspects: an inductive process, a constant comparative method and a theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006).

1. Inductive process: Grounded Theory is not based on the confirmation of hypothesis, for testing or refuting pre-designed theories by pre-designed analytical categories (Gibson &

Hartman, 2014). Grounded Theory tries to build theoretical categories grounded in data in order to explain the main concern of a specific group of people.

2. Constant comparative method: As soon as the theoretical categories emerged throughout the in-depth interviews process, a unit of analysis and some comparison groups had to be defined. The aim is to constantly compare the properties and dimensions of the data in both the unit of analysis and the comparison groups. This strategy fosters the construction of the main theoretical category (Glaser, 1992).

3. Theoretical sampling: Data collection is made through an inductive process and the theoretical categories are built through theoretical sampling. This means that, in order to gain a deeper understanding of analyzed cases and facilitate the development of analytic concepts, new cases are chosen to compare with ones that have already been studied. The goal of theoretical sampling is to build a theoretical category, no matter how many cases are needed, rather than prove the probabilistic sampling of the cases (Glaser, 2001).

The research process is characterized by looping, that is, as a researcher develops the theory, he or she can revisit stages as necessary. Bearing this in mind, the process is:

- Data collection and open coding. Interviews and observations carried out in the field are popular sources of material. However, the Grounded Theory maxim “All is data” (Glaser, 1998, p. 8) means that data can legitimately be gleaned from any source, e.g. newspapers, secondary data, and chance conversations. Data collection and open coding occur simultaneously. It is suggested to study the early data and begin to separate, sort, and synthesize these data through qualitative coding. Coding means that we attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data.

- Memoing throughout the study. The analytic grasp of the data takes shape by making and coding numerous comparisons. It is suggested to write preliminary analytic notes, called memos, about the codes and comparisons and any other ideas about the data that occur in the field. Ideas are defined by studying data, comparing them, and writing memos, that best fit and interpret the data as tentative analytic categories. Some questions would arise and gaps in the categories appear, then we should look for the data that answer these questions and may fill the gap. As the research proceeds, the categories not only coalesce as the collected data are interpreted, but the categories should also become more theoretical because they are engaged in successive levels of analysis.

- Selective coding and theoretical sampling. Once the core category has been identified, the researcher then selectively codes for the core category and related categories,

ignoring data that are not relevant. Theoretical sampling refers to the process of choosing new research sites or cases to compare with ones that have already been studied. It is one of the main tools of qualitative research and essential in the Grounded Theory. The goal of theoretical sampling is not the same as with the probabilistic sampling; the researcher's goal is not the representative capture of all possible variations, but to gain a deeper understanding of analyzed cases and facilitate the development of analytic frame and concepts used in their research. Theoretical sampling means that further data collection is focused on obtaining data relevant to the core category and related categories. At this stage, interview questions, which initially have to be neutral, can now be more focused since they are grounded in concepts discovered in the data.

▸ Theoretical coding and sorting. Theoretical coding is the process of identifying the theoretical code(s) which conceptualize how given concepts relate to one another. Sorting literally involves putting the memos into piles by concepts and these two stages can occur simultaneously. The analytic categories, and the relationships that have been drawn between them, provide a conceptual handle on the studied experience. Thus, levels of abstraction are built directly from the data and, subsequently, gather additional data to check and refine the emerging analytic categories. This way, the research should culminate in a grounded theory, or an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience.

### **Tracing the formation of values regarding active citizenship**

Any human or non-human element could be considered an Actor in a Network as far as it applies an influence over any other element; it also could be considered an Actor in a Network because it is susceptible to receive the influence of any other Actor.

By influence, it might be considered any action addressed to get engaged in public concerns, performing mutual respect, non-violence, and democratic values.

For instance, a group of people using electronic devices to transfer information, making phone calls or printing political symbols, in order to meet in a political meeting should be considered a network of mutual influences. Some of these elements are more powerful than others since they attract more influences or produce more influences. That is what we should call Agency. The political symbol attracts more influences or produce more influences than the printer machine, for instance; then, the political symbol has Agency.

Although some actors have agency and some other do not, the network requires the participation of all actors in order to keep alive. However, this participation could take place through, at least, two levels of influence: as Mediators or as Intermediaries. Any actor capable

of attract a relevant amount of Agency and produce a sustancial change in the influences is a Mediator, for instance: a photograph showing a social injustice could appeal for political action and later could be considered as an icon. On the contrary, an Intermediary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs, for instance: a map of the city where the meeting will take place could be sent by email to all participants, by traditional mail, or it could be published on a website... no big change will happen to the map, neither to the meeting, even when the map is an important actor in the network.

Tracing the formation of moral values regarding the active citizenship formation may be consider the process to identify the presence of the moral values as actors in the network. Some of them make big changes on the network, some of them do not; some of them launch actions, some of them do not.

Two more concepts could be useful: as far as the Agency flows all along the network, it suffers changes: occasionally it is an idea, then it becomes an electronic file within a machine, then it could be translated into a piece of paper, later on it is a political speech, then it becomes a group of people clapping, inmediately it is transformed into a sense of belonging, and so on... That is why Hibrid and Performance are useful concepts to trace the presence, role and transformations of values within the network.

Moral values are not “pures”: they could become any other Actor in the network, and any other Actor could be translated into a moral value. Moral values are hibrids of some other elements and, at the same time, they are presented within other Actors of the Network.

All the above requires continuous and persistent effort. Otherwise, the network vanish, go away, disappears. That is, a Network requires performance of all its Actors in order to be created, to be kept it alive, to be changed it, to be strengthened...

All along this effort, moral values could be traced through inductive processes continuously on the field or, to say it better, on the net.

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