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# 15 Conclusions

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In the Introduction, we established three main objectives for this volume: a) to articulate a concept of citizenship based on philosophical pragmatism; b) to explore a variety of practices wherein citizenship habits are formed and reformulated; and c) to reflect on the interaction between the ideals of transformation and the actualization of incremental change in practice. The three sections of the book addressed these questions in a variety of ways: first, anchoring the concepts used in philosophical pragmatism; second, discussing citizenship practices and their circumstances in different locations in Uganda and Tanzania; and third, examining the discrepancies between ideals and practices in intentional attempts to change citizenship habits. In this chapter, we reflect on the fulfilment of these objectives, and further, on our contributions to the three motivating discussions presented in the Introduction.

## **The concept of citizenship based on philosophical pragmatism**

The pragmatist stance on citizenship, inspired especially by John Dewey and adopted by the authors of this book, included, first, the methodological principle of producing conceptualizations as a result of dialogue between theories and lived experiences; second, an attempt to define citizenship as constructed in practices in which certain citizenship habits are acquired and formulated; and third, the requirement of contextualizing practices in their societal and historical circumstances (Holma & Kontinen, this volume). Moreover, Rydenfelt (this volume) provided a pragmatist conceptualization of democracy distinct from elitist and deliberative views, in which democracy is not primarily voting or participation in public deliberation, but social inquiry into shared issues often perceived as social problems. Kauppi et al. (this volume) then connected social inquiry with a Deweyan notion of intelligence, in which it is defined as fundamentally social, manifesting and cumulating in interaction and playing a crucial role in action and shared problem solving. Ultimately, anchored in pragmatism, we articulated a conceptualization of citizenship which starts with lived experiences, and complements the three perspectives prevalent in research: citizenship as a status, as participation or as identity (Holma & Kontinen, this volume). The definition provided

understands citizenship as constructed in practices taking place in communities involved in the public, thus, in shared activities that have the aim of taking care of shared issues, thereby realizing citizenship habits both acquired and reformulated, thus learned, in the course of taking part in these communities.

This conceptualization offers fresh perspectives for theoretical and empirical research on citizenship by extending its realm to activities that have been taken as non-political, and thus, not necessarily included in the notion (Isin & Nyers 2014), nor paid much attention to in the transformative agendas of citizen participation in development research (Hickey & Mohan 2004). The conceptualization drew on Deweyan theorization of citizenship as starting from participation in various communities which take care of shared concerns – rather than in political procedures or claim making – which implies an approach that does not make a sharp distinction between private and public activities. This view helped us to see that various practices in people’s everyday lives form a network where shared issues are jointly addressed, and enabled us to view the practices of participation as arenas of learning habits that can also be useful in other, more clearly political activities. We also highlighted the pragmatist notion of circumstances in relation to practices and habits of citizenship, as both social and political contexts define what is understood by citizenship and how it is, and can be, practiced in the first place.

These ideas were paralleled by our empirical investigations, where it became evident that, especially in rural contexts, people actively organize themselves around shared concerns, such as livelihood challenges or boosting agricultural productivity, but participate to a lesser extent in what could be regarded as political activities in the narrow sense. Further, in accordance with development research (Gaventa & Barrett 2012), we observed that organizing connected with shared issues might also have “political” consequences in terms of getting participants’ voices heard in local politics, gaining agency and self-confidence, and achieving an understanding what politics at different levels is about. Meanwhile, the Deweyan idea of democracy as social inquiry rather than voting or deliberation emphasizes that citizens’ organizing revolves around issues experienced as problematic, comprising shared experimentation in seeking new solutions. In social inquiry, everyone’s experience can contribute to solving shared problems and everyday concerns, which may also enable the expansion of future possibilities for action: for instance, women originally coming together over small-scale livelihood problems may gradually develop competencies and a reputation for competence that allows them to have their voices heard on village issues.

### **Practices and habits of citizenship in different locations**

During our research project, we relied on the methodological principles of pragmatism to explore lived experiences of citizenship. On the pragmatist

basis, and in interaction with empirical research, we developed notions of practices and habits as conceptual tools to further our investigation of lived experiences; however, while focusing on experiences and local practices, it was also important to understand the circumstances in which these practices took place. The contextualizing chapters on Uganda (Alava et al.) and Tanzania (Nguyahambi et al.) show that these two neighbouring countries have quite different historical circumstances that effect contemporary practices and habits of citizenship. While both countries share a colonial history, advancement of state-citizen relations in their post-independence trajectories have been different. African socialism and explicit nation-building in a quest to include every citizen in the project of “maendeleo” have characterized Tanzania, while Uganda has more explicitly dealt with religious, ethnic and area-based struggles, including violence on many fronts.

Therefore, we should be careful when speaking of “African citizenship”, or even of citizenship habits in a particular country, as contemporary citizenship experiences may vary according to region. For instance, the “subdued citizenship” (Alava, this volume) prevalent among the Acholi in northern Uganda, might not resonate with contemporary experiences and habits of citizenship in the southern part of the country. The diversity of citizenship also follows gendered lines. As Ndidde et al. (this volume) show, while women hold a certain “universal” legal status that equals that of men in Uganda, lived experiences and cultural practices in different localities can be quite diverse according to gender. We also learned that lived experiences of citizenship are often related to residence in one’s immediate community, while experience of membership in the state remains distant. Additionally, as Nguyahambi and Kontinen (this volume) conclude, those belonging to a religious community can make connections between the morals specific to their religion and the general civic virtues essential for a good citizen conversant with Tanzanian political history.

The chapters also showed that citizenship habits acquired in local practices have characteristics that are quite different to the ideals of liberal, universal, individual citizenship of claiming rights from duty-bearers (Robins et al. 2008). Islamic communities in rural Tanzania supported community-centred and harmony-seeking habits (Nguyahambi & Kontinen); self-help groups revolved around addressing everyday livelihood problems, which strengthened habits of contributing citizenship (Kilonzo et al.); while women in rural Uganda partly excluded themselves from their conceptualization of citizenship (Ndidde et al.). These localized practices and the citizenship habits acquired in them should be taken into account when designing interventions aiming to change citizenship habits in the direction of a desired ideal. As Nguyahambi and Chang’a show, an NGO attempt to promote citizenship that will engage with holding service providers accountable, can be countered by prevailing habits and, while some activities may change, this trend tends to lapse when the NGO is no longer present.

A quite self-evident, yet important, conclusion in regard to citizenship practices and habits is that usually an individual participates in a number of practices involving potentially different habits. For instance, in Kondoa in Tanzania, the same person can learn the habits of a contributing citizen in a self-help group, of a harmony-seeking citizen in an Islamic community and of an active, engaged citizen in a social accountability project initiated by an NGO. Overall, it seemed that some individuals are quite active in many communities, while others remain more passive when it comes to addressing shared issues; furthermore, those active on many fronts were able to take their experiences from one group to another. Individual habits are formed through these different trajectories of participation, and individuals can promote change in any particular practice by articulating innovative ideas derived from other practices, thereby contributing to social intelligence that might expand the possibilities of future action (Kauppi et al.). Moreover, practices and habits are not static, but can dynamically change, especially in a new situation where the existing habits no longer seem to work, as Kontinen and Ndidde demonstrated in the context of organizational habits in a gender advocacy NGO. Ultimately, the pragmatist notion of citizenship counters the projection of people as agentless manifestations of social habits, suggesting that, notwithstanding the stickiness of habits, they can be reformulated through reflection and experimentation with “doing it differently” if they are experienced as inadequate and ill-functioning.

### **Ideals of transformative change and practice of incremental change**

Our initial framework of *growth into citizenship* (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018) focused on learning as a change of habits originating in a disruption of older ways of thinking and acting. Interventions that involve some kind of citizenship education can be seen as aspiring to provide a disruption in order to initiate change and are often based on the ideas of transformative learning in which old habits are supposed to change at a fundamental level. As Dewey argues, habits are difficult to change (Dewey 1927, 336–337), and our examples demonstrate that implementing transformative ideals that encounter prevalent practices and habits, often results in incremental rather than transformative change. The interaction between ideals and their actualization was a consideration of the participatory research methodology of the Ugandan research team (Ahimbisibwe et al.), gender equality as a core concern of a Ugandan NGO was investigated by Kontinen and Ndidde, principles of critical education implemented by a Ugandan NGO were the concern of Bananuka and John, and a social accountability monitoring programme initiated by a Tanzanian NGO the province of Nguyahambi and Chang’a.

The application of participatory research methodology aimed to level the traditional power relations between the academic researchers and “local” research participants (Ahimbisibwe et al.). While the approach succeeded in

appreciating the unique experiences of participants and providing them with the empowering experience of analyzing their own situations, the research process involved continual struggles with presuppositions concerning “elite researchers”, and practices that, often unintentionally, strengthened these presuppositions. Indeed, Kontinen and Ndidde analyzed how an NGO seeking transformative change in gender relations had learned to deal with precisely this concern, as well as becoming used to seeing incremental rather than transformative change. Consequently, its organizational learning was not so much about clarifying objectives and measuring them with systemic monitoring and evaluation, but about continuous engagement with practices and being ready with an ongoing response to problematic situations.

At the same time, the experiences of the rural women who were beneficiaries of this particular NGO demonstrated that gender roles were not likely to transform rapidly from an imbalanced state to one of equality (Ndidde et al.). On the contrary, they were prone to change gradually, sometimes as a result of participation in new practices arranged by an NGO that have provided innovative ideas and examples of how gender relationships can be constructed. Another Ugandan NGO developed an idea of critical education as an alternative to its traditional support for livelihoods and in order to promote transformative development (Bananuka & John). However, practical initiatives based on the new pedagogical philosophy had to struggle continually with contextual forces related to the government, donors and prevailing culture. Similarly, Nguyahambi and Chang’a showed how the promotion of a social accountability monitoring (SAM) model by an NGO encountered habits in the prevailing citizen-state relationship characterized by state domination in governance. These were not fundamentally changed as a result of the intervention, which promoted active citizenship and direct participation, meanwhile demanding accountability from service providers; however, some disruptions and alternative models were provided which could, potentially, be used in other spheres in the future.

The main conclusion we can draw from these contextualized analyses is that the introduction of new ideals – for instance, by means of training and awareness raising – does not necessarily suffice to promote change. As Dewey (Dewey 1922, 88–91; Hildreth 2012) suggests, any effort to change habits is intertwined with the task of changing circumstances. Pragmatist ideas indicate that change often takes place in a long-term interaction between habits and circumstances and, therefore, changing only one side of the coin does not suffice. In relation to the habits of gendered citizenship, the example from rural Uganda (Ndidde et al.) showed that change in the legal circumstances governing gender equality might not necessarily become apparent in local practices. At the same time, the example of the gender NGO (Kontinen & Ndidde) indicated that channelling lived experiences from rural areas to decision makers, can contribute to changes in the legal circumstances. Nonetheless, attempting to insert NGO interventions based on certain ideals – such as gender equality or empowered citizens – into prevailing habits can result in

frustration with the slow pace of change and lack of transformation. This is exacerbated by the need to report quick and impressive results and outcomes to the donors who often require transformative change, ideally achieved during a program cycle.

In conclusion, based on our research, we contend that changing citizenship habits is largely a gradual process taking place over an extended period of time. Moreover, we suggest that, on the one hand, if interventions focus too much on implementing certain ideals, they might not be experienced as relevant, and, on the other, that without an input that disrupts existing habits, a need for change might not be experienced. NGO interventions, at their best, should create a joint community of inquiry, including both external experts and the people whose lives are at stake, and together formulate ends-in-view (Dewey 1922, 154–163) that address disruptions in existing habits that have been experienced, and initiate changes in existing practices to realize those ends-in-view. The pragmatist approach to social change therefore differs both from the blueprint project-implementation model where “modern” experts play a central role, and from the models of building on popular participation while dismissing outside expertise, thus emphasizing the productivity of bringing together different perspectives.

### **Contributions to development research**

Our main conceptual contribution to development research was the pragmatist framework, which, to our knowledge, has not been previously used in the field. The pragmatist approach offered new points of view, meanwhile confirming some previous results of development research. For instance, the need to take differences in contexts seriously has been continually articulated in the field of development research and practice (Davies 2004). However, both development research and practice easily fall back on using universal ideals and approaches, which start to play the role of “buzzwords” to be adopted in each context participating in the aid system (Cornwall 2007). Thus, the Deweyan critique of applying a solution proved in one context directly to another, without inquiry into the particular conditions (Kauppi et al.), is especially valid for the field. The critique makes it clear that an intervention model perceived to be successful in one context might not be appropriate for another, and that delving into the particular habits and circumstances is essential.

Additionally, Dewey’s concept of ends-in-view (Dewey 1922, 154–163) provides a useful new angle. He stressed that envisioned ends and values should also depend on the context and actual situation, and, therefore, should be negotiated in a process of shared inquiry. According to this view, people cannot espouse predefined ends that are entirely independent of the context; therefore, intervention approaches that hold to certain, fixed goals are hampered by the fact that these are not jointly negotiated from the very start. The extensive discussion of participation and participatory approaches in

development has addressed this issue (Chambers 1997; 2008), but, in practice, many projects invite people to participate within already established frameworks rather than defining the entire direction of change from the very beginning (Gaventa 2004). Instead, these negotiations over shared issues and good citizenship can take place in the course of practices connected with religious communities or self-help groups that have no direct connection to the development apparatus, and are not initiated by any external development actor.

The pragmatist concept of practice also provides a perspective onto aspirations for change and transformation typical of development research, as existing habits and the experiences on which they are based generally gain relatively little attention in such attempts. Pragmatist notions of experience, practice and habit prompt analysis to take into account continuities between the past, present and future, and the intertwining of habits and circumstances. This theoretical stance points to gradual, long-lasting change in “sticky” habits rather than indicating that nothing can change; on the contrary, it emphasizes the possibility of change in the course of joint inquiry into experienced challenges. The implication here is that people tend to organize around, seek new knowledge about, and experiment with new ways of doing things, in relation to issues that are significant and relevant for them; in rural contexts, for instance, these are often related to livelihood and income on the one hand, and to social gatherings such as weddings and funerals on the other. Therefore, for any intervention seeking to promote change, engaging with these existing forms of organizing (Lewis 2002; Kontinen & Millstein 2017) offers promising opportunities, in pragmatist terms, to form communities of inquiry, and introduce disruptions to existing habits – or, in the terminology of development, to initiate sustainable development based on ownership by local communities.

Contributing to current debates concerning the need for change in development research itself, we can provide a few conclusions on the basis of our joint inquiry. In terms of North-South partnerships, we experimented with a few practical measures. In order to counteract the usual asymmetries, we invested financial resources in joint meetings and seminars for the entire research team. We met in Finland, Tanzania and Uganda to discuss the concepts and action plan, the field methods, the initial analysis of the data and the first and second drafts of the chapters of the book. In this way, we avoided adhering to the traditional model of realizing a blueprint plan designed by Northern partners, leaving Southern researchers mostly in the role of data collectors (Carbonnier & Kontinen 2015). Eventually, the entire preparation of this volume demonstrated joint effort and involvement in real co-authorships, thereby addressing African scholars’ lack of voice and presence in international academic publications (Briggs & Weathers 2016; Melber 2019). The collaboration could not escape the institutionalized asymmetries in terms of funding sources and the requirements set by different academic environments.

**Contributions to pragmatism**

The key idea of philosophical pragmatism is to begin with practices and keep theorization in close and bidirectional contact with empirical reality; however, not many philosophers who claim to be pragmatists actually start their theorizations from empirical research into real-life practices. Consequently, our pragmatist “experiment” may serve as an example of putting these principles of pragmatism into practice. We were able, although far from perfectly and in a process that was not without problems, to bring philosophical theories into dialogue with empirical research in the two contexts of Uganda and Tanzania, and develop our concepts of practice and habit based on this dialogue.

The Deweyan philosophy on social inquiry stresses the role of context, but leaves a couple of questions, which turned out to be crucial in our research, quite untouched. The first is how to make sense of complex contextual factors in different empirical settings: that is, what kind of dimensions and levels should researchers take into account in order to have a sufficient grasp of the context? Secondly, the Deweyan theory of education and societal change (citizenship and learning), seems to presuppose institutionally democratic settings and relatively extensive public education. This is not a good fit in contexts where these presupposed conditions are not necessarily a part of social and political reality. As Rogers (2009, 2) points out, although Dewey stresses the idea of democracy as an associate mode of living that starts from communities which take care of shared concerns, he obviously presumes state-level democracy as the wider context in which the associate mode of living takes place. This necessitates sensitivity when theories are brought into dialogue with different circumstances and contexts from those in which the theories were first developed. While pragmatist ideas, such as applying the methods of democracy in communities of inquiry, are also suitable for circumstances where the state institutions might be non-democratic, restrictions on citizens’ freedom of assembly and speech undoubtedly have implications for the nature of the “shared issues” one can address in these communities, and whether they are permitted in the first place.

Engaging in dialogue with contexts which are different from the historical background of pragmatism underlines the need to articulate what is actually meant by environments and circumstances. Pragmatism argues for contextualization but, implicitly, seems to hold certain presuppositions – at least concerning political systems and levels of education – to be universal. The problem with regarding European and North American experiences and circumstances as universal in theorizing is well-known from, for instance, the postcolonial critique (Go 2016); however, for pragmatism, detailed inquiry into circumstances would not only respond to such critiques, but actually put its own theoretical principles to work. Our own investigation demonstrated the complexity of the question of circumstances, and how important it is for a researcher to familiarize herself with them, not only at the level of practice

but also when theorizing, in order to be more explicit about definitions of environments and circumstances, and their relationship to practices.

### **Back to the question of learning**

To conclude, we want to revisit our initial endeavour to study learning in relation to citizenship, and more specifically, growth into citizenship from the perspective of pragmatism (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018). Exploring growth would have required the identification of moments when habits were reformulated as a response to disruption. In the course of the project, we realized that examining this kind of learning in everyday life, without conducting an educational intervention in order to promote it, is challenging. At best, such learning could be identified retrospectively on the basis of people's narratives in individual and group interviews. As a consequence, we increasingly focused on the practices in which habits are formulated, and moved from emphasizing change – and thus learning – in citizenship towards exploring how certain citizenship habits are acquired and maintained within the space of joint practices.

The challenges we encountered are connected with some more general challenges in researching learning as a social and societal phenomenon. While it is comparatively easy to measure if an individual has learned something specific, such as literacy, examination of the learning of citizenship competencies as a result of overall life trajectory (Dahlgren 2006) is far more complicated. Moreover, an interest in kind of learning that takes place in everyday life increases the methodological challenges. There is considerable research – on transformative learning in development contexts (Skinner et al. 2016), for instance – that focuses on learning that takes place in the context of implemented educational interventions where such learning is explicitly promoted; thus, following the learning trajectories from the point of intervention structures the analysis. However, even in this kind of research, it is difficult to follow up the long-term changes that result from learning in educational interventions, and to trace how the transformative action spreads across different spheres of life.

The Deweyan approach differs from many approaches to education, ranging from the Christian to the Marxist, in which learning is supposed to lead to the total transformation either of a person (e.g. Mezirow 2000) or the power relations in a society. Such approaches, often openly utopian, provide a certain ideal for the end state of learning and, thus, can mobilize and inspire people to move towards these ideals. In contrast, Deweyan philosophy can be seen as an alternative to such utopias as it emphasizes gradual change and the continuities between the past and future. At the same time, it could be claimed that the Deweyan view of people participating in social inquiry in a democratic manner is also a utopian vision if it does not successfully take into account the circumstances that might limit joint organizing, or is not sensitive to the hegemonizing of certain “shared problems” or certain points of views over others (Holma & Kontinen 2015).

Therefore, our observation is that investigating learning not only as an individual, cognitive process, but as something that takes place in its social and societal contexts and aims at new habits of thought and action in the social and political realm, is a challenging task. However, it is a task that is much needed in order to strengthen citizenship in particular, and it is crucial in development interventions in general. It is also an important element when attempting to understand the intertwined nature of individuals, communities and circumstances and also in in-depth inquiry into the conditions in which learning is supposed to take place. There is a wealth of interesting research to be done from different theoretical perspectives in further conceptualizing learning, research that is anchored in empirical investigations in different contexts. Therefore, we do not consider the research discussed in this volume an end, but, rather, a humble beginning to the difficult and important work that continues.

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