# SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT? HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CONCEPTUALIZE CONVENTIONAL AND VIRTUAL CITIZENSHIP IN RELATION TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

## Podobne czy różne? Jak młodzi ludzie konceptualizują konwencjonalne i wirtualne obywatelstwo w relacji do edukacji obywatelskiej

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## Abstract

The development of new technology blurs the line between reality and the virtual world. The extent to which this process influences citizenship should be investigated. The aim of this study was to explore the way in which young people, who have recently acquired formal civil rights, conceptualize the phenomena of *citizenship* and *virtual citizenship* in the context of *citizenship education*. An online study was conducted among 145 Polish university students aged 18–23 (71% females). The Associative Group Analysis (AGA) approach that supports qualitative and quantitative analyses was used to collect associative constructs and conceptualize the studied phenomena. The results indicate that citizenship is perceived in the collective-state dimension with strong nationalist and patriotic undertones. Virtual citizenship is an individual-interpersonal concept that is associated with membership in the global community.

**Key words:** youth, Internet, citizenship, citizenship education, virtual citizenship.

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**Streszczenie**

Rozwój nowych technologii zaciera granicę między rzeczywistością a światem wirtualnym. Należy zbadać, w jakim stopniu proces ten wpływa na obywatelstwo. Celem badania było sprawdzenie, w jaki sposób młodzi ludzie, którzy niedawno uzyskali formalne prawa obywatelskie, konceptualizują zjawiska *obywatelstwa* i *wirtualnego obywatelstwa* w kontekście *edukacji obywatelskiej*. Przeprowadzono badanie internetowe wśród 145 studentów polskich uczelni wyższych w wieku 18–23 lat (71% kobiet). Podejście Associative Group Analysis (AGA), które wspiera analizy jakościowe i ilościowe, zostało wykorzystane do zebrania konstruktów asocjacyjnych i konceptualizacji badanych zjawisk. Wyniki wskazują, że obywatelstwo jest postrzegane w wymiarze kolektywno-państwowym z silnym podtekstem nacjonalistycznym i patriotycznym. Obywatelstwo wirtualne jest pojęciem indywidualno-interpersonalnym, które wiąże się z przynależnością do społeczności globalnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, Internet, obywatelstwo, edukacja obywatelska, wirtualne obywatelstwo.

## Introduction

In the conventional sense, citizenship is a concept that applies to adults who enjoy full voting rights and can become actively involved in politics. However, an individual does not become a citizen as of the moment he/she formally acquires civil rights, and the evolution of citizenship begins much earlier. Research has demonstrated that formative experiences relating to social engagement enhance citizenship activity in adulthood (Sherrod et al., 2010).

Citizenship education is a subject that has been taught for many years in various countries and political systems. The question that arises in connection with the relevant curricula is not only how to educate future citizens, but it also deals with the true meaning of a "good citizen". The answer is ambiguous because citizenship is a contextual category that is embedded in a given place and time.

The statement that modern technology changes generations is a platitude. The threats associated with the Internet have been broadly explored in psychological, educational and sociological research. The main barrier separating the creators (adults) and recipients of educational policies (students) is that the former are immigrants and the latter are natives in the digital world. Digital immigrants

> [...] were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology. (Prensky, 2001, pp. 1–2)

Digital natives, who were born at the turn of and in the first years of the 21st century are a part of the online world where information is literally at their fingertips by clicking or using their thumbs. They differ from previous generations in their preferences for learning, community engagement or career plans (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Therefore, in order to meet young people's needs and expectations regarding citizenship education, attempts should be made to explore their beliefs about the relationship between the state and an individual in the context of technological advancement.

Young people and citizenship

Citizenship is a category that spans the distance between an individual and the community. Contemporary citizens are confronted with numerous challenges, such as violence, racism, terrorism, poverty, unemployment and environmental pollution, which affect adults and youths equally. These problems are not effectively resolved by political regulations, and they require individual action (Kerr, 1999). This approach to citizenship lies at the heart of citizenship education. Civic procedures can be established by political decrees, but engagement needs to be developed and strengthened.

Judith Torney-Purta (2001) conducted one of the first cross-national studies into civic engagement among adolescents in 28 countries. She identified several types of activities which have been analysed and incorporated into citizenship models by other researchers and policy makers (Kennedy, 2007; Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & Zalewska, 2017). The forms of citizenship that are most frequently included in contemporary models are presented in Table 1. They include the conventional definition of citizenship, namely the formal relationship between an individual and the state (passive citizenship) which contributes to a sense of national identity and political activity. A contemporary definition of citizenship is also included, namely the relationship between an individual and daily life (semi-active citizenship) which involves loyalty and civic virtues, as well as active citizenship that includes participation in social activities, monitoring government activities, and personal freedoms. These concepts are commonly used to analyse the civic activities of young people in contemporary research. They also constitute a theoretical basis and a conceptual framework in the present article.

According to categories presented in Table 1, based on research done in 16 European countries (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz et al., 2018), youths are characterized by high levels of passive and semi-active citizenship. They declare respect for symbols and sense of attachment to their countries. They have intention to vote and respect the law. Although they assert some eagerness to work for community but they are reluctant to become actively involved in politics. In general, Polish youths present the same pattern of citizenship activity, though they eagerly participate in charity work, are strongly motivated to take matters into their own hands and become independent (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & Zalewska, 2018). The extent to which new technologies can influence Polish adolescents' civic participation in the future should be examined in this context.

**Table 1**
*Forms of passive and active citizenship*

| **PASSIVE CITIZENSHIP**<br>formal ties between an individual and a state/nation | |
|---|---|
| **National identity**<br>A citizen is familiar with values, the nation's history, respects national symbols and has a sense of belonging to the nation. | *All nation states attempt to promote this type of national identity.* |
| **Patriotism**<br>A citizen has a sense of pride in the nation, and build the nation's importance. | *Patriotism extends beyond national identity-building by instilling a sense of pride in the nation.* |
| **SEMI-ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**<br>attitudes and occasional civic activity | |
| **Loyalty and civic virtues**<br>A citizen is obedient, works hard and puts the needs of the state before personal needs. | *These attributes are often internalized values that nation states seek to promote.* |
| **ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**<br>undertaking activities that express the relationship between an individual and daily life | |
| **Conventional political activities**<br>A citizen votes, joins a political party. | *This is a traditional view of political engagement that highlights the importance of existing institutions.* |
| **Social engagement**<br>A citizen works with community care agencies, raises funds for a social cause. | *In this sense, citizenship is a daily life activity that serves the public good.* |
| **Action for change – legal and illegal**<br>A citizen, solicits support for political action, and initiates protests. | *This is often called 'the conflict' model of citizenship.* |
| **Personal engagement in self-regulating activities**<br>A citizen becomes financially self-sufficient, a self-directed learner, creative problem solver. | *This is often referred to as the neo-liberal or economic model of citizenship.* |

Source: own classification based on Kennedy, 2018, p. 9

For example, Wike and Castillo (2018) observed that young people (18–29) were less likely to vote than older adults, but they were more eager to express their political and social views online and become actively involved in the protection of freedom of speech. These observations could suggest that young people are not necessarily less active, but that their civic participation takes on less traditional form.

The impact of new technologies on young people's citizenship activity

The influence of technology on civic activity was described by the *digital citizen theory* at the beginning of the 21st century. This theory postulates that the Internet is not only a tool that promotes social development and change, but it also creates the space where this change occurs (Mossberger et al., 2008). In the literature, the influence of new media on civic activities in the real and virtual world is described by two general trends (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Gibson & Cantjioch, 2011). The first one posits that online and offline civic activities are similar and differ only in the relevant tools (voting in person vs. online voting; protests that are staged in real life or online). The second trend postulates that online activities are multidimensional and include different types of actions and behaviors. Research conducted on adults appears to validate the first trend (Gibson & Cantjioch, 2011), whereas the second trend was emphasized in studies involving young people. According to researchers, young people learn to participate in social life by using modern technology for daily activities, such as work, building interpersonal relations, and daily communication (Mossberger et al., 2008). Young people have become disenchanted with liberal democracy, they avoid politics in real life (membership in political parties has declined among people aged 18–25), they become politically socialized in a new environment and develop alternative approaches to political engagement (Loader, 2007).

Citizenship education and new technology

Does citizenship education in Poland follow global technology trends? From the formal point of view, citizenship education is a school subject that is taught from the age of 11 (primary school) until the end of secondary education. Citizenship curricula are also integrated with other subjects (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). The relevant curricula emphasize patriotic values, tradition and national history. Polish schools are less successful in promoting active participation in social and political life outside the academic realm (Kennedy, 2009). As a result, Polish students often have a deeper knowledge of civic duties and political systems, but they are less prepared to participate in political life than their peers in other countries (Koseła, 2004). In Polish schools, modern technology is applied to a similar extent in citizenship education and in other subjects. Most new projects in education focus on development of digital skills (Plebańska, 2017). General efforts focus on overcoming "hard" barriers such as the scarcity of modern equipment and the promotion of digital skills among both teachers and students.

The aim of this study was to determine the way in which young people, who have recently acquired civil rights, conceptualize citizenship in the context of modern technology and education. The links between these concepts and the resulting opportunities for citizenship formation were analysed. The study was conducted on young Poles, but

the results could inspire teachers and researchers in other countries to foster a better understanding of crucial phenomena in citizenship education.

## Research objectives and questions

To achieve the stated research aim, the attempt was made to answer two fundamental questions:

(1) What semantic categories are associated with the concepts of *citizenship, virtual citizenship* and *citizenship education*?

(2) To what extent are the semantic categories of *citizenship* and *virtual citizenship* linked with *citizenship education*?

The term *virtual* rather than *digital* citizenship was used to better reflect the specific character of the study. Digital citizenship is more related to the tools for using the Internet, whereas virtual citizenship has a broader meaning and accounts for the specific mindset and activities in virtual space.

The current study involves exploratory research that does not require the formulation of research hypotheses. However, based on an analysis of the literature, it can be assumed that young people have a different understanding of citizenship and virtual citizenship. An analysis of Polish school curricula suggests that the concept of citizenship is more closely associated with citizenship education than virtual citizenship.

## Material and methods

### Methods

The undertaken research problem and the formulated research questions require a methodology that combines qualitative analysis with quantitative comparisons. These requirements are met by associative group analysis (AGA), an inferential approach developed in the 1960s by the American sociologist Lorand Szalay (Szalay & Bernt, 1967; Szalay & Bryson, 1974). According to Szalay, subjective perceptions of different phenomena reflect personal beliefs and are directly related to an individual's readiness to undertake action in a given area. The AGA method uses word associations to identify high-priority domains in a culture and assess their cognitive organization as defined by the cultural meaning of words and their interrelationships. The resulting data provides information about thought patterns and is used to empirically assess key concepts and beliefs in a culture. The order in which subjective perceptions of different phenomena appear is equally important in the AGA approach. The first associations are most permanent, and they constitute an associative axis for the studied phenomena. The AGA approach is applied at the qualitative (content of associations) and quantitative (quantification of associations) level. At the qualitative level, competent judges work independently to cluster various associations into categories based on subjective meanings.

These categories can be further combined into larger dimensions to identify the associations that saturate a given concept with meaning. The saturation of closely linked concepts or groups of respondents is compared in a quantitative analysis. Depending on the order in which it was generated, every association is assigned points or weights. The first association scores 6 points, the second association scores 5 points, and so on. Szalay defined the weights for each association in a study investigating the validity and reliability of the method (Szalay & Brent, 1967; Szalay & Bryson, 1974). AGA characteristics make it well suited for research on cultural change and, in particular, on changing the conceptual range of key beliefs that underlie dispositions to act. The method has been used with adults but also with adolescents (Kelly, 1985), examining, among other things, the effect of changes in the educational process on changing the scope of key concepts (e.g., justice).

## Participants and procedure

The study was conducted online, via a secure data collection platform, in the spring of 2020 (during the lockdown and restrictions related to COVID-19 pandemic) on Polish university students aged 18–23 (71.3% female) who participated in or recently completed their citizenship education. Initially, 184 students participated, but only 145 correctly performed the research task and were included in the analysis. The participants were recruited by snowball sampling. They were provided with a link to a website containing instructions and information on the protection of the subjects' anonymity. The students were then exposed to three concepts in random order, and they were asked to write down the words and phrases that come to mind in relation to the terms *citizenship, virtual citizenship* and *citizenship education* in one minute. The students entered their associations in a window that closed after one minute. To avoid the mutual influence of words on each other, the participants solved simple mathematical problems for 1 minute between the tasks. The surveyed subjects were allowed to take a one-minute break in between the tasks. The entire session lasted around 8 minutes.

## Results

The results were analysed in two stages. In the first stage, the average number of associations generated for each phenomenon (citizenship, virtual citizenship, citizenship education) were compared in the dependent samples *t*-test (variables were normally distributed). Differences were observed in the average number of associations relating to the following pairs: citizenship vs. virtual citizenship ($M_C = 5.60, M_{VC} = 4.45, t = 3.74, p = .001$), and virtual citizenship vs. citizenship education ($M_{VC} = 4.45, M_{CE} = 5.09, t = -3.29, p = .001$). The latter pair did not differ significantly in the average number of associations ($t = -1.63, p = .104$), which indicates that virtual citizenship is a narrower and a less recognized concept than the remaining concepts.

In the second stage, the semantic content of the examined phenomena was analysed according to the method proposed by Szalay. The analysis produced 43 categories which were combined into dimensions based on similar associations (refer to Table 2). The frequency of each association was computed for each concept, and weights were assigned based on the number of points scored on Szalay's scale. The weights of all associations in every category were summed up, and the percentage weight contribution of each category was determined for the analysed concept.

Which semantic categories are linked with the concepts of citizenship, virtual citizenship and citizenship education?

The saturation of the three studied phenomena with various association categories is presented in Figure 1. For the sake of clarity, only 6 of the 43 categories for each phenomenon were presented graphically. However, it should be noted that these 6 categories defined citizenship, virtual citizenship and citizenship education in around 50% or more. The analysed dimensions, categories, and selected associations with percentage weight contributions are presented in Table 2.

**Figure 1**
*The saturation of the three analysed phenomena by association categories*
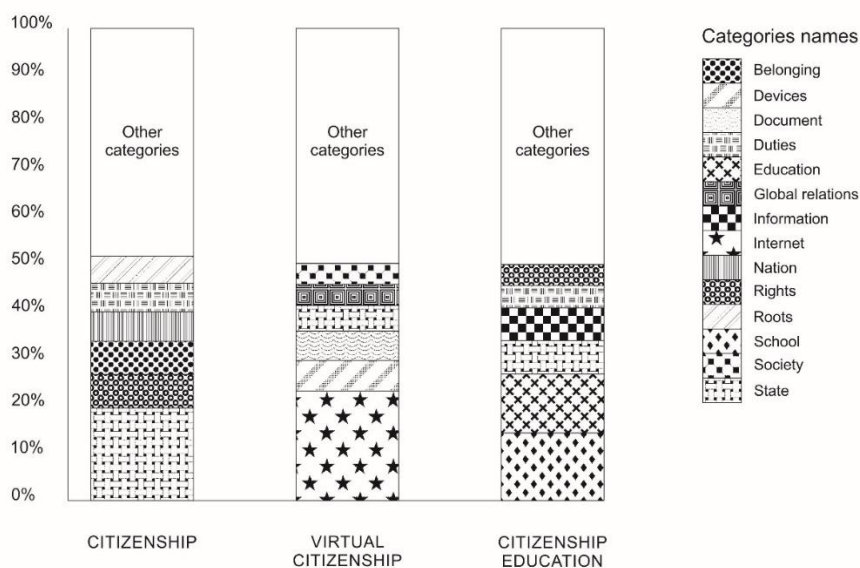
**Table 2**

*Dimensions, categories, selected associations, percentage weight for citizenship, virtual citizenship and citizenship education concepts.*

| Association category | Selected associations | Weight in % | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Citizenship | Virtual citizenship | Citizenship education |
| CIVIC ACTIVITY DIMENSION | | 10.8 | 5.8 | 10.4 |
| Active participation | active participation, activity, monitoring the authorities | 1.5 | 2.3 | 2.8 |
| Support | help, charity, assistance | 1 | 0.8 | 0.6 |
| Elections | voting, election laws, participation in elections | 2.3 | 2.2 | 2.2 |
| Duties | regulations, civic duties, knowledge of civic duties | 6 | 0.5 | 4.8 |
| VALUES DIMENSION | | 4.6 | 2 | 5 |
| Virtues | wisdom, dedication, fidelity, integrity | 2.3 | 0.7 | 2.9 |
| Values | dignity, honour, respect, equality | 2.3 | 1.3 | 2.1 |
| PERSONAL DIMENSION | | 7.3 | 5.9 | 7.7 |
| Individual | individuals in the real world / virtual world | 3 | 2.7 | 1.9 |
| Citizen | being a citizen, virtual citizen | 4.3 | 3.2 | 3.5 |
| School environment | teacher, student | 0 | 0 | 2.3 |
| NON-SPECIFIC GROUP DIMENSION | | 2.3 | 5.5 | 0.8 |
| Non-specific group | group of people, global community | 1.5 | 1 | 0.5 |
| Global relations | world citizen, globalization | 0.8 | 4.5 | 0.3 |
| SOCIAL DIMENSION | | 20.7 | 7 | 7.7 |
| Society | member of society, groups in social media, neighbour | 3.9 | 4.4 | 3.3 |
| Community | brotherhood, sense of unity, sense of community, togetherness | 2.1 | 0.6 | 1.3 |
| Belonging | membership, identification, loving | 7 | 0.8 | 0.2 |
| Roots | place of origin, family, tradition | 5.8 | 0.4 | 2.7 |
| Place | home, town, location, street | 1.9 | 0.4 | 0.2 |
| CONTACT/ MEETING DIMENSION | | 0 | 4.7 | 0 |
| Meeting platform | chat, Facebook, platform, discussion | 0 | 4.2 | 0 |
| Contact | online communication, contact | 0 | 0.5 | 0 |

| Association category | Selected associations | Weight in % | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Citizenship | Virtual citizenship | Citizenship education |
| STATE-NATIONAL IDENTITY DIMENSION | | 31.1 | 7.7 | 14.7 |
| State | country of origin, state, Poland, capital | 19.6 | 5.4 | 7.1 |
| Nation | Nation, Pole, fellow citizen, language | 6.1 | 0.9 | 1.2 |
| Patriotism | patriotism, patriotic symbols | 3 | 0.5 | 3.8 |
| National identity | identifying with the nation | 1.5 | 0.9 | 0.4 |
| Symbols | flag, emblem, anthem | 0.9 | 0 | 2.2 |
| POLITICAL SYSTEMS DIMENSION | | 2.5 | 1.6 | 5.4 |
| Democracy | democracy, constitution, republic | 1.5 | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| Politics | politics, president, government | 2 | 0.9 | 4.3 |
| STATE REGULATIONS DIMENSION | | 14.7 | 10.7 | 7.2 |
| Rules | legal provisions, norms, regulations | 0.9 | 0.2 | 1.8 |
| Rights | individual rights, civil rights | 7.1 | 1.5 | 4.4 |
| Order | security, protection, order | 1.1 | 0.1 | 0.5 |
| Office | administration, bureaucracy, e-administration | 0.4 | 2.7 | 0.5 |
| Documents | document, e-passport, e-identity card | 5.2 | 6.2 | 0 |
| INFORMATION SOCIETY DIMENSION | | 0 | 32.9 | 0.9 |
| Internet | Internet, electronics, online, network, WWW | 0 | 23.2 | 0.9 |
| Anonymity | anonymity, incognito | 0 | 0.8 | 0 |
| Virtual reality | virtual reality, virtual society | 0 | 2.4 | 0 |
| Devices | e-book, camera, mobile phone, computer | 0 | 6.5 | 0 |
| EDUCATION DIMENSION | | 0.9 | 2 | 33.7 |
| Information | opinion, news, knowledge | 0.8 | 2 | 6.9 |
| Education | education, teaching, upbringing | 0.1 | 0 | 12.5 |
| School | building, lesson, studying, curriculum, subject | 0 | 0 | 14.3 |
| PROGRESS DIMENSION | | 0 | 5.5 | 0.5 |
| Facilitation | light, fast, easy, convenient, access | 0 | 2 | 0.2 |
| Progress | 21$^{st}$ century, innovation, modernity, advancement | 0 | 3.5 | 0.3 |
| UNDESIRABLE PHENOMENA DIMENSION | | 1.2 | 3.6 | 1.9 |
| Negative phenomena | cyber violence, deviancy, hate, surveillance | 0.7 | 3.2 | 1.6 |
| Restrictions | limits, constraints, seclusion | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.3 |
| OTHER DIMENSION | | 2.9 | 5.5 | 4.1 |
| Abstraction | short-lived, superficial, forgery | 0.1 | 2.1 | 0 |
| Others | game, cheese, don't know | 2.8 | 3.4 | 4.1 |

*Citizenship* (Table 2) was most highly associated with STATE-NATIONAL IDENTITY and SOCIAL dimensions, where the relevant categories represented more than 50% of the total weights. The first dimension was dominated by the *State* category, followed by *Nation*. The SOCIAL dimension of citizenship was represented mainly by *Identity* (a sense of belonging, pride in citizenship) as well as tradition and common *Roots*. Citizenship was also linked with the more formal dimension of STATE REGU-LATIONS, including *Rights* and *Documents*. CIVIC ACTIVITY was an important dimension that was represented mainly by *Duties*, *Elections* and, to a smaller extent, *Active participation* and *Support*. VALUES, including civic *Virtues*, also played a role. Citizenship was not associated with CONTACT/MEETING, INFORMATION SOCI-ETY or PROGRESS dimensions.

*Virtual citizenship* was represented mainly by the categories in the INFOR-MATION SOCIETY dimension (Table 2). The semantic content of virtual citizenship was determined by associations with the *Internet*, digital opportunities as well as *Hardware* in nearly one-third. STATE REGULATIONS was the second dominant dimension, with *Documents* (including eID cards) as the leading category. Associations with *Rules* and *Order* were not noted in this dimension. The data in Table 2 indicate that several dimensions, including STATE-NATIONAL IDENTITY and SOCIAL, saturated the concept of virtual citizenship to a similar degree. Similarly to the results for citizenship, the *State* category accounted for the highest percentage of weights in this dimension, but the percentage of weights for *Virtual citizenship* was four times lower in this category. Virtual citizenship was not associated with *Symbols* which have strong nationalist connotations. The SOCIAL dimension was represented mainly by the *Society* category and, to a smaller extent, by *Belonging* and *Community*, whereas *Roots* and *Place* were minimally represented. Virtual citizenship was the only phenomenon that was saturated with the categories in the CONTACT/MEETING dimension, mainly online communication. Virtual citizenship was associated with PROGRESS which denotes modernity and innovation. It was less often identified with *Virtues* and *Values*, and more frequently linked with *Negative phenomena* such as cyber violence, surveillance and dependence.

*Citizenship education* was described mainly by the EDUCATION dimension (Table 2). *School* was the dominant category, which indicates that young people associate citizenship education with school subjects, lessons and curricula. Citizenship education was also linked with *Education* and *Information* which denote learning, development, upbringing, acquisition of knowledge, and evolution of consciousness. Similarly to the remaining two phenomena, citizenship education was associated with the STATE-NA-TIONAL IDENTITY dimension and the *State* category. However, the *Nation* category was less often identified with citizenship education than with citizenship. *Community* and *Roots* played the key role in the SOCIAL dimension. Citizenship education was

also associated with the CIVIC ACTIVITY dimension, and the relevant categories included *Duties*, occasional voting in the *Elections*, as well as *Social participation* in civic projects aiming to monitor government activities. The discussed phenomenon was also characterized by the highest percentage of weights in the *Politics* category (POLITICAL SYSTEMS dimension). The PERSONAL dimension, with the highest percentage of weights in the *Citizen* category, also made a significant contribution to citizenship education. The VALUES dimension, including civic *Virtues*, played an important role as well. Citizenship education was only marginally associated with INFORMATION SOCIETY, NON-SPECIFIC GROUP (represented by *Non-specific group* and *Global relations* categories) or CONTACT/MEETING dimensions.

## To what extent are the semantic categories of citizenship and virtual citizenship linked with citizenship education?

Citizenship and virtual citizenship are different phenomena, but both are associated with statehood in the sense of belonging. Citizenship is more closely linked with statehood, and it has stronger nationalist and patriotic undertones. Similar associations between citizenship and nationality were reported in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (Bauböck et al., 2007, in: Ross & Davies, 2018). In turn, virtual citizenship is identified with membership in the World Wide Web and the use of modern technology, activities that require digital competence and digital literacy. Both, citizenship and virtual citizenship exist in the social dimension. The former is characterized by a sense of belonging and identity, and it emphasizes the significance of community, roots and traditions. The latter is connected with global relations, meeting others and being a citizen of the world, and it is less associated with a sense of belonging to a specific social group. In this sense, virtual citizenship is more similar to the global citizenship concept which is not contained within state borders and is oriented towards global affairs, but is still linked with one's place of residence (see Davies et al., 2018). Citizenship is linked with a specific place (home, town, location), whereas virtual citizenship is detached from a physical location. Both concepts are equally saturated with the notion of active participation, but citizenship is more permeated by a sense of duty. The two concepts are also related to state regulations, in particular legal documents, but civil rights play a more important role in citizenship.

Citizenship education relates to the state dimension. Similarly to citizenship, it is saturated with patriotism. In the social sense, citizenship education emphasizes the significance of community, roots and traditions, but it is not bound to national identity or place. Citizenship education is more strongly associated with civic activity, including participation in civic projects, monitoring the authorities and politics, than the remaining phenomena. Similarly to citizenship, it is linked with duty in the sense of state regulations and civil rights, which is consistent with the concept of citizenship that is propagated during obligatory citizen education curricula in Polish schools.

## Discussion

Virtual citizenship is a relatively new phenomenon that came into existence with the emergence of the online world and social media. Understanding its conceptual scope and cognitive organization, especially in relation to relatively well-established concepts such as citizenship and civic education, will allow us to understand the direction of cultural change and willingness to engage in the public sphere. Farthing (2010) discussed two ways in which young people are perceived as political actors. They can be described as inactive or, alternatively, they become politically engaged, but in a way that differs from the conventional notion of civic engagement, such as voting in elections. At present, young people are more likely to manifest their social and political views online than in polling stations. The civic awareness of younger generations has evolved mainly in virtual space, but citizenship education curricula are designed and implemented by the "analog" generation, and they often struggle to keep pace with young people's views on the world. For this reason, the ways in which citizenship, virtual citizenship and citizenship education are conceptualized by young people has to be understood, and the differences in youngsters' perceptions of these phenomena have to be identified.

The cognitive organization of the studied domains related to different categories of citizenship shows that the young Poles perceive citizenship in the collective-state dimension with elements of patriotism, national tradition and common roots. Therefore, citizenship is saturated with the dimension of passive citizenship which is defined as a relationship of dependence between an individual and the state. The above suggests that young Poles are more inclined to celebrate their national identity and perform their civic duties, rather than actively participate in politics. These assumptions have been confirmed by numerous studies which demonstrated high levels of patriotism and national identity, but low willingness to become involved in political and social activity (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & Zalewska, 2018). These observations are consistent with conservative citizenship programs whose main goal is to propagate knowledge about the functions of the state and civic duties. Educational curricula focusing on social engagement in daily life and global citizenship are being slowly developed, but they are still far from the mainstream (Leek, 2016).

In turn, virtual citizenship is a concept that exists in the individual and interpersonal dimension. It is associated with membership in the global community, meeting new people, using new technology, and deriving benefits from modern tools, including in formal matters. Therefore, it has the traits of social citizenship, but it is not oriented at supporting the community, but on participating in the community through contact and interaction. Virtual citizenship appears to separate citizenship from the underlying values, namely relations with the state, nation, community and a sense of belonging. It harbours a cosmopolitan component which "ignores special ties and attachments to one's community" (Parekh, 2003, p.12). Virtual citizens are citizens of the world who

establish global contacts and are effective in their relations with the state. In this sense, virtual citizenship seems to be more related to global citizenship because it relies on community membership, but the term "globally oriented citizenship" could be more appropriate in this context (Parekh, 2003). Globally oriented citizenship emphasizes the importance of internationalism, and unlike nationalism and cosmopolitanism, it preserves the significance of political community, while fostering a broader outlook on the affairs of other communities.

The results of this study provoke further questions. The first question concerns young people's perceptions of nationality, patriotism and statehood in the context of citizenship. Can national states survive in the minds of future generations and influence their civic activities? Or, conversely, will national states be reduced to formal constructs that guarantee civil rights and oblige young people to perform their civic duties, mostly voting? To what extent young people's conceptualization of citizenship will lay the ground for their civic engagement? Polish historian and political scientist Janusz Ekes (1994) proposed various models to describe an individual's relationship with the state:

> A state does not rule a society, the same way a home does not control the lives of its inhabitants. Similarly to a state, a home has a distinctive form that keeps the inhabitants safe from extreme weather events. A home has a spatial structure that enables its dwellers to flourish or hampers their daily activities. The same applies to a state. Therefore, a home and a state create the basic conditions for human existence and give it a unique character. A state can be a social prison or a more or less comfortable hotel. But it can also function as a home which instills a sense of confidence and provides its inhabitants with the freedom to move and express their opinions. Household members are constrained only by their instinctive respect for the walls, but only if they are convinced that the walls guarantee a decent life and create ample opportunities for development. (p. 15)

Similar doubts concerning global citizenship, based on the findings of other authors, were voiced by Pathak-Shelat (2018, p. 545) who observed that "global citizens are like rootless nomads with no local ties, interest, or influence and hence are not really effective as citizens". Also Parekh (2003) questions the notion of global citizenship in favor of a globally oriented citizen, while Wood (2008), for example, points out why global citizenship is an impossibility:

> There are two reasons: first (as others have argued), because citizenship functions as part of a formal political structure that is absent at the global level; second, because I remain skeptical about citizenship as an unambiguously emancipatory, empowering institution. (p. 25)

The change brought by modern technologies affects the cognitive structure of culturally relevant concepts, thus creating new dispositions for activity. This provokes questions about the possibility of civic education activities and its form. Should citizenship education promote the conceptualization of citizenship as a phenomenon that is

only formally linked with the state and fosters the establishment of global and cosmo-politan relationships that reinforce the notion of global citizenship? Or should educational efforts reinforce citizenship in its traditional sense by promoting strong relations with the state, a sense of national identity, community, common roots and patriotism to prevent the loss of distinctive national traits in the global village? These concerns are particularly related to the new, digital form of education. There are no simple answers to these questions, and further analyses and observations are needed to describe online behaviours and their impact on offline activities.

The effects of the potential changes in regulations related to citizenship education will be manifested in the future, but one thing is certain – technology is and will be present in the lives of citizens who remain citizens not only offline, but also online.

## Limitations

The present study has certain limitations. The survey took place online, whereas the original AGA approach involves pen-and-paper observations. The survey had to be conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic – spring 2020 (during the first lockdown, restrictions and the time of distance education) which prevented the researchers from contacting the respondents in person. The local reach of the study was yet another limitation. The survey involved only Polish university students, mostly women. Future research should be conducted on a sample with equal proportions of male and female participants, and the surveyed population should have a more diverse social profile (not only university students).

## Conclusions

The way young people conceptualize citizenship in the context of new technologies may change their dispositions towards citizenship activity and social participation. The observed differences in the categories that describe citizenship and virtual citizenship can help to improve civic education. Citizenship education curricula should be modified to keep pace with technological advancement by recognizing that modern technology and social media can foster citizenship activity and identity building in local, national and global communities (Pathak-Shelat, 2018). Citizenship education programs can rely on games and virtual reality to enhance the attractiveness of the learning process relative to other online activities, but also to expand the students' experience during conventional classes. Use of technology in education, including citizenship education (Muñoz & El-Hani, 2012) and global citizenship education (Marino & Hayes, 2012; Shapiro, 2018) is seen as an opportunity in that process. Further research is also needed to explain the dual conceptualization of citizenship and virtual citizenship. This is a critical concern because the said duality can both encourage and discourage young people from

becoming active citizens online or offline. The present findings can be used in focus group research to gain a better insight into young people perceptions of citizenship and the most desirable forms of citizenship education. The results of this study can also inspire cross-cultural comparisons.

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