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# Input

## Online & Offline – Challenges for Citizenship Education

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*The rapid adoption of New Social Media both attracts and irritates citizenship educators. Yet, how citizenship education changes with the Web 2.0 is not determined by new technologies, but dependent on the approaches shaped deliberately. This input from Ursula Maier-Rabler and Stefan Huber to the NECE-Workshop Perspectives of Web 2.0 for Citizenship Education in Europe (Brno, Czech Republic, 2011) clarifies the difference between New Social Media adoption and New Social Media capabilities. It identifies the development of New Social Media capabilities as crucial for active online participation and collaboration. Citizenship education that aims for the active and capable citizen thus must provide offers to new target groups. The times when political education was complacent with the teaching of factual knowledge are gone. In the context of New Social Media citizenship education must make use of what the innovative toolbox Web 2.0 provides. The authors choose PoliPedia.at as an example within a range of new tools for citizenship education.*

New Social Media – sometimes referred to as *Web 2.0* – challenge citizenship education. The rapid adoption of New Social Media and the aspects of participation and inclusion in the foreground of *Web 2.0* both attract and irritate. In order to understand the challenges of citizenship education, New Social Media adoption shall be distinguished from New Social Media capabilities. Only New Social Media capabilities provide for the development of an open and participatory society, as expressed in the collaborative web.

### **The state of New Social Media adoption among young people**

From childhood, digital media and technology are integrated in the daily life of digital natives. In a study on 14 year old Austrians, two thirds declared to be online daily. Four out of five actively use online social networks and about 70% are meeting friends online on a regular basis. Only 5% of the young people surveyed, stated not to be part of any online social network, whereas about half of the participants cannot imagine to live without the Internet anymore (Diendorfer/Maier-Rabler/Parycek 2010, p. 235).

The adoption of technological innovations is implemented at the most part by the large majority of young people. On the one hand, the media repertoire and habits of using media change with technological innovations (Großegger/Heinzlmeier 2007, p. 153). On the other hand, mere access to the internet does not provoke a change of media use of digital immigrants from receptive to participative forms of political communication.



In many cases the stimulating effect of the internet stays limited to receptive forms of communication (Emmer/Seifert/Vowe 2006, p. 183). But even digital natives lack capabilities for participatory actions.

### **The challenge of New Social Media capabilities**

Adults and teachers have the misconception of seeing adolescents as experts in Information- and Communication Technologies (ICTs). In fact, remarkable deficits in the capability to use New Social Media for participatory actions can be observed among young people. Poor online searching competence has been found among 14 year old Austrians. Besides relying on a limited number of search engines (Google in most cases), they have troubles figuring out adequate searching words. The use of colloquial language when searching for information on the Internet, results in finding informal websites. Even when the 14 year olds managed to find relevant websites, they face difficulties when navigating through documents or identifying important official information (Diendorfer/Maier-Rabler/Parycek 2010, p. 235-237). Growing up with access to the Internet does not miraculously provoke the development of Internet capabilities. Due to their perceived expert status, 62% of the 14 year olds can use the Internet at their own discretion, free of any limitations set by parents. The downside of such a permissive environment is a general lack of supporting measures for the development of Internet capabilities on family level. But even in schools, particular measures for the implementation of a participative online culture – going beyond mere access to the Internet and the teaching of certain skills – are lacking to a great extent. The development of New Social Media capabilities is a major challenge for citizenship education, if it wants young people to become conscious members of a participatory culture.

### **New Social Media capabilities and participatory culture**

Young peoples' contributions to the Social Web are claims for and expressions of a participatory culture. Participatory culture, in return, is the driving agent of a participatory society. According to Jenkins, low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement are characteristics for a participatory culture. In such culture, people are offered with support for fabricating and sharing their own creations and ideas. Members of a participatory culture believe that their contributions matter to others. The transmission of knowledge and abilities occurs in some type of informal mentorship. They feel some degree of social connection to each other and care about what others think and feel. Collaborative problem-solving is the preferred way of completing tasks in a participatory culture (Jenkins 2006, p. 7-8). In the Social Web – and its collaborative applications being developed – we find many of these participative features at work. Peoples' ability to use the Social Web for participatory purposes (i.e. online collaboration with intended offline results) largely depends on their Internet capabilities. Livingstone (2009, p. 181 - 206) defines four basic aspects in this respect:

1. Being competent in accessing desired contents (i.e. goods, services, information and communication), and avoiding undesired contents.
2. Being able to understand and analyze contents as particular, selective and motivated representations of the world; one's own position as more or less private or visible, anonymous or accountable.
3. Knowing how to evaluate elite filters, how to search, sort and assess sources and evaluate relevance, reliability and bias.
4. Being capable of creating individual content.

A participatory online culture cannot thrive without users' capabilities in all four aspects. Yet, how can citizenship education cope with such requirements?

### **New requirements for citizenship education caused by participative online cultures**

The reaction of citizenship education to the development of *Web 2.0* is not dependent on new technologies, but on the approaches citizenship educators shape deliberately. New Social Media offer chances and expose risks to citizenship education. They particularly cause new requirements regarding the target groups of citizenship education. Additionally to the classical target group of pupils, in the framework of institutionalized education at schools, participants at the NECE-Workshop *Perspectives of Web 2.0 for Citizenship Education in Europe* (Brno, Czech Republic, 2011) identified three more: government, teachers, and inactive citizens. All four of them deserve a closer look. Regarding the classical target group of pupils, the main discussions in academic circles refer to the question if citizenship education should adapt to existing online platforms, or set up specialized ones on its own. While integration with existing platforms is generally recommendable, if the aim is to reach as many users as possible by a certain date, only the establishment of specialized platforms allows for particular settings. In a later topic, cross-linking with existing platforms should be supported.

For the development of New Social Media capabilities in the context of citizenship education that aims at active citizen participation, the Demokratiezentrum Wien and the ICT&S Center at Salzburg University found the specialized online tool [www.polipedia.at](http://www.polipedia.at). It allows the collaborative production of an online textbook for citizenship education. Teachers and pupils are invited to engage in knowledge production, raise questions and respond to issues of media literacy, and deal with online multimedia content. *PoliPedia.at* is an example of a collaborative tool for citizenship education that allows collaboration among pupils and teachers and across subjects, schools and educational systems. The role of teachers – as a target group for citizenship education – becomes obvious with *PoliPedia.at* and other educational tools. Citizenship education needs to provide training for teachers who wish to use New Social Media in class, and primarily, it needs to offer incentives for teachers who have not yet sympathized with New Social Media. Ignoring the ongoing development of New Social Media cannot be an option for teachers anymore.

The third target group for citizenship education – i. e. government and its officials – deserve to be dealt with priority. They set the operating guidelines for teachers and therefore need to understand the importance of New Social Media capabilities in citizenship education. Experts in citizenship education – in some cases government officials themselves – need to explain the implications of the Social Web for citizenship education to government. This includes controversial matters like open government data, privacy protection, collaborative governance, and so on.

The fourth target group for citizenship education in this context – i.e. inactive citizens – are promising to be reached easier with New Social Media tools than ever before. The participatory logic of New Social Media does not stop before politically inactive citizens. One approach that the innovative toolbox of Web 2.0 applications offers to citizenship education, among others, are serious games (e.g. [www.ecopolicy.at](http://www.ecopolicy.at)). Alike every case, citizenship education's considerations need to follow the formula of form-follows-function. If the function is to interest inactive citizens for complicated political matters, citizenship education must not shy away from providing offers with various levels of complexity, leaving the choice of the preferred level of complexity to the user's discretion.

### **Future challenges for citizenship education in the context of Web 2.0**

The omnipresence of New Social Media challenges the educational system, and citizenship education in particular. The major challenge to citizenship education in this context is to maximize citizens' New Social Media capabilities. Capable citizens know how to minimize the risks they are exposed to (e.g. they are aware of privacy and data protection, authentication, legitimation of agents, etc) and to maximize their room for maneuver. New Social Media capabilities allow citizens to freely choose among various options for social online and offline participation. Citizenship education is asked to act within the *Web 2.0* environment. The intention to raise peoples' media literacy is to help them to develop New Social Media capabilities. In the context of schooling, citizenship education has the potential to change qualitatively and sustainably. Qualitatively, *Web 2.0* offers possibilities for a more participatory form of education, like collaborative group work.

Furthermore, citizenship education can become more sustainable if it goes beyond the teaching of factual knowledge by focusing on young peoples' capability of leading a participative way of life, successfully catching peoples' attention and triggering their creativity. *Web 2.0* is a chance for citizenship education to reach way beyond school. Based on New Social Media, citizenship education has the potential to advance further by offering online tools that involve school kids with dropouts; apprentices with students; locals with migrants; the younger and the older. Yet another new target group for citizenship education is the media illiterate. For them, the capability of determining their life in a society of media-based collaboration is narrow. While *Web 2.0* is increasing the area of responsibility of citizenship education, it does not efface any of the classical tasks. Factual knowledge is still crucial for capable citizens, and real contact with politicians cannot be replaced by the *Web 2.0*. On the other hand, New Social Media capability is the key factor for active citizenship in times of *Web 2.0*.

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