

## **Civic Socialization in Late Modernity**

The Need for an Interdisciplinary, Generational, and Cross-Cultural Perspective

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### **Abstract**

Heated debates in public, political, policy and also social science circles display great concern for the erosion of social cohesion in Europe. These debates point at serious weaknesses in contemporary communities and at great problems in the way especially young citizens advance, or better still, fail to advance the common good. There are at least three problems with these current debates. First of all, discussions, not only in popular studies of media reports, focus on rather traditional forms of social cohesion, community life, social institutions and civic activism; forms that are appropriate to depict the life world of older generations and seem less suitable to describe the formative realm of younger generations growing up in late modernity. Cultural change has changed the meaning and shape of citizenship and civic activism for young generations. These changes call for an interdisciplinary approach. Secondly, understanding is hampered by a grave lack of sociological imagination. The few studies prioritizing the state-of-the-art of civic engagement among young people fail to acknowledge the basic sociological differentiation between age and cohort effects; a differentiation needed to simply address the questions and doubts about the culture of engagement of present-day youths. If a generational perspective is used at all, this perspective is very limited in scope pointing solely at statistical distinctions between birth cohorts as such. These studies lack the sensitivity for Mannheim's emphasis on generation members identifying with their generation, recognizing their common history, and being conscious of sharing the same destiny. A generational perspective is needed that goes beyond 'intergenerational accounting' and is (again) firmly based in classical generation theory. Thirdly and finally, the debate is biased by a predominantly Western if not American definition of the situation. There is a growing concern for the disregard of societal contexts, either of an institutional, political or cultural nature, in the analyses of civic decline and this calls for a thorough cross-cultural perspective on the problems at stake. This paper will address all three basic problems of the present debate on civic socialization and will present some suggestions to overcome these problems.

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## **Civic Socialization in Late Modernity**

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### **Erosion**

At the beginning of the third millennium the concern with the 'collapse' of community is, once again, at the very heart of the social science research agenda. The number of publications by social scientists, particularly from sociology and political science, dealing with the crumbling of community identity and engagement, often framed as the loss or erosion of social capital, is booming (Dekker, 2002; Foley & Edwards, 1997; Norris, 1999; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Contributions vary from highly normative approaches, embodied in the writings by (new) communitarians (e.g. Etzioni, 1993, 1996, 2001), to more sober quantitative approaches that study empirical trends in citizen involvement (e.g. Norris, 1999; Nye *et al.*, 1997). We witness a significant growth of studies on trends in citizens' civic virtues, political participation, volunteering, and involvement in informal social networks, which a few years ago accumulated in Robert Putnam's both much applauded and criticized book *Bowling alone* (2000). This address aims to show that it is important for socialization studies to take note of the cumulating tradition of civil society analyses. In this address I would like to focus on some necessary perspectives of civic socialization or the socialization aimed at people's, in this address young people's citizenship. Of course, today's debate in social science highlights different aspects of citizenship, ranging from the attainment of social right, the development of critical awareness and civic competences, to access to participate in political communities.<sup>1</sup> Following a more broad and dynamic approach this address focuses on citizenship defined as the process in which (young) people develop trust in others and in society's institutions and produce competences to participate in social networks, institutions and associations that to some degree serve a public cause.<sup>2</sup> It is important to stress that civic socialization does include (young) people's capacity to react, respond and adapt to social participation proposals formulated in society (cf. Feixa *et al.*, 2001). Young people's production of civic competences, in my view, is an important facet of civic socialization.

The debate on civic engagement is not only accelerating in social science circles. The same goes for the realm of policy-makers. Policy documents on

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Turner & Hamilton (1994).

<sup>2</sup> See Dekker *et al.* (2003) for similar and more definitions (e.g. regarding civil society).

future forms of governance, reports on civic education, and 'white papers' that focus on young people, for instance, all share similar hopes and fears on civic engagement, community life, and citizenship (e.g. IARD, 2001; IEA, 2001; EC, 2002). These documents note a marked disinclination toward participation – either through conventional activities in the political system, social movement groups in the community, or other groups that aim to solve problems in society in general, in schools, etc. They also report a lacking interest in, if not a negative view on political parties and other hierarchically organized institutions. Particularly young people are believed to show low levels of trust in basic social institutions. The European Commission even warns for 'alienation' of young people when considering figures on participation in social movements and (youth) organizations (EC, 2002: 14).

We believe that the emerging tradition of civil society studies does point at major weaknesses of contemporary communities and the way (young) citizens advance the common good. At the same time many of these studies have serious weaknesses themselves. These weaknesses should be taken into account before valid conclusions on the decline in civic virtues and civic engagement and its correlates can be drawn at all. These weaknesses especially relate to the need for a better understanding of the emergence of new forms of citizenship that go beyond the classic 'modern' twentieth century ways of civic engagement, political involvement, and social connectedness. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the debate is one of the drivers of this lecture. It is aimed to show that the debate on this issue, predominantly framed from the perspective of political science, is in serious need of at least a fair share of sociological reasoning. Furthermore, the debate lacks a serious approach of the position of young people from the context of generation formation. This is a very important issue as the civic decline debate is not an innocent one. Without an educated assessment on what it is that sets contemporary young generations apart from other generations in contemporary society, the diagnosis that today the young are the finest examples of political apathy, of lack of interest in others and of withdrawal from the 'good' civil society is extremely gratuitous if not simply misleading. In this address I stress the importance of including not merely genealogical, but thorough sociological generation perspectives. Finally, a point that looks almost too obvious to make, but still is massively ignored by many empirical contributors to the debate: the analyses of social erosion, civic decline and political disillusion has a profound North American origin and cannot be transplanted to other countries with impunity. It is high time to take account of historically grown, if not growing variations in the basic cultural, institutional and political features of societies.

The aforementioned issues point to an important assignment for socialization theory in order to keep a head position in explaining how people today become social beings and affect the development of society and culture. One of the keywords in this assignment is comparativeness. It is necessary to compare and learn from the diverse disciplinary perspectives on young people's social engagement, to have an open eye for the particular generational idiosyncrasies of contemporary young people as compared to generations of yesterday, and to take on the task of assessing the specific conditions under which young people grow adult in a particular society as compared to other societies.

## **Antenna**

A flourishing civil society as well as a vital democracy presupposes, as Putnam (2000, 2002) and many other observers show (e.g. Berger & Neuhaus, 1996; Dekker & Uslaner, 2001; Edwards et al., 2001; Sandel, 1996; Wolfe, 1989), high levels of social trust, cohesion, and participation. Mutual social trust among citizens is assumed to create community bonds, to positively affect the functioning of social institutions, and to generate a cultural climate in which pro-social behavior, cooperation, and democratic involvement are secured. Trust strengthens feelings of support for democratic rule and institutions as well as a willingness to engage in political participation and voluntary associations. The decline in mutual trust among Americans, the widespread feeling that honesty and morality are weakening, and the increasing mistrust of institutions and political authorities that Putnam and many others depict, is directly linked to the loss of civil society, or the weakening of the private commitment with the public cause through collective participation in the wide range of voluntary associations, and to one of the key merits of civil society: the rise of a competent citizenry actively engaged in reproducing a strong democratic culture. In line, of course, with the classic Almond and Verba study on civic culture (1963) Putnam points at 'virtuous circles' of trust and involvement that are directly related to the quality of democracy.

It is *bon ton* among the vast majority of civil society theorists to sketch the contemporary moral climate in pessimistic terms. "We do not have to read deeply in the philosophy and literature of today to sense the degree to which our age has come to seem a period of moral spiritual chaos, of certainties abandoned, of creeds outworn, and of values devalued" (Nisbet, 2000: 33). The general idea in the contemporary concern about what constitutes the good life, the good citizen, and the good society is that prime social institutions such as the family, the school, the neighborhood, the church, civic organizations - the "little schools of citizenship" according to de Tocqueville - no longer fulfill essential

psychological and symbolic functions in providing people with basic values and meaning structures. These traditionally mediating institutions between the individual and society have lost their significance, led to a fraying of the social fabric, de-unification of moral standards, and fragmentation of individual pursuits. The enlargement of scale, the professionalization and bureaucratization of the welfare state, the 'thickening' of the state, have disintegrated the societal midfield, so many civil society analysts hold. The social capital as embedded in primary social institutions has inflated and the postmodern citizen becomes detached, non-affiliated, and feels no personal loyalty to the wider community. Malcontent is said to boom. "[N]umerous signs - unstable voting patterns, a return to religious orthodoxy, increases in antisocial behavior, opposition to scientific and technological advance, a withdrawal from public issues into private worlds, and the rise of irrationality - indicate, for reasons both sound and unsound, a feeling of discontent with progress" (Wolfe, 2000: 51).

The present debate on community decline, civic decay, political disengagement, spiritual chaos, and the like, is at its crescendo and today includes all social problems known to contemporary society: divorce, juvenile delinquency, alcohol and drugs abuse, school drop out, intolerance, excessive TV watching, inner-city degradation, widespread cynicism, etc. It is crucial to address a set of basic issues central to this debate. For civil society theory and research not to stagnate these issues need reflection. Only this way its may maintain its relevance for answering the questions what it means today to be civically engaged, to be a good citizen, to foster the good society, to counter the erosion of community in a postmodern, highly individualized, fragmented, and technologically highly developed society which just entered the twenty-first century. These issues especially relate to the need for a better understanding of the emergence of new forms of civic, political and social participation that go beyond the classic 'modern' twentieth century ways of civic engagement, political involvement and social connectedness. Specific forms of social action afforded or facilitated by cyberspace connections may provide examples of more contemporary ways of this engagement, involvement and connectedness. In the following section these points will be- further elaborated.

Mainstream political science survey research on quantitative trends in political participation is conservative as it typically lacks a sharp eye for new and innovative forms of political action particularly among younger generations. The 'signs of time', it seems, are not well read or covered in customary empirical studies of developments in civic political engagement. This lacking sensitivity for new forms of political action is not so much intentional, neither does it reflect an absence of professional sophistication, rather it has to do with the very nature of political trend studies itself. In order to be able to detect trends and trend

changes, political scientists – as well as many other social science researchers prefer to measure the *same* longitudinal quantitative indicators of political participation. This enables them to come up with robust trends. By continuously adapting measurement instruments to new upcoming and alternative forms of political action, neat trends would be obscured as comparisons with the past are no longer possible. Basic anchor points would be missing and this would seriously hamper time comparisons. Mainstream political science survey research thus favors to focus on the longitudinal study of rather traditional and stable ‘easy’ indicators of political participation such as voting behavior, writing letters to congress, attending political meetings, signing petitions, etc. (cf. Almond & Verba, 1963; Barnes *et al.*, 1979; Halman, 1991; Inglehart, 1977, 1997; Jennings *et al.*, 1990; Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995; Van den Broek, 1996; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba *et al.*, 1978). These behaviors have been studied for decades now in several well-known longitudinal survey studies among random samples of the American public such as the General Social Survey (GSS) by the University of Chicago based National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the National Election Studies (NES) by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) of the University of Michigan, the Roper Social and Political Trends, or the DDB Needham Life Style Surveys.<sup>3</sup> By analyzing these data over time, political scientists did and do a valuable job in detecting political action trends but are likely to simply miss novel forms of political participation.<sup>4</sup> If one finds, for example, that younger generations are less inclined to vote, to write letters to its political leaders, to attend political party meetings, and to sign petitions does this consequently imply that its political participation is below that of older generations? Framed in these terms, it is. But it may very well be that younger people use *alternative forms* of political action, particularly through the Internet, which they think are better suited to boost political discussions and to influence the political arena, such as by being involved in forms of political ‘hacktivism’, by massively sending emails to political leaders, by using information technology for community building, by designing and maintaining political websites, by participating in political chat groups, by raising political awareness and support through websites and zines (the web’s version of magazines) or by launching mass political demonstrations through the web (see e.g. Hill and Hughes, 1998). New forms of political engagement are not covered with standard political participation scales used in mainstream political science survey research. Says Bennett (1998: 744) “[...] what is changing in politics is not a decline in citizen engagement, but a

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<sup>3</sup> See Putnam (2000), Appendix I for a description of these surveys.

<sup>4</sup> Measures such as these have been used for almost three decades now in political science research (see literature cited in main text).

shift away from old forms that is complemented by the emergence of new forms of political interest and engagement". The cultural dynamics of political engagement are simply underrepresented in the toolbox of the average political scientist who is interested in longitudinal data on political action using repeated measures. True, these data pertain to long time periods, some over more than two decades. But: "compared with earlier decades, by the end of the century [American] citizens may not be joining the Elks or striking in trade unions or demonstrating about civil rights, any more than they are hula-hooping or watching sputnik or going to discos. But they may be engaged in civic life by recycling garbage, mobilizing on the internet, and volunteering at women's shelters or AIDS hospices" (Norris, 1999b: 258).

A careful look at Putnam's indicators of civic engagement leaves the (post)modern reader with feelings of fundamental ambiguity and even a little sociological fatigue. From a democratic point of view it is surely important to vote during election time. But what can be said about the political system itself? Much of the assumed former appeal of the political process may well have lost its significance in the eyes of younger generations. The grand old ideological conflicts have vanished, classic left-right differences have lost much of their political substance, transparent antagonistic political party lines have disappeared, politics turned into a sometimes grotesque media circus (particularly at election times), there still is a marked gap between politicians and voters, and the political patronage system moved far beyond ordinary citizen representation. We may overstress these points but only to underline that the political system itself has changed considerably since the formative years of the long civic generation, yielding different intergenerational political responses. Classic indicators of civic involvement may very well have less significance to young generations that are likely to express alternative forms of engagement that are both more meaningful and more functional to them. One should not, thanks to the availability of longitudinal indicators of what used to be civic involvement, endlessly apply them to each new generation. New generations will invent new forms of political participation, which for the sake of the older forms do not necessarily mean less civic engagement. The social parameters of what constitutes a good citizen are not culturally invariant but do change over time. New eras witness new definitions of meaningful community involvement. Sticking to the old parameters leads to serious misperceptions of what is going on in the civic political realm. The world has changed and so have the ways in which citizens voice their political concerns.

Still, scientists, professional educators, and youth policy-makers focus mainly on citizenship that involves traditional, formally organized civic institutions (e.g.,

political parties, unions) and classic civic activities (e.g., writing letters to congress, signing paper petitions, reading about politics) that are appropriate for older generations. Young generations today voice their public concern, show their political involvement and create social capital in new ways, especially in ways that allow more reflexivity, and through new channels, especially in the leisure and consumption domains.

Let me briefly illustrate this with focusing on the scholarly literature and social science research on the Internet (Vinken & Ester, 2002). These sources suggest that Internet has strong ties to the basic cultural, social, and political characteristics of contemporary society. The Internet emerges from the typical cultural, social, and political realities of today's society as well as strongly contributes to these cultural, social, political realities of this type of society. *Culturally*, today's society provides space for more autonomous construction of meaning and builds on individuals who functions within multiple cultures. The Internet is a constitutive force as it adds to the creation of multiple identities and symbolization of fluid selves in a setting where no culture is dominant. *Socially*, contemporary society and its permeable institutions allows and demands people to develop partial commitments, establish weak tie relationships and to combine diverse sets of social identities and roles based on shared interests more than on social categorizations. The Internet is the space that promotes and pressures people to connect and disconnect relationships at high speed, to experience heterogeneity and multiplicity in these relationships, and indulge in supportive environments and communities without social burdens or inhibiting social cues. *Politically*, present-day society confronts the citizen with a wide variety of agencies and organizations (political movements, parties, and interest groups) each with divergent repertoires of action and political expression, and each targeted to influence a diversified set of political actors. Internet offers the alternative avenues of engagement. It is a new public sphere, a tool for boosting real life politics, as well as a new reality in itself. The Internet is probably functioning more as an alternative reality, benefiting non-mainstream political actors, when the political system and political culture emphasize 'politics as usual' and are less open for alternative political views. The *promise* of the Internet for civil society is culturally located in its vigor to bring down central control over truths and values and to involve citizens in the criticism and creation of what civil society should consist of. Socially, this promise is found in its power to counterbalance the trend of declining classic community involvement and contacts in public space. Politically, the promise lies most probably in its potency to give a lucid voice to alternative political agencies, repertoires and targets.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Vinken & Ester (2002) for an overview, an overview primarily based however on theory and persuasion. Although fragmented evidence is growing, thorough

It can be argued that the main focus of civic socialization could be put at the leisure and consumption domains. This not only goes for media use or the involvement in Internet, but might also relate to other types of activities. Small-scale qualitative studies suggest that shared consumer interests, shared fashions, shared musical tastes, etc., instead of for instance involvement in traditional political or ideological interest groups, create the strongest sense of collectivity and are the ultimate factor of sociality for younger generations (Willis, 1990; see also Laermans, 1993). In sociology we know relatively little about the civic dimensions of leisure and consumption activities. Consumer and shopping activities, activities that take up a large part of the time spent by younger generations, can have the same civic result as Internet use: yield new forms of solidarity, community life, and involvement in the common good. Most notable is politically inspired consumerism where buying ecologically, politically and socially sound and just produced goods and boycotting goods with the contrary traits are central. Through these consumer channels people build trust, share collective interests, and more directly hope to solve common (public) problems. Sports activities and cultural activities (e.g., music-, movie-, video-making, -buying and -listening) may have similar value. In these forms of participation strong civic links between people are created, in many cases aimed at deliberately counterbalancing, criticizing and contesting existing disengagement and political balances in society. Many of these activities aim to build a new community identity, a new 'among their own', as well as alternative routes to establish solidarity, community life and involvement in the common good. Leisure and consumption activities have a strong political and social potency. They may even have become the main playing field for expressions of political voices, for the driving forces of new senses of belonging to society, and promotion of social connectedness.

It seems as if mainstream political science research on civic engagement and social capital could do with a fresh shot of sociological imagination with a sensitive *antenna* for the political meaning of new cultural phenomena, particularly as expressed by younger generations. Again, the debate on declining civic engagement and social capital is not an innocent one. If it would be true that young people are indeed less committed to the old forms of shaping the good society *but* are much more involved in new and alternative forms, this would put the moral concern about young people's societal roles in a radically

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comparative data on the subject is scarce. Recent studies that promise to provide empirical insight in how the new media changes participation of children and youths in private and public life mostly do not keep that promise (e.g. Livingstone, 2002).

different perspective. What the debate on civil society needs is a solid combination of quantitative political science trend research and an imaginative interdisciplinary social science approach focused at today's forms of civic engagement, political involvement and social connectedness.

As I aim to argue here a disciplinary mix of political science, of socialization studies, but foremost of a modern sociology of youth, of generation, and of culture, if not of cultural studies – interdisciplinary by definition – is pivotal in advancing the debate. In the context of this address I will focus at the added value of the sociology of youth – especially addressing the currently heated debate on other- or self-socialization (*Fremd- or Selbstsozialisation*) – and on the sociology of generation perspective.

## **Reflexivity**

Let us first take a closer look at what role youth or young generations play in the current civic engagement debate. The current debate on what is taking place among generations in terms of their civic engagement for one thing is strikingly conflicting. The generational perspective dominates the discussion on what the past, present, and future state of civic engagement is. In almost every observation and analysis in the field, the rise, decline, and – according to a few number of analysts – the revival of civic engagement is closely connected to the issue of generations. Robert Putnam (2000: 283) suggests that 50% of the decline in most forms of civic engagement and social capital in the US is due to generational change, making the generational argument the single most important one in his analysis.<sup>6</sup> The process of the gradual replacement of the civic prewar generation of 'self-made citizens' by the postwar generations of baby boomers and Gen X'ers (and the like), is what 'killed civic engagement'. As already indicated, this rather malicious intergenerational picture of civic (dis)engagement by Putnam definitely needs some counter-arguing.

Firstly, he seems to glorify the 'long civic generation' for its above average accumulation of social capital and community involvement, and there are many good reasons for doing so. Controlling for educational disparities, members of this generation of American 'civic champions' were more likely to be members of civic organizations, to trust other people, to vote during election times, to work

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<sup>6</sup> It has to be stressed, though, that Putnam is well aware of the possibility that the younger generation today "is no less engaged than their predecessors, but engaged in new ways" (Putnam, 2000: 26) but he is not very convincing in elaborating this very likely alternative interpretation of intergenerational civic participation in postwar American society.

on community projects, and to read daily newspapers to keep up with political developments, compared to the generation of their grandchildren. From a civil society point of view one may applaud these civic virtues. But there is a darker side to this long civic generation that also needs consideration. It was a generation that strongly thought in terms of rigorous bi-polar value systems of what is good and what is wrong, of 'us' versus 'them', which fostered male dominance, emphasized the importance of traditional gender roles, favored authoritarian power balances in work and family life, expressed rather rigid in-group/out-group stereotypes (they may have bowled together but certainly not across racial lines), were quite intolerant vis-à-vis different ideologies and lifestyles, and were convinced of the American lead in showing the way to other countries. This assessment is, of course, based on present-day 'moral' and cultural standards, but, then, much of contemporary youth' civic involvement is based on the standards of yesterday.

Secondly, Putnam and others do not clarify the most elementary notions when claiming that civic decay is a generational process. As stated Putnam (2000: 283) suggests that 50% of the decline in most forms of civic engagement and social capital in the US is due to generational change. One of the problems with this diagnosis is that it stops with pinpointing the mechanism of change: generational replacement. What it fails to indicate are the basic commonly shared features of these different generations that make them more or less engaged in civil society (see also McLean, 2002). An answer to the straightforward question *why* younger, post-war generations, including the sixties generation, are less involved in their community or have less social capital than older generation is simply missing. Ad best ad hoc explanations are offered such as excessive TV watching. Similar problems have American popular studies that *au contraire* predict the rise of a 'new great generation' of optimistic, 'more civic-spirited' young people manifesting a 'wide array of positive social habits...and good conduct' (Howe & Strauss, 2000: 4, 13; see also Tapscott, 1999). The energy with which an inevitable turn for the better is communicated on almost every page of these studies is proportionally reversed to the number of convincing and verifiable empirical arguments that substantiate the sudden rise of this new 'great generation'. Both Putnam and these upbeat studies make a strong generational statement – Putnam for alarming decline, the others for powerful revival – but both do not reveal or explain their most basic assumptions.

It is high time to counterbalance the political science and mediagenic type of youth studies from a thorough youth sociological and perhaps even more so, as I will show below, from a generation sociological perspective. I will recapitulate

some views from both perspectives and draw some conclusions on the relevance of these perspectives for civic socialization.

Prominent in the sociology of youth debate, at least in the German context, is the issue of other- or self-socialization. As in my view is not unusual in German context debates, different schools of scholars dig in deeply in the trenches of theoretical opposition, either emphasizing the over-socialized man of modernity or the over-individualized person of post-modernity. Zinnecker (2000) has fuelled the debate not by simply arguing in favor of more susceptibility for the role of the productive individual in socialization theory, but by systematically downplaying the relevance of the formal pedagogic environment of young people in their process of growing to adulthood. He stretches Hurrelmann's socialization concept of the productively reality-addressing subject (Hurrelmann, 1983, 2002ab) further by stating that socialization has become primarily self-directed and predominantly dealing with issues of self-realisation. With Hurrelmann the individual's ability to address reality productively depends on interaction with the informal and formal, direct and wider social environments of the individual at hand. Zinnecker argues however that formal and more indirect social circles fail to connect to modern-day young people and have retreated in favor of the self and the peer group of contemporaries with whom young people filter socialization efforts by the wider social environment. Bauer (2002), Hurrelmann (2002b) and others have criticized Zinnecker for his predominantly subject-oriented perspective of socialization.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, Bauer (2002) refers to classic socialization theory and surprisingly introduces traditional Bourdieu'an perspectives that dwell on people's varying dispositions to strive for integration in society and for preservation of individuality.

One important point in Zinnecker's assessments on self-socialization is, in my opinion, unjustly underrated in the criticism on the self-socialization concept: the role of consumption and media use. Says Zinnecker (2000: 277): "*(Dass die Instanzen des Marktes, des Konsums (...) den Kindern und Jugendlichen andere Formen der Beteiligung anbieten und auch abverlangen, als es die kleinräumig-*

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<sup>7</sup> In the low countries the same tendencies in social sciences are sharply criticized. The Brussels' sociologist Elchardus, e.g., is one the fierce criticasters of what he calls a dangerous 'self-ideology' (Elchardus, 1999, Elchardus & Glorieux, 2002), leading to the underestimation of the social inequalities determining people's life chances as well as to the sole transfer of responsibilities for overcoming life's difficulties to the individual, which, in turn, unjustly relieves pedagogic institutions from their obligation to help those less capable to successfully deal with social demands in their life course. Similar warnings are sketched in a series of future orientation studies in the Netherlands (Ester & Vinken, 2001; Vinken et al., 2002, 2003), which also clearly shows young people's clear-cut call for more and not less investments of representatives in schools, governments and corporate business to help them cope with life course difficulties (e.g. to combine educational, working and family life).

*nachbarschaftlichen Milieus der Erwachsenengesellschaft taten*". Through consumption and media use young people (both children and adolescents) their traditional status of civic incapability (the idea of being a 'minor' itself) is transferred into, if not replaced by a model of equal competence of action. Especially the domains of leisure and consumption therefore promotes self-socialization, or better still in my opinion, the socialization of the self with the help of contemporaries, being Zinnecker's peers or, as I aim to show below, being Mannheim's generation co-members aware of their shared history and destiny.

Let me first dwell shortly on the generational perspective. This perspective in sociology builds on reflexivity. The reflexivity of those who, in their formative years, have experienced disruptive socio-historical events or discontinuous change in society is central in truly sociological view of generations. It was another classic author, Karl Mannheim (1928/1929), who first framed generations in a sociological way. Though Mannheim has become the inevitable reference when focusing on generations, it is surprising to note that present-day sociology, including youth sociology, has drifted away from his notions, that is, from the purely sociological notions of generations.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, though the generational perspective is widely used in many value and life chance studies, methodologically the 'intergenerational' in these studies is usually analyzed by comparing different birth cohorts. A crucial sociological notion emphasized by Karl Mannheim has been lost along the way. It is the notion that a generation is not simply a numerical clustering of birth cohorts, but a group of contemporaries who share a sense of *belonging* to a generation. They share this because they experienced common societal events and circumstances that marked their formative period and had lasting effects on their individual life courses. From a sociological perspective, birth cohorts as such are not equivalent to generations. A consciousness of the shared history and destiny is a necessary condition if a generation is to emerge, a generational consciousness that separates one generation from the others. Mannheim made this very clear in his distinction between generation location, generation as an actuality, and generation unit. The sociological concept of generations originally refers to individuals who think of

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<sup>8</sup> One of the latest issues of a key journal in youth sociology, *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation* (Heft 4, 2002), was on generational relationships and solely focused on a genealogical concept of generations, the concept seeking to address distinctions between members of the same family (see also Kohli & Szydlik, 2000).<sup>8</sup> The meeting of the research committee on sociology of youth (RC34) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) at the 2002 World Congress of Sociology, furthermore, started with a tribute to Karl Mannheim, and was rightly so presented as a true re-invention of the relevance of his thought for youth sociology (Chisholm, 2002). Unwittingly, this tribute displayed the gap grown between youth sociology and Mannheim's sociological concept of generations.

themselves as members of a generation and who (either implicitly or explicitly) express the extent to which this sense of belonging leads to unique experiences and endeavors (see Diepstraten, 1999).

Mannheim discerns three dimensions: generation location (*'Generationslagerung'*), generation as an actuality (*'Generationszusammenhang'*), and generation unit (*'Generationseinheit'*). A generation location refers to individuals born in the same period and socio-cultural space, who are exposed to a common range of historical events. A generation location is a potential generation that may or may not materialize. This potentiality of generation formation becomes reality by way of a generation as an actuality, which is defined as 'constituted when similarly 'located' contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding' (Mannheim, 1952: 306). The step from a generation location to a generation as an actuality depends on the recognition of common experiences during the formative period of individuals who are born in the same historical and cultural space or region, which feel connected with their contemporaries because of the common destiny of their *'historischen Schicksalgemeinschaft'*. Thus a generation as an actuality exceeds the mere historical co-presence of individuals. To corroborate this view, Mannheim draws on Dilthey (1875), who emphasized the importance of commonly shared experiences as subjective, mental elements and the impact of the youth period or formative years. Shared formative years as such are not enough to create a generation as an actuality; it requires consciousness of the *'Generationslagerungangehörenden Individuen'* of a shared destiny resulting from the collective formative years. It is within this generation as an actuality that generation units may emerge. They are the most concrete manifestations of a generation, and develop a common vision on societal events. Often cultural vanguards, they form a crystallization point that attracts other members of the same generation as an actuality. Different generation units within the same actual generation might hold very different views on these societal events. A generation unit is usually a quantitatively limited group within a larger generation, and generations can include various generation units, hence people may react differently to similar societal events.

Thus, the Mannheimian conceptualization of a generation stresses that a generation is not a mere statistical birth cohort. To begin with, a generation refers to individuals who are born in the same historical period, who live in the same socio-cultural space, and are aware of sharing similar youth experiences in their formative years. This conceptualization presupposes that generation members subjectively identify with their generation, are linked by a common biography, have an elementary sense of a joint destiny and of being different from other generations. Generation membership assumes generation *consciousness* and a

cognizance that one's generation is *distinct* from other generations. Generation membership thus depends on the subjective views of people in a particular social and historical setting. Analytically this implies that objective and subjective aspects should both be taken into account in empirical generation research. Much of the generation research aims at assessing the objective intergenerational differences by only examining differences between birth cohorts. A *subjective comparative* approach is needed to do justice to Mannheim's theory on the origins and emergence of generations. All things considered, this means that from a sociological point of view, birth cohorts are at best generation locations but by implication do not represent an actual generation. By merely measuring objective differences between statistical birth cohorts, generational accountancy has floated a long way from its sociological heritage.

Elements of the contemporary youth sociology and generation sociology debate present clear-cut opportunities to address the issue of civic socialization. It has been argued that younger generation are more likely to pursue new forms of citizenship, forms that align with their formative experiences and might well be different than propagated by previous generations with other formative experiences. Forms that are based in the leisure and consumption domain, forms too that allow more self-direction and that might be recognized by young people today as symbolic artefacts of their particular formative experience and that, in turn, create a feeling of connectedness, of a common history and destiny.

The key concept that underpins both the self-socialization perspective and the generational perspective in my view is the concept of reflexivity, the competence to recognize and signal the communality of experiences. As Veith (2002) argues in his comment to Zinnecker socialization is no longer a matter of individuation through social integration (*Vergesellschaftung*) but vice versa can be understood only through the subjective observation of options for each individual to socially integrate from the perspective of self-direction of one's future life (Veith, 2002: 169). The aim of socialization, to put it more simply, shifted from developing individuality by taking part in society to developing individual competence that allows one to continuously make personal choices from the wide range of options to participate in society.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, Veith claims, the life course undergoes a certain 'reflexive biographization' (Veith, 2002: 173). The ability to project one's own life course, to plan one's future, to evaluate different options, to think about the consequences of choices, has

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<sup>9</sup> Of course this perspective aligns closely with Hurrelmann's alternative to Zinnecker's concept of self-socialization, being the concept of self-organisation (Hurrelmann, 2002b).

become a central theme in the life course, more than taking the different transitions in the life course itself, transitions with which one gradually becomes aware of one's individuality and one's history and destiny in the life course. Veith's reflexive biographization of the life course requires young generations to develop the competence of reflexivity, be it partly a kind of anticipatory reflexivity, considering that young generations still stand at the brink of adulthood and objectively have a broad ranged future to anticipate to.<sup>10</sup> Still, this *anticipatory reflexivity competence* is not getting shape in a social void, but is co-figurative *par excellence*, developing more and more in coalition with significant others from the direct social circles of the young. A series of Dutch studies on future orientations of young people we conducted shows that Dutch young people are well aware of the wide range of life course options, possible transitions, and accompanying life course cultures (orientations and aspirations related to particular choices) and definitely choose for a dynamic life course model directed not at progress (getting ahead) or self-development (broadening one's capabilities) per se, but directed at variation, change, and continuous experimentation (Ester & Vinken, 2001; Vinken et al., 2002, 2003). At the same time, at least as far as their future career life within this dynamic life course model goes, their prime supporters are people, and only people from the direct social circle of intimates (partners and spouses, and to a lesser extent parents and peers). Professional educators, teachers, career consultants and others with an explicit pedagogic agenda are absolutely absent in the career life course perceptions of young people. Only with their direct confidants they evaluate, plan, negotiate, and project their life course, a life course aimed at dynamics as an end *an sich*, a type of life course, therefore in turn, promoting the continuous process of reflexivity with close associates. With this company they will, over the total life course, develop a common consciousness of a shared history and destiny, a history and destiny in which autonomously, but with the help of close relatives, directing the dynamics of one's biography is and persists to be the central issue. This might result in the rise of a '*reflexive generation*', not only *having* formative experiences regarding their relationship with their life course that are fundamentally different from the experiences of the previous generations, but also – and necessarily so, given the rise of the reflexive

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<sup>10</sup> In my opinion the key issue is not the alleged rise of the choice biography, but the rise of the issue of biographization of the life course. The choice biography suggests young people no longer make traditional life course choices, no longer follow structured paths to and through adulthood, etc. (see e.g. Du Bois-Reymond & Oechsle, 1990). Empirical evidence for this trend is, however, weak (see e.g. Vinken, 1997). In the case of the biographization of the life course, the issue is not whether people can or will make traditional choices or not, but that increasing numbers of people are engaged in the projection, planning and evaluation of their life course. This, of course, still allows people to make traditional choices.

biographization of their life course – *being aware* of the distinctiveness of their formative experiences and acting according to this awareness.

Exactly the leisure and consumption domain, and the new media in this domain in the first place, allows the reflexive generation to interact with contemporaries on a previously unknown scale. Exactly that is the domain too of which we, in line with a number of theorists and researchers, expect that young people shape new forms of citizenship. As stated, this domain may even have become the main playing field for expressions of political voices, for the driving forces of new senses of belonging to society, and promotion of social connectedness.

It is clear that if we aim to address young people's civic socialization, of course neither completely self-induced nor predominantly directed by significant others, the key is to look at leisure and consumption, not per se as socialization agencies, but as domains *par excellence* where young people if not a young generation in Mannheimian terms materialize their anticipatory reflexive competences, in this case civic competences with the help of their direct significant others, including generation co-members.

## **Distinction**

A third feature of the present-day negatively framed discussions on (young) people's civic engagement, political participation, and social connectedness is the dominance of the American perspective. Within the framework of this address I will only shortly touch upon this issue. Not only do we not know from the alarming US-studies on civic decline, the crumbling of community and the resulting societal erosion whether or not young generations of the postwar era are really less involved in civil society (nor do we really know how to account for this), we neither know whether or not younger generations outside the US are equally less (or more) embedded in community life, engaged in civil society, oriented towards social life. It might well be that we are witnessing a typical American phenomenon. In general, however, there is a tendency in social science to uncritically copy analyses based in and concerning specific societies and transfer these analyses to other societies.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In fact this goes also for Bauer's (2002) critique to Zinnecker (2000) in which he proposes to apply the theory of social stratification and distinction by Bourdieu for explaining German socialization processes. Bauer does not reflect on the cross-cultural applicability of Bourdieu. See Schulze (2000: 16) for exactly the warning against replicating Bourdieu's theory for Germany, particularly as regards Germany's leisure, consumption patterns and the stratification and distinction schemata underlying these.

The vast bulk of studies on the assumed decline of civic engagement and the erosion of community bonding is from American political scientists and sociologists surveying American society. And there is, of course, nothing wrong with that. But the lack of a cross-national perspective becomes pressing. Is the prevailing malaise with American civil society to be generalized to other advanced Western societies as well? Is the loss of commitment to the public cause a phenomenon that cuts across national cultural and political boundaries? Answering this fundamental question is not an easy one but a highly relevant one. Other Western societies differ in many respects from American society but also share much of the American societal order. They also have strong market economies, are also believed to have changed into mass consumer cultures on the waves of globalization, their political arenas are also dominated by the prevalence of economic issues and special interest groups, and are thought to be also confronted by the weakening of the triad of the citizen, the community, and the state. But at the same time there are marked differences too. America has a very special tradition and quite unique history of voluntarism, is much less of a classic welfare state than most European societies, and has a public philosophy of the role of the state that is not that pronounced in Europe. This mixture of similarities and dissimilarities calls for a cross-national analysis of civic engagement in Europe and the United States, a call that becomes louder and louder (Dekker, 2002; Norris, 1999). In order to advance the present debate on the loss of community, a cross-national comparison therefore is very much warranted.

If we look at the political domain, for instance, there are some quite obvious differences between the US and Europe. Voter turnout in the US is lower than in Europe but the question is whether or not this is an indication of more pronounced civic disengagement among Americans or simply a reflection of structural differences between the two. Lower voter turnout in US elections is likely to be first and foremost related to institutional and legislative factors such as voluntary voter registration, absence of proportional representation, divided government, political trends such as the explosion of advocacy groups and other specifics of American political life. I disregard culturally induced features such as the non-existence of political parties inspired by postmaterialist values that are particularly important to younger voters (Inglehart, 1997). Besides, evidence suggest that whereas voter turnout is declining in the US, electoral participation in Europe is much more stable (Dekker et al., 2003). Thus, lower voter turnout in the US - clearly among the top discontents of most American civil society theorists (Eberly, 2000) - does not simply mean that Americans are less civically-minded than Europeans but is primarily related to differences in electoral systems.

The issue at stake is that studies on civic socialization should take basic diversities in societal contexts, institutional arrangements and especially cultural traditions into account. Thorough social science research, let alone robust internationally comparative research, addressing these issues are not yet available.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that especially civic socialization studies need a cross-cultural comparison. Cross-cultural comparisons (e.g. Fukuyama, 1996; Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1997) show that a particular set of nations differs strongly on a core set of social capital indicators (memberships, voluntary work, interpersonal trust). It should be aimed in studying civic socialization to at least address the consequences of cultural features (at different levels, e.g. national, regional or among subgroups), features that impact not only the way people behave and interact, and thus what the practices of agencies involved in socialization process are, but also how institutions involved in this process are structured and organized (cf. Hofstede, 2001; Trommsdorf, 1995). This perspective becomes even more relevant when we realize that the leisure and consumption domain might be a pivotal domain for young people to produce their forms of citizenship. Culture is most vividly underpinning this domain, its commodities, symbols, heroes and practices. Moreover, these elements from the domain of leisure and consumption are believed to derive from the USA. Alarming notions of globalization, or more specifically, in reference to consumer culture, notions of Americanization and McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993) argue that the young around the globe uncritically copy US-models in leisure and consumption (Van Elteren, 1994). Real large-scale evidence to back these claims is not available, on the contrary, cross-cultural consumer studies (De Mooij, 2003), show the young hardly divert from consumer patterns well established in respective countries. There does not seem to be much proof that the young form a globally uniform 'McWorld'-culture (Berger & Huntington, 2002). Still, this first evidence relates to consumption and media use as such, not to the sense of meaning young (or older) people address to it, let alone the meaning of this use in terms of civic engagement, political participation or social connectedness (see Vinken & Ester, 2002). The conclusion still stands that cross-culturally data on civic socialization, within and beyond the domains of leisure and consumption, taking account of cultural, political and institutional diversities are fragmented, scattered and underdeveloped.

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<sup>12</sup> Since the fall of the Berlin wall, there is, however, a boost in youth research, including research on political socialization, comparing the former West and East regions of Germany. See one of the earliest collections of these studies the volume of Büchner and Krüger (1991).

## Discussion

At this moment it seems that in an era of widespread disillusion with the status of the social sciences, the preoccupation with the assumed decline of community life, of civic engagement, of political participation and social connectedness develops into a growing unifying theme (Miztal, 1996). In the social sciences, but also in policy circles, the popularity of the theme of erosion of civil society is marked. This address aimed to show that socialization studies should take note of this theme. A number of claims in civil society studies, especially those regarding the declining willingness of young generations to participate in forms of citizenship invented by previous generations, need an answer from social science involved in addressing socialization processes. This address argues that civic socialization could be a focal theme, i.e. the theme of socialization aimed at people's citizenship, which, in turn, can be seen as the process in which (young) people develop trust in other people and in society's institutions and produce competences to participate in social networks, institutions and associations that to some degree serve a public cause.

Civic socialization theory and research can provide a counterbalance to civil society studies. Other than the latter studies it can provide a better understanding of the emergence of new forms of citizenship, especially in the leisure and consumption domain. It can furthermore seriously address the position of young people in the debate, not only from the perspective of self- or other-determination currently again highlighted in socialization debates, but also from the context of classic views on generation formation in which people's awareness of their distinctive formative experiences as regards social trust and civic competences is central, which, in turn, creates a sense of a shared history and destiny in civil society. Moreover, it can take account of basic diversities in societal contexts, institutional arrangements and especially cultural traditions. The basic condition for this is that civic socialization studies take on an interdisciplinary perspective, a co-figurative, or more specifically, a generational scope and a cross-culturally comparative view.

As the playing field of contemporary forms of citizenship might well be the domain of leisure and consumption, particularly forms related to the Internet, it is time to include scholarly knowledge from different backgrounds, not only from classic political science or socialization studies, but also from the sociology of youth, the sociology of culture, media and technology, and the sociology of leisure and consumption. Only by combining perspectives from these divergent social sciences civic socialization studies can read the "signs of the times". It can mix the analyses of societal pressures for young people today to function in multiple cultures and at the same time produce themselves in settings, such as

the Internet, where no culture is being dominant. Where they are required to be autonomous and develop a self and where they can do this in multiple forms. Where they are required and can develop trust, commitments and social identities of the modern weak tie type. Where they can join in the reality of the high variety of political agencies, repertoires and targets. The analyses of these aspects, all found in the leisure and consumption domain, require an interdisciplinary scope.

A co-figurative and a generational perspective in particular can be of help to address young people's engagement in new forms of citizenship, forms that allow for more reflexivity and are located in the leisure and consumption domain. As the aim of socialization seems to have shifted from individuation through social participation or integration to the development of competences to make personal choices – not only at the beginning of the life course but through the whole life course, to evaluate options and think about its consequences, reflexivity becomes a key competence. For young people this competence is best framed as an anticipatory reflexivity competence with which the theme of anticipating on one's present and future biography seems to have gained weight in the early phases of the life course. This type of competence, preliminary empirical evidence indicates, seems to be firmly socially embedded, especially in the direct social circle of intimates. With the company of close associates – including peers, but excluding any formal educator – young people are engaged in continuous reflexivity on their life course. This is likely to result in an awareness of a shared biographical history and destiny, a history and destiny in which developing a dynamic biography autonomously but with the help of direct others is a crucial element. Being aware of this commonness may well result in the rise of a 'reflexive generation' of which the production of civic competences is also characterized by a constant of anticipatory reflexivity. The analyses therefore of new forms of citizenship, especially in the leisure and consumption domain, should have an open eye to generation formation processes.

Civic socialization studies should be aware that many notions on citizenship, civic engagement, political participation and social connectedness of young people derive from a particular cultural setting. Concepts and detailed analyses available now are profoundly American. Nations, and regions and social groups within nations, vary strongly on basic structural and cultural features. As culture is a driving force for the way people interact, also as regards citizenship, and as it lays the groundwork for institutional arrangements and political contexts, and as culture plays a particularly strong role in the leisure and consumption domain (through heroes, symbols and other culturally induced practices) where the new forms of citizenships are to be found, it is argued that civic socialization studies make the necessary efforts to come up with cross-

cultural comparisons that allow the assessment of the cultural make-up of young people's new forms of citizenship. Instead of copying concepts and analyses of a particular country's origin it is time to address the cultural diversity of civic socialization practices.

The debate on civic socialization, as argued before, is not an innocent one. If it is true that young people are indeed less committed to older forms of contributing to the public cause and shaping the good society, *but* are more involved in new and alternative forms of this kind, the moral concern about young people's role in society is put in a radically different perspective. Civic socialization studies can play a key role in assessing this perspective, if they open up to insights from a broad range of social science disciplines, take on a co-figurative, generational scope and make efforts to analyze the theme on a cross-cultural basis.

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