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# 1 Introduction

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In this book, we offer a number of illustrations of what citizenship means and how it is practiced in selected locations in Tanzania and Uganda. Moreover, we discuss the potential contribution of philosophical pragmatism when it comes to conceptualizing citizenship in general, and in everyday practices in these East African contexts in particular. Therefore, we hope, on the one hand, that the phrase “philosophical pragmatism” in the book title will not scare off those interested in practices in these particular contexts, and on the other, that those having a more conceptual interest will be inspired to reflect further on the implications of these particular contexts for theorizing about citizenship. In other words, we would like to invite any reader interested in citizenship, from everyday practice to philosophical conceptualization to join us for a dialogue.

Three ongoing debates have motivated us to engage in a dialogue between development research and pragmatist philosophy. First, we respond to the eagerness of development research to contribute to “intentional development” (Cowen & Shenton 1996) and, therefore, to use theories and concepts in a normative way: to describe what *should* be the end state of “development” and accordingly, to prescribe needed interventions in order to reach the desired situation. While, as researchers, we cannot, and should not, escape our normative ideas of what the good life is, our analytical endeavour nevertheless seeks a relatively non-normative starting point with a focus on analyzing the present situation. Second, we seek to adhere to the methodological principle of philosophical pragmatism according to which concepts and theories should be informed by human practices and developed through joint inquiry. In accordance with this view, our aim is to investigate selected philosophical concepts through inquiry into practices in African locations, which are often marginalized from philosophical theorization. Third, we were motivated by the recent debates in development studies concerning the importance of civil society and citizen engagement in societal change and, consequently, chose the notion of citizenship, extensively discussed in both development research and philosophy, as the locus of our inquiry.

These three motivations, discussed in detail below, set the academic framework for the book, which is not clearly situated in any particular discipline. It represents a genuine attempt to make sense of everyday citizenship by drawing on contributions from a variety of disciplines. It presents selected findings from a four-year research project, “Growth into citizenship in civil society encounters” (2015–2019), and is thus an important milestone in a collaborative research journey that has combined expertise in educational philosophy, philosophical pragmatism, adult education, sociology, political science and development studies from four universities: the University of Dodoma, Tanzania; Makerere University, Uganda; and the Universities of Jyväskylä and Oulu, Finland.

### **Development research: The practical relevance of theory**

Development research has continually argued for knowledge production that is relevant and useful for development policy and practice, and, most importantly, for those whose lives “development” is supposed to improve. In relation to defining relevance, development theories hold different normative or ideological underpinnings in regard to the nature and desired direction of social change (Thomas 2000, 42), and how to address this change by means of intentional development interventions. For instance, the tensions between incremental and transformative societal change in regard to the role of civil society in development are constantly debated (Mitlin et al. 2007), the former being inspired by de Tocquevillean tradition of civil society seen as primarily a sphere of associations and citizens’ organizing, the latter stemming from a Gramscian view understanding civil society as potential space for counter-hegemonic collective action (Howell & Pearce 2002; Kontinen & Melber 2015). The proponents of transformative change argue that incremental improvements will not bring about changes at the systemic level and, thus, cannot address the prevalent inequalities resulting in situations such as a lack of social justice or marginalization (Hickey & Mohan 2004).

Moreover, development scholars and anthropologists often hold different views on the role of research, on whether its goal should be to conduct “analysis” or facilitate the “design” of interventions. Development research typically seeks knowledge that could contribute to change and transformation, while anthropology stresses the importance of more descriptive analysis (Crewe & Axelby 2013; Green 2012) and “knowing how the world is before trying to change it” (Olivier de Sardan 2005). Moreover, there are arguments from various normative bases about needed changes in development studies itself. The recent debates on transformations (Alff & Hornidge 2019), decolonialization (Schöneberg 2019) and engaged excellence (Oswald et al. 2019) effectively capture reflections on the need to abandon the traditional North-South dichotomies prevalent in the field, to be committed to both academic quality and support for social justice globally, and to engage with global transformations rather than primarily changes in so-called “developing countries”.

Traditionally, development research has been part of an international system that includes policies, practices and organizations that focus on the improvement of the life of those residing in the Global South (Janus et al. 2015). Therefore, not only the practical but also the policy relevance of research is central. Development research is typically funded, at least partly, by Ministries of Foreign Affairs or national aid agencies from money allocated to international development cooperation. Thus research conducted is expected to make direct contributions to the goals of international and national development policies. In a similar vein, our research project received funding from a “Development Research Program”, partly funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and, consequently, we had to tackle the above-mentioned questions. While our primary aim was to engage with analysis that is not directly connected to any specific intervention, in each chapter we have reflected on the implications of our findings for potential future initiatives for strengthening citizenship.

However, the constant need to provide prescriptions and contribute to practice, directly and rapidly, sometimes jeopardizes both conceptual elaborations and empirical investigations. The field of development studies is famous for its changing “buzzwords” (Cornwall 2007), notions that circulate disconnected from their theoretical backgrounds, frequently adopted by development practitioners and researchers alike. In this study, we have attempted to avoid circulating the buzzwords of the system and, therefore, sought respite from theoretical embeddedness in philosophical pragmatism not prevalent in the field.

### **Philosophical pragmatism: Intertwining theory and practice**

Pragmatism refers to a philosophical tradition explicated by scholars such as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859–1952). As the name indicates, pragmatism stresses the role of human practices in philosophy. Furthermore, one of the main starting points of early pragmatists was that the academic field of philosophy should take evolutionary theory seriously as well as other theories of modern science; John Dewey also developed a theory of social inquiry as a theoretical tool for engaging with social problems (e.g. Dewey 1935, 1–66; see also Addams 1902/2002). Dewey is often considered to be ahead of his time (Jones 2009, 137–154; Leddy 2006/2016), and his ideas are still extensively used, debated and developed in philosophy and empirical research to address issues such as globalization (Narayan 2016), public administration (Evans 2000; Whetsell & Shields 2011) and education (Wilson & Waddington 2016, 89–94).

First, in this research project, pragmatism provided us with the conceptual means to take a stand on the issue of normativity. In philosophy, the concept of normativity, at the basic level, refers to “how thing ought to be” whereas its counterpart, descriptivity, refers to “how things are”. From the pragmatist perspective, there is constant interaction – or entanglement – between facts,

or how things are, and values, which direct the ideals of how things should be (Dewey 1929; Putnam 2002; Holma 2011). This implies that all human activity, including research, is embedded in certain values and normative ideas, which can, however, be revised in a joint inquiry. Pragmatism suggests that all theories, conceptualizations and belief systems are uncertain and liable to error, but that human beings may assess and improve these systems, in relation to both facts and values; in this assessment and improvement, a method of shared inquiry is crucial. The pragmatist framework thus also acknowledges that there can be multiple normative ideas about “what ought to be”, and that it is possible to re-evaluate these ideas in interaction between different value perspectives and in the face of new empirical evidence. Inspired by these ideas, we embarked in a relatively non-normative way from the analysis of everyday perceptions, inquiring about the kinds of ideals of good citizenship people hold in different locations rather than starting with a definition of a “good citizen” from some existing theory of citizenship.

Second, pragmatism guided our understanding of the intertwined nature of theory and practice. One of the key ideas of pragmatism is that philosophy should engage with human practices. One side of the coin is that for pragmatism, a criterion of a good theory is that it helps in understanding and developing current practices. The other side of the coin is that a good theory should not be based merely on ideals but should be informed by actual practices. We perceived philosophical pragmatism to fit our purposes since it differs from so-called analytical philosophy in its stance towards practice and, therefore, could potentially be relevant to such a practice-focused field as development research. We wanted to explore the pragmatist framework in a field where critical social theories ranging, on the one hand, from Marx to Gramsci to Habermas, and from Foucault to post-structuralism, on the other, are extensively used to analyze inequalities and power in their material, discursive and epistemic forms. While we consider critical theories extremely relevant in this research field, we nevertheless suggest that pragmatism, with its particular understanding of practices and habits (Holma & Kontinen, this volume), offers an additional and supplementary angle from which to interpret everyday lives and the potential for change initiated by them.

### **Development practice: From civil society to strengthening of citizenship**

Eventually, we chose a general theme of citizenship as the focus of our inquiry. The issue of citizenship has emerged as central in development research, and the promotion of active citizenship has gained prominence in development practice (Cornwall & Coelho 2006). This has been especially related to the mainstreaming of the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) in which citizens are encouraged to claim their rights. Notions such as empowerment (Kabeer 1999), citizen engagement (Gaventa & Barrett 2012), social accountability (Hickey & King 2016) and civic-driven change (Fowler & Biekart 2013) emphasize the importance of citizens’ agency in taking an

active role in changing their living conditions. The promotion of learning about one's rights and practices of mobilizing are important strategies to support active citizenship in development interventions conducted by NGOs and other civil society actors.

There are plenty of examples in which initial support from an NGO has led to change in citizens' stance towards the government and other stakeholders: for instance, in regard to the rights of people with disabilities (Abrese Ako et al. 2013), or gender equality (Phillips 2015). At the same time, however, the question of why citizens do not become active as a consequence of such initiatives has also been raised (Pettit 2016). Among the identified elements hindering transformation towards more active citizenship are challenges related to transmitting models of rights-based approaches and participatory technologies without sufficient sensitivity to existing patterns of acceptance of authority (Dorman 2014, 170), and a lack of acknowledgement of the prevalent civic habitus formed in long-term experiences of poverty and oppressive governance (Pettit 2016). Moreover, it has been pointed out that the direction of these aspirations is often based on certain Western models grounded on an ideal of the "individual, male and modern" citizen (Robins et al. 2008; Lazar 2013). Further, in authoritarian contexts people's group memberships and associated rights and obligations might not be first and foremost geared towards the state, while the modern notion of citizenship focuses on state-citizen relationships. The identity and belonging, rights and obligations which are significant to people often follow lines of ethnicity, kinship, religion and place of origin rather than nation states (Bøås & Dunn 2013; Dorman 2014; Geshiere & Jackson 2006). Consequently, investigating citizenship requires delving into local conceptualizations and lived experiences of belonging rather than embarking from any ready-made ideals of citizenship (Kabeer 2005).

In international development, the emphasis on active citizenship mostly relates to the broader goal of transforming the existing authoritarian governance models in the direction of democracy and good governance – the cornerstone of which is an active citizen ready for political participation (Lazar 2012). Democratization efforts and donor conditionalities have resulted in the establishment of regular elections in most African countries, but the consolidation of the desired model of liberal democracy has not been fully successful. As a consequence, African states have undergone a growing "democracy fatigue" (van de Walle 2012), establishing "competitive authoritarianism" (Cheeseman 2018) or hybrid regimes (Tripp 2010) that combine democratic institutions with authoritarian governance. Moreover, clientelistic relations and the realities of under-resourced states pose specific challenges for people's willingness to participate, for example, in initiatives based on the idea of deliberative democracy (Cornwall & Coelho 2006). In such contexts, building local democracy and bottom-up citizenship by means of enhancing citizens' capacities – often through participation in locally-organized groups and associations not necessarily initially engaged with an explicitly political

realm – plays an important role in societal development (Gaventa & Barrett 2012; King 2015; Hickey & King 2016). Consequently, when exploring how citizenship is learned, it is important to engage with the areas and spaces of participation which are significant and meaningful in the everyday life of the citizens, rather than limiting the focus only to those concerned with the “political”.

Against this backdrop, we sought for a conceptualization of citizenship that allows the gap between ideal models and lived experiences to be addressed, and that captures the gradual processes of change in citizenship (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018). Inspired by pragmatism, we decided to conduct empirical research that would start with analysis of existing conceptualizations of citizenship, and the kinds of experiences from which they arose. Additionally, on the basis of philosophical pragmatism, we developed a conceptualization of citizenship as constructed in practices taking place in communities involved in a public, thus, in joint activities with an aim of taking care of shared issues. In these practices, citizenship habits are both acquired and reformulated, thus, learned. Circumstances of practices, referring to the institutionalized habits of state-citizen relationships and habits of people’s organizing, connect local and everyday experiences to the historical continuum, affecting which practices become relevant and what kinds of habits are the most likely to be learned (Holma & Kontinen, this volume).

### **Methodological note: Collaborative dealing with uncertainties**

To realize the idea of the intertwined relationship of philosophy and practice in the course of an actual research project is far from an easy task. In the first seminar of our project in September 2015, one very renowned scholar in the field of philosophical pragmatism emphasized that *pragmatist inquiry* does not “begin with a theory vs. practice dichotomy but is always already practically relevant”. We asked him what this implies for research practice and how we should conduct our collaborative study in order to engage in inquiry rather than simply applying selected concepts from philosophical pragmatism to empirical studies in Tanzanian and Ugandan realities. A bit surprisingly, his answer was that philosophical pragmatism is “practically relevant mainly in theory, not in practice”. We wanted to go beyond this statement. Despite the scarcity of time and other resources, we set out to experiment with how principles of joint inquiry could guide our own process of knowledge production in research practice. Therefore, this book is the result of a continuous dialogue: first, between pragmatist philosophy and development research, and second, between Northern and Southern academics. During the process we learned to deal with uncertainties when it came to defining citizenship, developing detailed field methods and conducting analysis of the data. We continuously had to go beyond our own disciplinary manoeuvres, jargon and writing styles in order to be able to communicate and understand each other.

At the beginning of the project, our main goal was to investigate encounters between NGOs and their beneficiaries in NGO projects that aimed to strengthen citizenship. Therefore, our first entry point for the actual empirical research in communities was to identify the Ugandan and Tanzanian NGOs whose encounters would be under scrutiny. However, gradually we wanted to distance ourselves somewhat from the NGOs in order to avoid perceptions that the research was about evaluating their project or assessing the impacts of their activity. Rather, we were interested to see if they played any significant role in the everyday life of the community members. However, we conducted interviews and workshops with the NGOs in order to discuss their perceptions of the ideal citizenship they would like to support through their programs.

We were also interested in local definitions of “citizenship”. Therefore, the first round of interviews among community members focused on identifying arenas of participation meaningful for them and the interpretations of citizenship they articulated. In Tanzania, we were able to conduct a second round of interviews: first, to provide feedback on the results of the first round to community members, and second, to get more in-depth information on selected meaningful spaces of participation such as self-help and religious groups. The interviews in communities were conducted in local languages, and all the material was transcribed in the original form. The material collected during the GROW project and used in diverse chapters in this book is listed in Table 1.1, while the chapters by Alava as well as by Bananuka and John are based on individual PhD projects accomplished prior to joining the GROW team. Philosophical analysis of the selected concepts in pragmatism was conducted in parallel with the generation of research material from Uganda and Tanzania.

Our research project could not escape the much-debated power asymmetries in North-South relationships in development research (Melber 2015; Carbonnier & Kontinen 2015). The usual preconditions applied: the funding was granted by a Northern funding agency, the Academy of Finland, with its own administrative requirements; the money to the Southern universities was transferred under conditions of detailed planning and reporting; the initial research proposal was designed mainly by the Northern scholars although commented on by the Ugandan and Tanzanian partners; and data collection was mainly the responsibility of the Southern partners. There were, however, attempts to counteract the traditional asymmetric research relationship. We conducted annual research seminars with the entire research team both in Finland and Africa where the project was redesigned in different stages; a Tanzanian postdoctoral researcher was employed in a Finnish university contrary to the standard practice of allocating the funding to young scholars from Northern universities; and the Southern researchers continuously engaged with analysis and writing the publications. Additionally, we were well aware of the debates criticizing the use of Western theories in making sense of African experience (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Without doubt, we are guilty of



*Table 1.1* The empirical research material collected in the GROW research project.

<i>Time</i>	<i>Material on NGOs</i>	<i>Material on communities</i>
November 2016	Workshop in a Ugandan NGO Interviews with the NGO staff	
January 2017	Interviews in a Tanzanian NGO	Interviews in three villages in Kondo District in Tanzania (n=20)
April 2017	Feedback workshop in Ugandan NGO	
March–May 2017		Individual interviews in rural areas in Kiboga and Namutumba Districts in Uganda (n=60)
May–July 2018		Feedback meetings in study villages in Kondo District (n=2) Individual and group interviews in three villages in Kondo District (n=64), Tanzania
July 2019		Feedback meetings in two villages in Kondo District.

once again using the theories of a “dead white man”, rather than drawing from African theories of learning and citizenship; yet, at the same time, our collaborative and bottom-up research approach, embedded as it is in pragmatist concepts, enabled us to critique some of the “Western” theories applied in development research and practice, giving rise to new ideas of how potentially to develop theories on the basis of everyday African experiences. Moreover, we have included as much Tanzanian and Ugandan literature as possible, especially in the chapters concerning the contextual characteristics of the states (Alava et al.; Nyuyahambi et al.).

### **Structure and contributors**

The overall aim of the book is to offer insights into the everyday experiences of citizenship in Tanzania and Uganda. At the same time, we offer a novel theoretical perspective for development research, drawing from philosophical pragmatism. Supplementing the idea of liberal, active citizens willing to hold the state accountable, it highlights citizenship as a lived experience and stresses the incremental learning therein. The main objectives of the book are: a) to articulate a concept of citizenship based on philosophical pragmatism; b) to explore a variety of practices in which citizenship habits are formed and reformulated; and c) to reflect on the interaction between the ideals of transformation and actualization of incremental change in practice. Consequently, the book is divided into three sections, each providing different perspectives on the questions at hand.

The first section anchors the main concepts used in the research in philosophical pragmatism. In their chapter, Holma and Kontinen articulate the concept of citizenship, in which the notions of practices, habits and circumstances intertwine. Rydenfelt engages with the concept of democracy, and provides a pragmatist conceptualization of democracy as social inquiry. Kauppi, Holma and Kontinen present the pragmatist notion of social intelligence, central to citizenship habits and their potential change, and reflect on its potential implications for development research.

The second section contextualizes the conceptual ideas in prevalent circumstances in Uganda (Alava et al., this volume) and Tanzania (Nguyahambi et al., this volume), and provides in-depth analyses of citizenship practices and habits in specific locations. Alava (this volume) then discusses subdued citizenship formed in the experience of violent state-citizens relations among the Acholi in northern Uganda. Ndidde et al. (this volume) continue with an account of gendered citizenship formed over decades in rural Uganda in Kiboga and Namutumba Districts. Nguyahambi and Kontinen (this volume) describe the ways in which the members of a religious community in rural Tanzania in Kondoa District make connections between Islamic morals and good citizenship. Kilonzo et al. (this volume) examine the formation of habits of contributing citizenship in the practices of self-help groups in the same area.

The third section discusses the intersection between transformative ideals and gradual changes in practices in participatory research and development interventions. Ahimbisibwe et al. (this volume), provide a critical reflection on their own research process, tackling the ideals of participatory research and its practical implementation. Kontinen and Ndidde discuss organizational learning in a Ugandan NGO as it endeavours to promote change in gender relations. In the same vein, Bananuka and John describe how the critical education initiatives of a Ugandan NGO were shaped by contextual forces. Finally, Nguyahambi and Chang'a provide an analysis of the model of social accountability monitoring (SAM), and an example of discrepancies between its ideals and practical implementation.

The final chapter by Kontinen and Holma provides conclusions concerning the three aims articulated, and reflects the lessons learned from this particular research process for development research and philosophical pragmatism.

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