



technology, children, schools and families

# **Young people's reaction to the feeling of self-inefficacy and the role of technology towards a new kind of citizenship.**

**Thalia Magioglou**

**Maison des Sciences de l'Homme de Paris, and CURAPP, University of Picardie**

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## **Abstract**

This review paper concerns the issue of citizenship as it applies to young people, especially those who have a sense of inefficacy in the political system. Starting from a normative point of view in political philosophy, concerning the meaning of democracy, citizenship is defined as a way in which people relate to and create communities, especially as active participants, in the formation of common rules that are open to revision (Castoriadis, 1987). Citizenship is also defined as a cultural and social dimension of the self. Many studies in the last ten years have underlined the absence of younger generations from the traditional channels of participation of representative democracy (ie Haste and Hogan, 2006). Based on field work with Greek young adults, (Magioglou, 2008) but also on evidence from other European (British, French) and North-American populations, this paper takes its starting point that there is a feeling of inefficacy in the public sphere, but that new technologies already channel in democratic or less democratic directions (Bennett, 2008). In that sense, the role of education, state, community or groups, could be to empower young people so that they may assume responsibility for their actions in the local and global community.

**Key words:** citizenship, young people, technology, autonomy, community, democracy, society, politics, philosophy

Having as a starting point the work of the political philosopher and psychoanalyst Castoriadis, (ie 1987) and the social psychologist Moscovici (ie 2008), this paper adopts a theoretical framework that does not oppose the notion of the "individual" to the notion of "society". They both see them as a continuum, characterized by a dialogic tension and interaction. More specifically, this review uses the concept of citizenship as a facet of a person's cultural and social self, based on Castoriadis's notion of the imaginary institution of society (1987), and especially his conception of "autonomy" and democracy. Citizenship, in this way, is defined as a socio-political dimension, constitutive of the self as a member and creator of a community. This French tradition can be linked to the thinking of Giddens (ie 1991) and also to the notion of "active citizenship" as it is used in the UK and EU literature (Haste and Hogan, 2006). Autonomy is a dimension of democracy in Castoriadis's sense as it concerns both individual and collective actors. In that way, an autonomous person cannot exist in a community that oppresses her/him. Being autonomous as a social actor is associated with participation in the formation of the rules that regulate our life together.

Rosanvallon (2008), a historian and political philosopher, talks about the need to reinvent democracy: elections are not enough to ensure the system's legitimacy and it is urgent to develop a democracy of "interaction". His position, close to a form of deliberative democracy, also implies the reform of the current functioning of the representative system. This theoretical framework is different from one that opposes a liberal and individualist conception of citizenship to a communitarian conception. Nevertheless, it can be associated with Haste's argument (2004) that one becomes a citizen through praxis. Haste and Hogan (2006) linked the moral to the political dimension, in relation to young people and citizenship. They argue that the distinction of private and public spheres in Western thought is not useful for addressing the motivational dimensions of political behaviour.

For the purpose of this paper the author adopts the normative and Western view that democracy, as a way to become autonomous, can only exist through constant re-invention, and a citizen can only "be" when she is empowered to participate in the creation of common rules. This is a way to say that meaning and central symbolic meanings are constructed, and only when we accept our responsibility as meaning-makers, can we exist as persons and not subjects. In this way, a human being is seen as a social animal, as communitarian arguments would suggest, but not every community or participation meets the criterion of autonomy that in Castoriadis's thought has a Marxist and psychoanalytic dimension and is not linked to liberal perspectives as Taylor (1991) implies.

The concept of the "self" is used as dialogical, as a product and producer of a changing social and cultural context, for the purpose of this paper. This position derives from the socio-psychological tradition of social representations (Moscovici, 1984), but also from recent developments in the perspective of the dialogical self. The other is thus conceptualized as a constitutive part of the self in terms of a multiplicity of voices emerging from global-local dialectics. Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) alternate the concept of "self" with that of "identity" as in the title of their article *"Self, Identity, and Globalization in Times of Uncertainty: A Dialogical Analysis"*. In this review paper this author also alternates the term "self-efficacy and citizenship" as a dimension of a social identity. In an era of increased globalisation, the number and nature of voices of the self have expanded and increasingly involve mediated forms of dialogue. From the perspective of critical psychology, Papadopoulos (2008) provides a non-essentialist definition, of "identity", inspired from the work of Vygotsky (1934). The main idea is that "identity" is never "identical" to what it used to be. The sense of self is on the move in a way, more than something stable.

Although self or identity as concepts can be highly ambiguous and imply tensions and contradictions, at the level of lay thinking, the self needs to be represented as a narrative with a certain continuity, in order to have a sense of well being, at least in

western cultures (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007). What is more, the possibility of projecting oneself to the future is essential not only for an individual sense of well-being, but is also an important dimension for a society or community (Mead, 1934; Butterworth, 1992).

Other conceptualizations of self that can be useful are those of Lahlou and Slevin. Lahlou (2008) proposes a conception of the representation of the self for lay thinking that enables us to make a link with technology and citizenship. He claims that the issue of identity is complex because it refers both to how we define ourselves from a subjective point of view and how we define ourselves to others. He distinguishes three dimensions: a physical (subject as body), a social (subject as a social position), and a biographical (subject as the product of past experiences and desires). Slevin (2000) draws from Giddens (1991) and views self as a symbolic project in late modernity. He refers to the distinctive tensions and difficulties which people have to resolve in order to preserve a coherent narrative of self-identity, what Giddens calls "dilemmas of the self" that can also be related to the "dialogical self" perspective.

This review paper is particularly interested in citizenship as the social dimension of the self and the way a sense of self-inefficacy, or a lack of recognition as an actor, can be constructive or destructive in re-establishing a sense of power for young people. This feeling has to do, on the one hand, with the dissolution of traditional ways to structure symbolic meanings after the end of the Cold War such as the left-right spectrum in Western society (Haste, 2004). On the other hand, it is linked to the intensification of globalization with the feeling of uncertainty that it brings (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007). The understanding of what is positive or constructive is related to everything that enhances life and diversity that allows a construction of the "self" which is both a creation and creator of society. This derives from the political philosophy of Castoriadis, who links the notion of individual and collective autonomy and liberation, to democracy (1987).

The notion of citizenship cannot be limited to the nation-state. Citizenship implies a community, a group where someone can be a member, a citizen, but this paper focuses more on the socio-psychological dimension of the concept, especially since globalization and technology allow different representations of the communities we create and belong to. Local, national, global, but also virtual and imaginary communities can be taken into consideration.

## **Where things stand: Do young adults have a feeling of inefficacy in the public sphere?**

If autonomy is a normative objective, this review starts from the premise that the feeling of inefficacy at the public sphere (Bandura, 1997) alienates youth from more conventional forms of participation in the representative democratic system. In that way, the social dimension of the self, "citizenship", becomes problematic. The feeling of inefficacy is based in a number of "realities" that young people face in different European countries:

1. The formal education system is still inspired by a mentality of authority and hierarchy that is not accepted not only by the more disadvantaged youth but also from those who are materially and culturally more fortunate (at least in Greece) (Fragoudaki; Dragonas, 1997). Although it provides knowledge about the functioning of the political system through a range of different classes, it does not empower young people (Condor and Gibson, 2007). Since citizenship is conceptualized as dialogical (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007) and action oriented (Haste, 2004), it is through the possibility of changing their everyday realities that young people could be empowered and this could lead to their being recognized by significant others as existing, acting citizens.

This dimension is not always present for a number of reasons. Resistance to authority

as it was conceived in the past and materialized by institutions is one of the characteristics of younger generations according to authors such as Sanford (2007). The use of computers among high school students, according to Wighting (2006), contributes to the development of a sense of community that can be linked to academic success. However it does not change the structure of an education system that could be defined as "monological" in the sense that accurate information and knowledge is "top down". On the other hand, education can lead young adults to higher and more sophisticated expectations of the political system than older generations (Bennett, 2008).

2. The material condition of young people and the less young that is characterized by mobility, the sense of the ephemeral and insecurity.

### **Youth as a social construction**

Youth, as a sociological category, seems to extend at least to 30 year-olds, according to the way researchers in the social sciences set up their categories in Europe. Although there are researches that still refer to 12 to 21 year-olds as the young people (Haste and Hogan, 2006), there are many others in different European countries that define young adults as the 18 to 30 year olds: for example, the research report of Laaksonen (2000) on young people in Finland, Sweden and Germany refers to young people as "18-29 years-old". In other cases, there is reference to the "generation of 20-40 years-old", as Generation X (Sanford, 2007).

Concerning questions of life style, the 20-40 years-old could have a lot in common: this has to do with their precarious life-style that is extended more and more not only in Europe (ie Laaksonen, 2000), but also in the United States (Heiman, 2001). A stable relationship, job and independence from parents that used to be the criteria for entering the world of adults, seem to be postponed indefinitely, since youth is not only a biological but also a cultural value and social construction (Galland, 1993; Cicchelli, 2001). In that way, an ageing European population extends youth further and further, so there is no clear limit since certain "youth" lifestyles are adopted by older populations. Jobs are less and less stable, in different levels of the social hierarchy, as is income.

Changing jobs is also related to mobility, within the same country or abroad, or between different professions. Sanford's report (2007) concerning the USA concludes that mobility is only going to increase with higher levels of education. The decline of fixed benefit pensions and increasing globalisation imply that social capital definitions that rely on more stable residency patterns put them at variance with individual realities and engines of economic growth. Even for more fortunate, well paid young adults, there is an alienating effect of the question "which is the community I belong to?" and a work affiliation that alternates with unemployment is not enough to offer an alternative to the weakening of more "traditional" social identities, national or local. Relationships can be less stable due to this fact. For the more disadvantaged, this feeling of the ephemeral, and the inability to project oneself to the future, gives a feeling of marginalization. Why vote for tax laws if one doesn't pay taxes? Bennett (2008) and Heiman (2001) imply that this position could be a sign of sophistication.

Class differences exist, of course, and so does gender, but the author's hypothesis is that there is no category excluded from this trend or from the feeling that they don't matter. Apart from income, other characteristics differentiate the social dimension of the young generation's representation of the self: there are many differences related to their culture, gender, religion, and their interaction, to give a few examples. Minorities, for example, or young Muslims could face different challenges from the majority of young people. Hopkins and Hopkins (2006), mention the lack of studies on how minorities conceptualize stigmatized identities, for example, British Muslims' conceptualization of "Islamophobia". This tension is related not only to the traditional

public space of the nation-state but also to the local and to the global or cosmopolitan space.

3. A sense of inefficacy and "empowerment" through violent communities, or a subversive way to practice democratic values.

Could the "Local" dimension be the solution to autonomy and empowerment? Sauvadet (2006), in a series of interviews and participant observation with "dangerous" youth (that for him extends at least to the age of 35) of the French *banlieus*, the suburbs, insists on the link between the material conditions that lead to a lack of a space of their own and to them being on the streets, the prolonged periods of unemployment and especially the fact that they cannot become materially independent from their parents, for which they are criticized. But most problematically they lack the facility to project themselves into the future (Wakslak et al, 2008). The community they belong to, their "gang", could represent a community where they matter, but in a destructive way since they are stigmatized by the larger society.

This sociological research is relevant to social psychological findings (eg. Klandermans, 1997; Stümer and Simon, 2004) that individuals for whom group identity is more relevant are more likely to participate in collective action than individuals for whom group identity is less relevant. However, there are different types of "collective action". Van Zomeren, Spears and Leach (2008) who study two psychological mechanisms of collective action, differentiate two ways to deal with collective disadvantage: one, problem-focused coping and two, emotion-focused coping that seems relevant for the angry youth of the "banlieus". Studies on the affective component of relative deprivation show that it is linked to collective action (Smith and Ortiz, 2002). What is more, the power of collective identification to mobilize people for collective action has been proved to derive partly from processes of identity affirmation (Simon, Trötschel, Dähne, 2008). So, the young disadvantaged and migrant youth who organize either in drug dealing enterprises, or in violence, practice collective action and certain values of a democratic community.

A study that involved participant observation with a crack gang, done in Chicago by Venkatesh (2000), a social anthropologist, comes to similar conclusions concerning the life of the community: the gang was one of approximately 100 branches or franchises, of an organisation. The college educated leader of the franchise reported to a central leadership that was called the board of directors. Three officers reported directly to the franchise leader. Beneath them were 20 foot soldiers, dreaming of becoming officers, and 200 members who paid dues to the gang for protection, or for the chance to become a foot soldier. Although certain aspects of this organisation are similar to that of a business, the way the leader took care of his people and their families is similar to that of a community where each member counts: the gang invested in "community events" which would include paying for a dead member's funeral and giving a stipend of up to three year's wages to the victim's family: "Their families are our families, we been knowing these folks our whole lives, so we grieve when they grieve".

In that sense communities can be of utmost importance, and "helping with the community" a sign of civic involvement, but the type of community could also differentiate the outcome. The particular character of a community could have different effects on their members and enhance (or not) democratic values and autonomy. The way in which the local community relates to the national or global level could also be an important variable of the configuration.

4. At the level of the nation-state, disaffection from conventional political parties whose role is traditionally to be a channel of participation and legitimate expression of contest in the public sphere, means disaffection from traditional forms of contest. It seems that dissatisfied youth do not use them to mediate their anger. The public sphere becomes the "macrocosm" where they are not important (Magioglou, 2008). Feelings of belonging to a national community such as the British, the Greeks, the

Japanese, do not always signify confidence in the state and the importance of participating in elections that do not change their everyday life. Single issue politics are the result; (for example French youth demonstrating against a law of the Right Wing government in 2006 that proposed a special "youth" job contract of limited duration, or Greek youth demonstrating against changes to the education system, or the anti-war movement).

Several studies in the last ten years have demonstrated political apathy, cynicism and the lack of political participation by young people in the political system. Their results refer to "conventional" forms of political participation that include voting and party affiliation. The MORI Omnibus survey in 1996, for example, demonstrates that age is a key determinant of involvement in formal politics. 40% of 18-25 year-olds did not vote in the 1997 election in Britain; until 1997 the average age of party members was 48 for the Labour Party and 62 for the Conservative (Fahmy, 1999). This research has drawn attention to the consequences of growing economic marginalization of youth in terms of their access to social rights of citizenship (Haste, 2004).

Political apathy is related to the impact of economic and social hardship, according to Pacheco and Plutzer (2008), using data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey, 1988-2000 for the United States. A random set of 80% of respondents was selected for follow-up interviews and 50% of those students completed the entire panel. Their results show that disadvantage in the family of origin is correlated with later markers of disadvantage and all have negative impact on turnout for voting. Bontempi and Pocaterra (2007) found that youth voter turnout in most European countries has declined significantly, despite rises in education and income, particularly in long-established democracies like the United Kingdom.

In a more recent study concerning the forms of political participation in England, such as the MORI polls for the Nestlé Family Monitor (2003), the figures for expected "conventional" political activity were similar to the international average but for "unconventional" activity including legal and illegal protest they were well below (28% for England, compared to 44%, the international average to participation in non violent protest). Haste (2004) argues that this data prove the change of the notion of citizenship and democracy for young people, together with the way they co-construct narratives that make sense of experience. This interpretation can be applied to the way other European young adults, such as the young Greeks, represent democracy (Magioglou, 2008).

However, if the notion of "political" is extended in order to include a "moral" dimension, there are results that claim that the young people are politically active. Haste and Hogan (2006) have argued that alienation, or a feeling of inefficacy, could be associated for the case of the British youth with the "conventional" forms of political participation, such as voting. On the contrary, there are other forms of civic engagement, such as helping with the community and making one's voice heard, in which the British youth engage. The findings are based on research carried out in 2005 using on-line questionnaires and interviews in schools. Participants were from 11 to 21 year's old. Only a quarter of the population was inactive in the civic domain as defined by the study. Although these findings are very optimistic, certain items were linked to a normative action and the attributes of the "good citizen" questionable: for example, a vast majority of the participants thinks that obeying the law is very important (90%) but only 48% would protest against a law they believe unjust. Obeying the law could be a way to respect common rules, or a way to respect a reified "power" one has nothing to do with. More qualitative analysis could illustrate the meanings related to that. At the same time, helping the community could be extremely important unless the young person is taking up predetermined, "monological" roles. In this case it is far from being an act of citizenship the way it is usually understood.

A study that focuses on the representation of political participation with a qualitative

approach is that of Condor and Gibson (2007). After a conversation analysis on interviews with young white adults from 18 to 24 years old, and following Billig's perspective on ideological dilemmas, (Billig, 1988), Condor and Gibson argue that everyday understanding of political participation showed dilemmatic tensions. These tensions were situated between values of active citizenship, on the one hand, and norms of liberal individualism on the other. More specifically, Marquand (1991) argues that the British liberal individualist ethos is associated with a "passive" model of citizenship: one in which the public sphere is understood to be populated by autonomous individuals who, far from having a duty to participate in public affairs, are accorded rights to protect them from interference by the community. Concerning political efficacy, the respondents expressed the view that their vote would not make any difference or it made no difference which party was in power. Although they justified political disengagement as usual or appropriate for people of their age or stage of life, these same individuals also tended to orient to a normative assumption that political engagement was a marker of maturity and civic responsibility. In conclusion, the authors questioned whether everyday understandings of responsible citizenship entail injunctions to political action.

These findings are similar to results on the meaning of democracy for young adults in Greece (Magioglou, 2008). Part of the participants, a group that was defined as using a "consensual" way of thinking, saw themselves as citizens "to be". They considered that for now, they would apply democratic values in their "microcosmos", waiting to be fully integrated socially, to be effective in the public sphere. They had a strong feeling of political inefficacy, but that didn't matter for the time being because they belonged to a group with justified optimistic aspirations of upper social mobility. Either their family was well off, or they were in a sector with job opportunities, and they focused on becoming more independent financially and socially from their family. This group was considered to be in a state of a "waiting room", postponing their life as citizens. However, for the bigger part of the sample, this situation was associated with anger and feelings of alienation.

## **Trends: the role of new technologies and self efficacy construction**

The public appeal of films of popular culture such as *'The Matrix'*, is an example of the link between a feeling of inefficacy and the fears of the digitalised world to come. Philosophers such as Zizek (2004) have analysed its importance using a Lacanian method of reading the reaction of the public: the role of *'The Matrix'* is seen as the reduction of the subject to a total passivity, of its use as an instrument. Is liberation possible? Can the digitalized world, on the contrary, provide the means to a form of liberation from the state of subjection and inefficacy, and contribute to the creation of autonomous citizens? It is interesting that the scenario of the film is so close to a case of paranoia reported in 1919 by the psychoanalyst Victor Tausk: a group of schizophrenics believed that their problems were caused by an "influencing machine" operated by alien forces. The patients saw the machine as feeding on the emotions and "souls" of human beings unconscious of their true state. Indeed for these patients, knowing about the machine that is "seeing" the real, could be fatal because ... it revealed the givens of everyday reality to be fabrications. Sanal (2008), who mentions this case, concludes that to this day, the use of machine metaphors marks persistent fears of invasion, possession and authoritarian control.

Lahlou (2008), a social psychologist, considers that there is a process of digitalization in society where three levels, the physical, the mental and the institutional guide subjects into their activity track. The physical level refers to material reality and artifacts, it provides affordances (Gibson, 1982). Representations and practices provide possible interpretations of the situation and enable subjects to elaborate and plan behaviours. At a social level, institutions set the rules to be applied to maintain

order and foster cooperation and communities of interest. He points that ten years ago Google did not exist and that now, children's sociability is made up of SMS, blogs, chats and instant messaging. Although these systems are designed tec-down, teenage sociability is one of the outcomes of these techniques. At the cognitive level, Alexandrov's findings (2008), based on experiments conducted on animals in neuroscience, concern learning processes. They show that by training our children with digital-learning techniques, using them on an everyday basis, we are modifying at the neural level, the very way we perceive the world. The brain for him is a system in which every new learning is built on existing structures and modifies the previous organization. Therefore, previously formed behaviour is modified by forming a new behaviour. Even "classic" objects take on a new meaning in this new context of practice.

Lahlou (2008) adds the notion of "face" and "persona" as dimensions of a person's notion of "identity" in the digital world. If a person's physical "identity", the body, is of limited value in the digital world, according to Lahlou, the social, psychological and subjective dimensions become the useful cues for transactions and interactions in the digital world. "Face" is more than the mere presentation of self as considered in Western psychology, following Goffman (1963). He includes in this notion the Eastern Asian sense of moral integrity, intention, position, propriety and outward behaviour.

The notion of "Persona" has also been used in the ICT literature, especially for interaction in media spaces. It is either considered as a partial individual construct, a sub-self or alias, created as an agent or proxy by the subject, or as a passive identity created by gathering activity traces of a subject (Clarke, 1994). The "Second Life" game is a virtual space where Personas are used. However, it is considered that in both cases of "face" and of "Persona", there is an active role of the person who is creating and using them in the digital world, giving a sense of power and efficacy. Negative experiences are also possible (Helsper, 2008), but that does not limit the possibilities for a new sense of efficacy.

### **Possible directions with the help of digital media towards a feeling of efficacy and empowerment in new "spaces"**

Maglioglou's data in Greece (2005; 2008) show that the reaction of young adults to the sense of inefficacy is taking two directions that could be expressed in a constructive or destructive way:

- a) the exercise of democracy in the private sphere of the "microcosm" which means one's physical self, the family, circle of friends, communities one belongs to (face to face or virtual, connecting through the internet). The microcosm can become extended through the possibilities technology can offer in the digital world, and the "personal becomes political" as Giddens has argued. In this way, the delimitation of what counts as moral and political change, together with the meaning of the political itself (Haste and Hogan, 2006).
- b) Refusal of the actual national or international political system and adoption of a mystical, spiritual and virtual conception of democracy, associated to the meaning of life, to love and beauty. Violence is not excluded as a means to an end, but no participants could find an alternative that was worth or plausible to fight for.

In both cases, Maglioglou considers that technology is used either as a means to escape from the feeling of inefficacy, even in destructive ways, or as a means to create new realities, and it is closer to the notion of citizenship as a form of autonomy. An example is the participation in alternative groups and communities that organise altermondialist manifestations.

## **The sense of inefficacy and the physical dimension of the self**

Contrary to Lahlou (2008) who underplays the role of the physical dimension of the self in the digitalized world, several studies show its importance. The body, as part of the self and a means of interaction with otherness, could be a dimension where one could feel important, using different ways to dress and express oneself (Riley, 2008); having eating disorders, using drugs or stabbing, having sex. There is a sense of immediacy and a sense of control that is a possible way out of the feeling of inefficacy. The facility of younger generations with new technologies offers another option where one could "matter" by creating or participating in already existing communities, based on new forms of subjectivity. The case of the "pro-ana" (pro-anorexia) websites is a combination of both dimensions for a creative, but destructive form of "citizenship" and empowerment that combines one's physical and virtual reality. Giles (2006) describes how people who share experiences of eating disorders create a cyberspace community where they can meet virtually in a positive and supportive environment. The community creates specific rules of inclusion-exclusion and the result is, as the author says, a "rich tapestry of identity work". Different subgroups are created and the boundaries between them are contested. This example is a way of creating a community where one "matters" but in a very self- and group-destructive way. Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) mention a big increase in cases such as eating disorders, which are associated with identity problems.

In the case of disadvantaged young people, there may be a lack of access to technology (Bennett, 2007) because of the absence of material (computers, space to work on the computer); and the family TV is not very accessible since they share it. Violence could take more or less digitalized forms. In the case of violent youth (stabbing for adolescents, drug users) there is a possibility of feeling that one "matters" and a sense of negative efficacy through the destructive use of one's or other people's bodies. Terrorist groups networking through the internet could be a digitalized way to express anger and construct a positive self identity, by relinquishing one's autonomy.

In contrast are the examples of globalized altermondialist social movements which organize through the internet and bring together many people from different geographical areas which share cultural, ideological and political characteristics. They show how virtual communities are also real and participate in the public sphere, proposing a point of view in a constructive way. The work of Della Porta (Della Porta et al, 2006) on "globalization from below", shows in a series of studies how altermondialist demonstrations were organized in Italy against the G8 in Genoa and the ESF in Florence, protesting against a certain form of globalization. The demonstrations expressed a strong demand for political participation that political parties no longer seemed able to respond to. Protest developed outside the parties and presented strong criticism of representative democracy. Although exhibiting a slow start, some concerns start to be debated by left wing parties.

What is the percentage of young adults in this movement? Taking into consideration the importance of communication through the internet, and the facility of younger populations with it, we assume that they form an important part of it. At the end of the book the authors affirm that citizens' trust and interest in conventional forms of democratic participation seem to be reduced and that "the new cycle of protest is witness to a growing demand for politics, albeit of a new, unexpected type, in particular from the new generations". Held's notion of cosmopolitan democracy could be close to this kind of civic engagement at the global level (Held, 2008).

## **New forms of efficacy in a new kind of public space: digital mobs and dialogic publicness**

Self efficacy could be strengthened through the use of control and the expression of one's opinion that the internet allows. However, if the formation of a digital public opinion becomes the "Panopticon" of Bentham, this could be another negative way to practice self-efficacy. Dennis (2008) mentions the case of the "dog-shit girl", name given to a girl by South Korean bloggers who refused to clean her dog's shit on the subway,. A passenger took a picture of the girl and posted it on a popular Korean website. Soon after, people started searching for her identity until they found her, in order to "punish" her for her behaviour. Within days, her pictures and parodies where everywhere, and were soon transferred to Western sites. The girl in question had to quit university because of the humiliation and even contemplated suicide. Dennis, using also other examples, raises the question: are we facing the constitution of "digital mobs" with a mass psychology, which find new techniques to exercise their power? This kind of "public opinion" amplified through the use of new technologies such as mobile phones with digital cameras and the internet could have destructive or constructive aspects, depending on the way they are used. The result also depends on whether the social dimension of the selves, this tec-citizenship, does or does not involve a notion of responsibility (Haste, 2004).

In a more positive framework, Slevin (2000) speaks of the dialogical mediated publicness, the possibility to create "dialogical spaces" through the internet, which was not the case with the television and the radio. Sanford (2007) found through written surveys and oral interviews with young people in Austin, from 2000 to 2003, that the respondents thought quite deeply about public life and civic involvement when given the opportunity. Her research objective was to test Putnam's assumption regarding the typical characterizations of Generation X actors (which includes for her 20 to 40 year-olds). She claims that the respondents are actively involved in a new form of civic life. In the contemporary economy, increased mobility is a fact of life. Increasing educational levels have long been associated with higher levels of social involvement but also with higher levels of mobility. A "just in time" social capital activities will become the norm.

However, the population she refers to, and the categories of "tech elites", "cyber-democrats", "wireheads" and "trailing Xers", is composed of young people who belong to social and cultural elite. They lead technology companies, work in the intersection of politics and technology, are cubicle dwelling functionaries or students. Instead of privileging the vote, they place greater value on the work ethic and on being politically informed and active. They reject formality and structure in favour of greater responsiveness. They see technology as a powerful tool and they are creators rather than joiners. They place personal choice over transcendent obligation and they embrace a more personal sort of reciprocity where one asks for help to animate a personal cycle rather than do something nice and animate an abstract social cycle. They look for low social barriers of entry and exit and they enjoy creative work, easily blurring the lines between work time, social time, personal time and community time. The author has an "individualistic" conception of this generation that is quite different to the young public who participated in the humiliation of the "dog-shit girl".

## **Conclusion and future prospects**

The question that should be raised is in what ways education could empower young people so that they become "autonomous" citizens, confident that they matter, and creators of meanings and narratives instead of meaning-consumers and subjects. The question is also how the feeling of inefficacy could be overcome in a way that respects "democratic values" and doesn't result in the physical or symbolic destruction of self and others in order to feel empowered. The more mobility becomes the norm and youth becomes extended as an in-between unstable category, the more education could become dialogical and reach young and less young populations on the move.

The young people who watched '*Matrix*', and adhered to the conception of a reality of alienation and relinquishment of one's autonomy by a digitalized world, those who were seen in the US as "slackers" (Heiman, 2001), were, with the dot.com generation, or the "digital natives" those who also massively voted for Barak Obama. In '*Matrix*', resistance starts from an awakening from the false consciousness to a "new" reality, that has a common point with the old one, it is exclusive and it is the "truth", a way to see things that extinguish ambiguity. However, uncertainty seems to increase as people become more mobile and communities can both threaten and sustain autonomy. A youth gang of drug dealers can be an example: young people learn their respect for a sense of hierarchy, courage, solidarity, even a notion of business and deliberation. The community enhances their self-esteem and also makes them feel empowered, that they matter. Fundamentalist communities could also function as a haven where certain values of participation can be learned and practiced. The pro-ana virtual communities are another example of a creative form of identity construction that combines a physical with a symbolic dimension. In the past, fascist and Nazi regimes took pains to integrate the youth into some forms of organisation and participation was often obligatory.

However, there is a problem with this kind of communities. They do not work towards a form of autonomy or some kind of "liberation" both of the self and of the group or society one belongs to. That is why it is alarming that the category "obey the law" is deemed important for a good citizen for 90% of the British youth. If the law is something that is imposed from outside, a kind of reified power, this is the way a subject of an authoritarian rule would also answer.

The results of the USA elections in November 2008, show a different direction and could be considered a "surprise", or what Haste (2008) has characterized as a "knight's move", with the proof of massive mobilisation of the younger generations for Barak Obama. The internet seems to have played an important role for this mobilisation. Is this a proof of the "return" of the American youth to the traditional ways of political participation? Is it something exceptional or will it create a phenomenon that will also influence young people in other parts of the world? It is already significant that young people outside of the US have manifested their support, so it could be an event that will change the way younger generations have related to politics in the last two decades.

Bennett (2008) finishes his chapter on changing citizenship in the digital age with a question: "are politicians, parents, educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers willing to allow young citizens to more fully explore, experience, and expand democracy, or will they continue to force them to just read all about it?" The question for this review is: are we supposing that we have a perfect political system and our only preoccupation as societies is how to replicate it and indoctrinate young generations? But even if the answer is yes, maybe democracy is about re-invention, creation and re-creation of the self and our communities in a way that we take responsibility for our meaning and policy making in our every day lives. Digital media offer new possibilities by being "dialogical" and groups with less power that can use them such as young people could enlarge their political "power".

Education, which used to be related to school and university, could become also more dialogical and flexible. Formal education could turn to a "laboratory of a polis" instead of restricting civic education to the transmission of knowledge for a world that seems to be out of reach, or that does not concern young people's everyday life (Coleman, 2006). Concerning the future, the way the different actors will interact, the role of specific events and their symbolic power, could show if we take the direction of greater autonomy for self and society. However, the risk of higher degrees of flexibility could be overwhelming for persons or groups who seek ready-made ideological and heteronomous ways to relate to one another.

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