Diverse views on citizenship, community and participation: Exploring the role of adult education research and practice

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Abstract

In this article, we look at three photographs that each (re)present a space of citizenship and community. In examining each photo, we question our assumptions about adult education and community building practices. In each of the three cases, we adopt the same approach. We start by focusing on a particular place where present-day citizenship nowadays takes shape and observing what is to be seen at this location. This observation forces us to view that particular place in sharp focus and to direct our attention to the specific citizenship practice emerging there. This is an exercise in paying attention, which helps us to take notice of the singular way in which citizenship and community play a role in that particular context. In line with this, we also formulate some critical observations regarding a number of mainstream concepts in policy discourse such as social cohesion, active citizenship, lifelong learning, etc. These terms often represent programmes that close off the space in which an original contribution to adult education can be developed rather than opening it up. In analyzing these three images, we do not aim to construct a fully-fledged theoretical framework nor to develop a method. Rather, we wish to open the possibility of seeing things differently and altering our way of thinking.

This article addresses citizenship, community building and democracy in a transforming society. It explores conventional and new ways of conceptualizing these concepts and

their relationship to adult education practices. This exploration seems relevant because the way in which these concepts have so far been framed suffers from a number of limitations. The language we are used to fails to capture the transformations of concepts and practices of citizenship today and, accordingly, of community building and of democratic practices. Citizenship was long associated with some form of stability and with well defined geographical/cultural boundaries. A citizen was defined as someone belonging to a more or less cohesive community, mostly a nation-state, which imposed different kinds of rights and duties on its members. From this perspective, representative democracy was a major principle of citizen participation. Today, these boundaries are blurring and the question of membership of a community is gaining urgency. New practices and concepts relating to social cohesion and civic participation are emerging. Direct democracy is being promoted, while governance is said to be replacing government. The citizen is expected to become an active participant, not only in policy matters, but also in different everyday contexts. In the face of these transformations, adult education is trying to redefine its perspectives. It is engaged in the debate on the membership of communities and on new forms of participation. It is exploring ways to educate and train people in taking up new roles and responsibilities and is experimenting with new forms of community building. Against this background, it is important to question the ways in which we define citizenship, community and democratic participation.

In this paper, we engage in such an exercise. It is not yet entirely clear where we are headed. Yet, we think the exercise in itself is important. In embarking on this venture, we make use of three photographs. In selecting these photos, we were guided by an interpretation of what they represented, i.e. three different discourses on citizenship education. This included a focus on the participation of citizens in policy making (photograph1), on the development of social cohesion (photograph 2) and on the importance of urban togetherness (photograph 3). We hoped that close analysis of these photographs would allow us to present thematically the way in which researchers and practitioners try to make sense of the practices depicted in these photos and set the scene for what we usually say and do in relation to current policy discourses on citizenship. However, when engaging in this exercise we began to realize that our descriptions of the photos were saturated with implicit meanings, which saturation prevented us from exploring new ways of (re)presenting citizenship, community building and democratic participation. We therefore decided to radically change direction and interrogate our classical ways of 'looking' and 'interpreting'.

We decided to leave our preconceived notions behind and to start from a systematic description of what we see on these three photos, thereby halting references to practices and ideas situated outside these three pictures. We chose to view each photograph as 'a space', a social gathering of bodies positioned in different ways. This new way of looking at the pictures was influenced by the phenomenological approach to place developed by the philosopher Edward Casey (1996), who highlights two essential structures that pervade places; 'first, the centrality of the experiencing body to place; second, its ability to draw together bodies and things' (Casey in Pink, 2008, p. 166). In line with this, we consider citizenship as a place-making practice and look at this double process of gathering and embodied engaging within the three photos. We became increasingly convinced of the relevance of this new approach, because in present-day society citizenship manifests itself in a wide range of practices and in diverse places, locally, nationally and supra-nationally (Sassen, 2002, 2003a, 2003b). This persuaded us to pay more attention to citizenship in connection with places, bodies and things, and to how these are positioned in relation to each other.

Clearly, this focus on citizenship as an emplaced and embodied practice requires us to carefully consider the particularity of situation depicted. Likewise, Rose (2008) points to photos made in the context of human geography.

> Some geographers (…) use photos neither as taken-for-granted illustrations, nor as problematic representations. Instead, they work in the tension between these two approaches to photography. They acknowledge that photos are indeed riddled with representation but that they nevertheless still can carry a powerful descriptive charge (Rose, 2008, p. 155).

Such an approach encourages us to look at what there is to see and to pay close attention to the picture. It is an invitation to do what Hansen (2007) describes as 'seeing with the body' as opposed to 'seeing as a mechanism'. In our everyday lives, we tend to look at the world in a mechanical way, i.e. from the perspective of a preconceived theory or policy discourse, thereby only seeing what we expect to see. In contrast, 'seeing with the body' demands conscious attention, as we try not to pin down the moment of looking and to make sense of things beyond our narrow frame of reference. 'Seeing with the body' means relating oneself as a researcher to what is to be seen and challenging one's own thoughts and one's own way of living (Masschelein, 2008). It points to the experience of seeing the familiar in unfamiliar ways.

Looking at the three photos from this perspective proved an uncomfortable experience, as it disrupted or suspended our taken-for-granted understandings (Masschelein, 2006; Thompson, 2010). Recently, Burdick and Sandlin (2010) argued in favour of what they describe as a 'methodology of discomfort', i.e. a methodology that is attentive to the irreducible 'otherness' of many of the spaces and sites of citizenship practices taking place outside the walls of formal educational institutions. By focusing on citizenship as an emplaced practice, we also try to invert our thinking about the community that may appear in the three spaces. While many authors may emphasize different aspects of the changing way in which we inhabit the world together, many analyses seem to lead to the conclusion that community life is currently disintegrating. Authors such as Putnam (2000) or Etzioni (2000) depart from a particular concept of community that, according to them, is being lost. In opposition to that concept, they emphasize the revival of community in terms of strong social bonds between people and bridges between communities. Indeed community seems to be something that we can know, that we can build and that can be mobilized to undertake collective projects. By focusing on citizenship as a placemaking practice, and starting from close analysis of the three photos , we want to subvert this 'appealing imagery of community' (Brint, 2001, p. 1). We challenge this imagery by looking at concrete things and situations from a particular perspective. This approach is inspired by, amongst others, the French philosopher Nancy (1983, 1996, 2001), who rethinks our being-together-with-others in terms of concrete observable things. In discussing Nancy's work, Devisch calls this 'a witnessing of the world "as such": that is to say, the world here and now in which we are living in common' (Devisch, 2002, p. 385). Such an attentive attitude can challenge our conventional thinking and encourage us to search for the proper words with which to sketch the outlines of another way of thinking about citizenship and community education.

First photograph: 'the participating citizen'

Figure 1. Cultuurraad Geraardsbergen [Untitled Photograph] From *Wissels: Handboek sociaal-cultureel werken met volwassenen* (p. 486), by F. Cockx, H. De Blende, G. Gehre, G. Van den Eeckhaut and G. Verschelden (Eds.), 2011, Brussels: SoCiuS. Permission to use the picture from Cultuurraad Geraardsbergen.

The people in the first picture are members of a cultural council in a Flemish town in Belgium. This photograph visualizes a first important practice of citizenship. It refers to those practices and places in which citizens can participate in and contribute to local – or possibly regional or Flemish – policy-making on diverse issues. This photo refers to a long tradition of conceptualizing citizenship in terms of rights and duties. In this tradition, each citizen must be treated as equal and is therefore entitled to equal fundamental rights. A prominent advocate of this view was Marshall, demonstrated how citizen rights expanded between the 18th and the 20th century. In the 18th century, civil rights offered citizens a minimum of protection, by ensuring the right to a fair trial, for instance. Similarly, the right to property and the right to privacy enabled citizens to build their own lives. In addition to civil rights, adults also gained political rights in the 19th century, entitling them, for instance, to participate in political decision-making by voting in elections, or to establish or join a political party. In the 20th century, finally, social rights, such as the right to education and health care were introduced to support citizens in developing their own lives. This movement towards establishing universal rights is based on the conviction that the nation state is powerful enough to uphold these promises of citizenship in all spheres of society. In addition to rights, citizenship, as conceived in this tradition, also involves duties. Citizens are expected to be involved in the community. This ranges from abiding by the law over paying taxes or participating in elections to engagement in society and participation in government. This photograph of the cultural council refers to an important recent development in citizens' political rights and duties. In diverse fields, such as urban planning, mobility, culture, or the environment, the government acknowledges that it is not the sole actor in ensuring good governance and that citizens are important partners. Various concepts are used to describe this change: participatory decision-making, interactive policy-making, co-production of government, participatory budgeting etc. Despite the difference in terminology, the same movement is involved: citizens are expected and even obliged to be involved, to participate, and to be informed on both local and global issues relating to

environment and society. This first image of citizenship therefore focuses on citizens' contributions to various policy-making forums. Traditionally, adult education has played a central role and considerable efforts have been done to support citizens in 'voicing a well-informed opinion', 'being/ remaining involved', 'undertaking critical reflection and action' etc. The main assumption underlying adult education initiatives is the need to encourage the development of a vibrant and broad-based civil society in which citizens can attribute personal significance to their environment and take action accordingly. Adult educators support people in their efforts to articulate social issues and encourage them to explore the means, meanings and values with which they can address these issues as citizens. Within the context of these practices, civic education is not a separate educational practice that prescribes a top-down curriculum but is a process in which individual learning is inextricably linked to group or community practices in groups.

As researchers, we have tried to understand the educational dynamics underlying these practices as a process of social learning (Wildemeersch, Jansen, Vandenabeele & Jans, 1998; Wals, 2007). This is a type of civic education that is driven by the desires and the abilities of the people involved while engaging with the social issues that affect them. In this learning process, social problems are articulated and interpreted, and projects for a 'better' society are conceived and tested. Increasingly, however, we were influenced by governmentality theorists who, drawing on the insights of Foucault, have shown that many of these participatory practices are part of a range of new technologies of persuasion, normalisation, and inclusion (Rose, 1996; Dean, 1999; Quaghebeur, 2006). According to these theorists, the 'hidden agenda' of such participatory practices is that they actually teach the participants to define themselves as self-directed agents in an 'active society'. Adult education practitioners frequently adopt this specific, dominant activation discourse, which assumes that people should first learn certain participatory skills before they are entitled to speak and act as citizens. In this view, acquiring particular concepts, insights and skills is a prerequisite for participation in democratic practices. Drawing on Lingis (1994), we can describe this particular way of knowing and acting as taking part in a 'rational community'. Within a rational community, the established principles and practices proper to a particular community are regarded as the ultimate standard. These principles and practices, ratified by experts, guide changes and serve as a standard for (political) decisions about the organization of society. The call for participation therefore usually entails that citizens adopt this 'rational' discourse. In other words, citizens must first adapt before they are allowed to participate (Biesta & Lawy, 2006). Adult education practitioners induce participants to conform to this activation discourse, which assumes that the 'competences' of a good citizen can be deduced from the principles of the rational community. In our western context, this discourse is strongly rooted in Enlightenment ideas. The main problem of such a discourse is that it establishes a norm of what it means to be a human being/citizen and that, without much discussion, it excludes many people from ever meeting this norm (Biesta, 2006). This discourse of the rational community – in which … the experts of the rational community is therefore incompatible with the discourse of democracy, have the final say.

If we look at the photograph and at the way things and people are depicted we become aware of particular rules governing the appearance of the people pictured. We see seven men and four women sitting in front of a painting with an ornate, gilded frame. The people in the picture are posing for the photographer. The canvas framing the painting as well as the people standing next to each other symbolizes what Rancière (2007/1992) calls a particular sensibility that ensures the self-evidence of the cultural

council as a policy institution. We are seeing a social arrangement where images and bodies appear in a particular juxtaposition and circulation. The seven men and four women in this photograph are all aware of being photographed and are looking directly at the camera. They are entitled to do so as members of a formally organized participatory council of citizens living in the same village or city. But the normative space within this photo also shows something of what Rancière (2007/1992) calls the dissonant blur of the everyday. Some persons in the photo keep their hands at their sides or folded elegantly on their knees; others stand with their hands in their pockets. Only one man is wearing a suit; the others are only wearing sweaters or shirts. These small details in the appearance of citizens generate a paradoxical space where a citizen can present herself as someone who is a member of the rational community while *not* sharing the particular features of that community. In this sense, she is a stranger characterized by an 'improper appearance'. And, in line with Rancière (2007/1992), we suggest that it is actually this 'improper appearance' that constitutes democratic citizenship per se (Panagia, 2009). Members of a cultural council do not need to gain equal status by proving their competence to experts and politicians. The council's democratic legitimacy does not derive from its members' ability to act in accordance with the principles and norms of the rational community. council Rather, it is based on the act of raising one's voice. And it is exactly this act that confirms the central democratic assumption that 'all intelligence is equal'. Or, as argued by Simons and Masschelein (2010), democracy is rooted in the entitlement of those who are unqualified or incompetent with regard to the particular social arrangements at stake. Democratic equality begins with an act of impropriety.

It is this basic assumption of equality that should encourage citizens to take themselves and others seriously. For years, we were involved as researchers in various experiments related to the debate on bio-technology. Focus groups and citizen-juries provided a forum for reasoned discussion of choices relating to technology. Participants compared the dominant view on technology to a high-speed train speeding out of control with failing brakes. A different image of technology emerged from these experiments, i.e. one of a normally functioning train with different passengers on board, with regular stops and changeovers. In this system, it is possible to close or to build railway lines and to carry out maintenance work on rail track beds. Within such a space, scientific knowledge is no longer the only source of legitimacy. Scientists contribute to a debate in which cognitive and value-driven arguments proposed by other participants are also taken into account. People involved in an issue at a practical level – for instance, farmers growing transgenic crops, consumers familiar with a particular product, parents of a child with a specific hereditary disease – can contribute their experiences. The issue is addressed from various angles and alternative solutions can be proposed. Scientists question their knowledge in the light of the arguments advanced by non-scientists. Representatives of various interest groups can no longer hold such a debate in stark black-and-white terms. The focus of the debate shifts from the exact size of risks and effects to issues such as quality of life, since every participant is encouraged to articulate her underlying views and concerns.

Such experiments open up a space in which citizenship can develop on the basis of the recognition that people engage in action and discussion whenever they feel that the question of values in society is at stake. Such experiments also challenge dominant views of citizenship and democracy: instead of 'learning to prepare for participation', learning 'is' participation (Wildemeersch & Berkers, 1997). Hence, adult education practices have a role to play in the 'disruption' of the rational community and the transformation of the legal principle of equality between citizens into a more

fundamental principle of equality guiding adult education practices. In such cases, adult education practitioners try to maintain an educational dynamic that is driven by the desires and the critical questions of the people involved, while encouraging debates and actions that may enhance the quality of our lives. The starting point is neither certainty nor clear knowledge on how practitioners should help participants develop a specific set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, thus promoting participation and citizenship. The focus is no longer on the conditions that participatory citizens must meet, but on the nature of the spaces and practices in which participation and citizenship can develop. From this perspective, the question of what it means to be a citizen is a radically open question, which can only be addressed by engaging in educational practices rather than by defining the answers before the practice has even started (Biesta, 2006). Increasingly, we are realizing that different rationalities could be inspirational in practice. The essential question is no longer how we can rationally control the social and natural world, but rather how we can also share this world in a responsible and meaningful way. Adult education practitioners therefore encourage citizens to raise questions or take initiatives related to matters that affect them (Biesta, 2006).

The second photograph: 'the relational citizen'

Figure 2. Natuurpunt Zemst [Untitled Photograph] From *Wissels: Handboek sociaal-cultureel werken met volwassenen* (p. 493), by F. Cockx, H. De Blende, G. Gehre, G. Van den Eeckhaut and G. Verschelden (Eds.), 2011, Brussels: SoCiuS. Permission to use the picture from Natuurpunt Zemst.

The second photograph depicts a joint activity. Six individuals can be distinguished, working outside, at the edge of a plot of land. It is not immediately clear what they are doing. One person, wearing a cap, seems to be drilling a hole. Someone else is using a shovel. In the background, somebody seems to be mowing the long grass. Possibly, they are placing a fence, planting trees, or doing maintenance work. The second photograph evokes a view of citizenship often shared by adult educators. In this view, citizenship emerges from 'a community of practice' or from the joint undertaking of activities. In this perspective, the development of strong 'bonds' and 'bridges' with others is very important. A citizen only acquires citizenship status through her loyalty and contributions to such communities of practice. Each citizen is even expected to ensure that this strong sense of community can continue to develop (Tonkens & Kroese, 2008). In this way, people also express shared values and views, related for instance to the

environment and nature as is the case in this photograph. Such shared activities and values also reflect a strong commitment to the world out there. People feel responsible and undertake action. Examples include campaigns for greater road safety, community response to a natural disaster, campaigns to save local heritage, demonstrations protesting against or demanding the closure of a plant, third world solidarity initiatives etc. The spaces highlighted by the second image do not refer to the formal participation structures suggested by the first image but are structured and made meaningful through everyday practices undertaken together with others. This is illustrated in the second image - a meadow close to a wood is turned into a space where people collaborate to safeguard nature. However, in presenting this second image, we do not wish to indulge in nostalgia for a purportedly long-lost sense of community. Such a feeling of nostalgia is often at the basis of policy-makers' attempts to strengthen social cohesion by encouraging regular contacts between citizens. According to communitarian social scientists such as Putnam (2000), this activation of social relations, constitutes an investment into the social capital of a community, by increasing trust, solidarity and openness towards each other. And, according to Putnam (2000), this is 'the glue that holds society together'.

However, this photograph also suggests an alternative reading, which keeps options open and does not immediately impose particular policy objectives. When looking at the picture in a different way, we see six people who are not as close together as in the first photograph. They are literally standing apart and are not looking at the camera or posing. They are drilling or digging holes. Perhaps they are also pruning, weeding, mowing, planting, toiling and sweating. They are next to each other, facing each other, each doing something in their own way. They give or follow instructions, they disagree, negotiate or give in. What we see is a space where spontaneous conversations can arise. These conversations are always unfinished, never achieving closure. When different voices interact, this opens up the possibility of moving and changing. The current discourse on the learning society and lifelong learning, however, acts as an impediment to this (Vandenabeele & Wildemeersch, 2010). This discourse has become so dominant in our society that adult education practitioners tend to derive their identity from it. Just like the discourse on social cohesion, it is a way of speaking and acting which, 'highly efficiently and apparently democratically, closes off the time and space in which the logic underlying this discourse can be questioned' (Masschelein, 2001, p. 129). Within this discourse, there is little or no space for any learning that is not useful, necessary, rewarding, and pleasant within the existing set-up of society. The importance, yet at the same time the difficulty, of preserving the openness of this space of conversation and mutual commitment is well articulated in the study conducted by Pols (2006). Pols investigated the way in which psychiatric nurses and psychiatric patients interact during everyday activities such as the washing of the patient. While this context is not really related to the practice of adult education, the focus of the research, namely the specific interactions engaged in by professionals, is highly similar to the work of adult educators.

Pols' contribution is interesting because she explores daily interactions as sources of 'living or lived citizenship' (Trienekens, 2004) and thus interprets citizenship as a process that is shaped in very ordinary practices such as the washing ritual. Pols distinguishes four registers of citizenship, including 'relational citizenship'. In the first three registers, Pols (2006) argues, nursing staff act and speak from the perspective of the individual and autonomous citizen, which means that the relationship is informed by a specific ideal. In the first register, nursing staff focus on patients' likes and dislikes, interests and preferences in order to support each person's authentic self. While talking

to patients, nurses mainly try to discover their personal needs and preferences as they are convinced that this self-knowledge will empower the patients. If a patient were to decide not to wash, this would be tolerated to a certain extent, but at the same time there is a clear rule stating that nursing staff is allowed to intervene if this is causing a nuisance to others. In the second register nurses focus on the acquisition of skills and competences, as washing is a basic skill that everyone should learn. Being dirty is simply not acceptable, so nursing staff devote considerable effort to instructions and assessment, as they are convinced that they are fostering the patients' independence. The third register focuses on the active citizen or the extent to which patients engage in their own projects, such as travelling, working, creating art etc. Patients who succeed in pursuing a life project are regarded as making a valuable contribution to society, and the act of washing becomes significant within this context.

Pols (2006) observes that some of the nurses use a fourth register that is different from the previous three. There is no ideal to be pursued, except the willingness to engage in conversation and to experience a sense of living together in an everyday activity such as washing. In this register, unlike in the other three, the nurses' approach is also at stake, because the staff-patient relationship is not simply the outcome of a properly applied method. The nurse enters the room, which feels like an undetermined, 'open' space that is not immediately filled with planned actions and ideals. In this indeterminate space, people, things, relationships may have evolved from what they were before. Pols (2006) argues that the focus on washing as such opens up a space in which new actions and conversations are possible. This is what Pols (2006) calls a space in which existing norms and positions can be displaced. In this space, citizenship does not emerge from the intentional actions of autonomous individuals. Rather, it is the result of a mutual commitment which develops spontaneously. In the space that emerges, an opening for a new future is created (Agamben, 1999). What is crucial in these conversations is the shift from 'what' someone is saying to 'who' is saying it. 'What' someone is saying is important in the rational community, whose members share a common discourse. Everyone is expected to speak in accordance with the rules and principles of the rational discourse adopted by the community. Within these spontaneous conversations, in contrast, participants experience that each individual is involved in the world in their own particular way. The wide range of conversations and shared activities within adult education contain opportunities for opening up this space and emphasizing what we call 'relational citizenship'. Their potential is far-reaching. They enable citizens to bring something new into the world, i.e. their own, unique response.

Third photograph: 'the indefinite citizen'
The third photograph is a blurred image of people walking in a street. This image refers to a tradition in photography that visualizes urban life. It reminds one of images from the 1982 film Koyaanisqatsi (life in unbalance) by Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass, in which cars and people dissolve in a blur of lights and lines. The origins of this tradition can even be traced back to the first photograph in which a (blurred) human figure appears, i.e. an image taken by Louis Daguerre in 1838 entitled *Boulevard du Temple* (Agamben, 2007). We use the third photo to refer to the way cities are depicted as places where we can dream and wonder about alternative worlds. Cities are places where we can invent alternative visions and ways of life. Traditionally, the way in which people live together in cities has been contrasted with the closed and homogeneous communities living in rural areas. In this dichotomy, cities stand for the liberation from oppression and the right to remake the world according to one's own

imagination and desires. For David Harvey (2003, p. 939) 'the city is the historical site of creative destruction'. Another aspect of this contrast between urban and rural communities is that cities allow us to remain different. The city, then, is the place where we live among strangers. It is a malleable and fleeting collectivity where all can find their place. In this view, citizenship includes everyone present in public places and not just those who are official citizens (i.e. citizens allowed to participate).

Figure 3. The indefinite citizen. Source: Authors.

Ruth Soenen (2006, 2009) investigated everyday interactions in shops and on public transport. She describes these brief, incidental and unpredictable interactions as ephemeral encounters: people making small talk in shops, complaining about bus being late to other passengers waiting at the bus stop, smiling at an inquisitive toddler, scolding someone who jumps the check-in queue. The community emerging here is not a community shaped by daily, recurring relationships (relational citizenship). Rather, the encounters referred to are characterized by the absence of enduring bonds. These ephemeral encounters – typical of urban life may also inform educational practices. This means that adult educators should not only try to build strong ties between people, but should equally encourage educational practices in which ephemeral encounters are valued. One example of a practice that shows this focus on brief encounters is Permanent Breakfast[1], an ongoing art project accidentally developed in 1996, when a group of artists in Vienna decided to carry their breakfast table outside and have breakfast in the street (Derschmidt, Schneider & Hofbauer, 2009). The reactions they received from passers-by made them realize that, by placing a table in a square, a street, or a park, they were modifying this public place. This was an activity that bridged the public-private gap, giving participants the experience of 'living in a public space' or 'a public living space'. The group decided to continue having breakfast in the street and to invite passers-by to join them. Gradually, a sort of pyramid game developed. The group started having breakfast in different public places in Vienna and inviting passers-by to join them. These breakfasts are free and carry no social or political agenda. The only requirement is that everyone who joins the group for breakfast should in turn organize such a public breakfast and invite others. This experiment was highly successful and spread to many countries. What is interesting from our perspective is what happens when people place a table in the public domain, have breakfast and invite others to join them. Their usual functioning in the public domain changes, and this disruption causes surprise, curiosity but also confusion.

A common reaction is that people say they have 'no time', often pointing at their watch as they hurry on. Some people even start walking faster when they notice the copious breakfast on the table. Even elderly people with children or people who return shortly afterwards react in this way. Apparently, this practice affects the way in which we experience time. Having breakfast in the street seems to halt time or at least the way in which we experience time, which many find problematic. Wasting time on something useless in the public sphere disrupts our routines. People feel uncomfortable if they think they are not spending their time usefully. Another common reaction is that people ask what the artists are selling or what organization they represent. When the artists explain that their initiative does not have any commercial purpose, nor contains a political message, people often become suspicious. They seem to assume that everyone has ulterior motives, that there is always a hidden agenda. Being invited to join a group of strangers for breakfast tends to arouse suspicion, because this subverts ordinary relationships between people. On some occasions, the organizers were even chased away: in a number of seemingly public places in Vienna, such as shopping centers, private security staff quickly removed tables, chairs, coffee and breakfast rolls. Apparently, such spaces cannot be freely used, not even for an innocent activity such as breakfast. Derschmidt, Schneider and Hofbauer (2009) refer to private commercial spaces camouflaging as public spaces. Of course, there were also positive reactions. Many passers-by joined the table and engaged in conversations, ranging from small talk to political discussions or questions about the activity itself.

Adult educators often expect such practices to trigger a much deeper process, culminating in a moment when the differences among participants are transcended. However, when returning to our third picture, we started to view togetherness with strangers from a different angle. In the picture, we see the outlines of a number of people, walking on the pavement (?) between our camera and the shop-windows. The blurred image suggests movement. But we cannot see who is actually passing by. Faces cannot be identified. We do not have a clear image. Sassen (2003a, p. 19) describes the effect of globalization and increased mobility on citizenship as the emergence of a 'blurred subject'. The clear distinction between legal citizenship and citizenship practices performed by illegal subjects becomes unstable. According to Sassen, some legal citizens remain at the margins, while certain non-citizens play crucial roles in all kinds of local practices. What remains is 'a range of blurred subjects: the citizen who is authorized yet unrecognized due to discrimination and racialization, and, at the other extreme, the subject who is unauthorized (…) but recognized in some way or another' (Sassen, 2003a, p. 19). This picture also shows people walking separately, side by side. This reminds us of how we are surrounded by others who are strangers, whom we cannot understand and who nevertheless address us in one or other way. The photograph makes us consider the way in which people co-exist in public places today and as such also transcends the opposition between so called urban and rural togetherness.

Hannah Arendt's metaphor of s the public place as a table is inspiring in this respect (Arendt 1958, in Visker, 2008). A table is shared by all invited, yet a distance remains, as everyone has a different place. The table creates a space between people: it relates them to each other but also separates and opposes them. The metaphor of the public space as a table makes us understand the way people today relate to each other and how we can conceive of citizenship, without feeling obliged to transcend difference. In this kind of public space, the community of citizens can then be understood as a community of people who are close to each other yet remain distant at the same time. This kind of citizen is not well-defined. To others, her contours are blurred. She appears

to them in a way characterized by openness or indefiniteness. The citizen we encounter in these circumstances is an 'indefinite' citizen. She is, just like us, a passer-by. Citizens thus encountered can be described as 'foreign', which does not necessarily mean 'originating from a foreign country', but may also be interpreted as unfamiliar, odd and even bizarre (Nancy, 2000/1996, p. 20). Something is foreign if it is outside our familiar frame of reference. The indefinite citizen and the effects of such brief encounters are perhaps most noticeable if the people we encounter are radically different from ourselves: a gipsy begging in the street, stretching out her hand for alms, a lost tourist asking for directions, a careless youngster on a skateboard, almost bumping into us and yelling at us. In all these situations, we experience the presence of another human being in a fleeting encounter.

From this perspective, adult education might mean much more than the promotion of ephemeral encounters. Instead, adult education could be an experiment about what living with others means. Adult education is often aimed at promoting fraternity, at transcending differences and supporting long-term collaboration between highly diverse people and organizations. Yet, the imperative of sharing – inspired by the ideal of promoting a sense of 'us' - may drive people apart as well as bringing them together. In contrast, (adult) education can also be conceived as a space where the foreign, the frictions, the dilemmas and conflicts can be articulated. As such, education aims to provide time and space for the precarious existence of this world and to preserve its indeterminacy. It is a space in which people encounter the world and feel challenged by what is different and strange, by what annoys or even disturbs them without being able to eliminate this. In this respect, the work of the American pedagogue Ellsworth is inspirational. In her article/book, 'Places of Learning. Media, Architecture, Pedagogy' (Ellsworth, 2005), she introduces architects, artists and theatre makers who explain how they invite citizens to engage in a transformation process which challenges securities, questions convictions or generates emotions. Ellsworth is of course not the only one trying to establish connections between education and the experience of space, urban environment, architecture, arts, etc. Practices such as arts manifestations, events in museums, neighbourhood action, community drama productions, the erection of monuments or memorials, all highlight the increasing importance of the urban environment as a particular site of learning. The use of innovative imagery, challenging or inviting spaces or unexpected encounters is characteristic of all these initiatives. In reflecting on this third image, we especially want to pay attention to the literal meaning of e-ducation, that is 'leading into the open' (Masschelein & Simons, 2010). Education in this sense means the exploration of spaces which are anomalous or alienating rather than 'pleasant' or 'nice', and therefore enable us to envision a kind of citizenship which reflects our present-day ways of living together.

Conclusion

In our introduction, we started from the observation that concepts such as citizenship and community are currently hard to delineate. We referred to Sassen (2002, 2003a, 2003b), who mainly argues that present-day citizenship manifests itself in diverse places and in a multitude of practices. In line with this, it seemed relevant to question our taken-for-granted ways of 'looking' at practices of citizenship and community building. Rancière, amongst others, helped us to better understand the act of looking by his analysis of 'spectatorship'. He argues that spectatorship is not a passivity that has to be turned into activity. Spectatorship is our normal state of being. 'We learn and teach,

we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamed' (Rancière, 2008, p. 17). Producing new knowledge means inventing a new idiomatic form that facilitates translation between empirical stories and philosophical discourses. Within the scope of this article, we aimed to find a translation between three photos on the one hand and three different ways of looking at citizenship as an emplaced and embodied practice on the other hand. And like Rancière (2008) we faced the risk that the outcome would be an unexpected idiom. The result of the exercise described in this paper, may remain 'unreadable' to those who insist on finding the cause of the story, its 'true' meaning or the lessons that can be drawn from it (Rancière, 2008). Nevertheless, we hope that we have developed a story that is readable to those who are willing to undertake their own translation and embark on their own adventure. The exercise have we engaged in 'requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story' (Rancière, 2008, p. 22).

As mentioned above, we questioned ways of looking at citizenship and community building on the basis of three pictures. Each picture presents familiar imageries of citizenship, community and democracy, but also offers an opportunity for reversing these familiar interpretations. With the help of the first image, we focused on practices in which citizens participate so as to co-direct policy-making. In other words, this first image presented 'participating citizen'. We explored the role of adult education with regard to such participatory practices and suggested that equality of citizens should be considered as the basic principle in this context. This perspective reverses the role of adult learning and education. Education in this sense is not about 'learning to participate'. Rather, it primarily seeks to create opportunities for participation because 'learning is participation' (Wildemeersch & Berkers, 1997). In the second image, we focused on a multiplicity of conversations: in these conversations, people are neither pinned down to predefined roles nor guided towards conventional life paths, but they are allowed to explore unexpected directions, In this second image, we presented the 'relational citizen', which reminded us of the possibility for adult education initiatives to open conversations without preset outcomes. Again, this turned a dominant discourse on citizenship upside down. Participants are not dealt with on the basis of a shared essence (e.g. a life project or a need). On the contrary, adult education creates a conversational space where people can give 'a unique response' to the question of 'who they are'. Finally, the third image brought the experience of living in a globalised world strongly to the fore by evoking the experience of the 'indefinite citizen'. In line with this, we tried to clarify how adult education practices can literally take people 'out into the open' (e-ducation) and encourage them to explore anomalous spaces where the imprint that others leave behind cannot be ignored. It subverts the dominant understanding of citizenship and diversity: what is at stake is not the transcendence of difference, but what is different and alien, what annoys and even disturbs us without the illusion that this can be eliminated once and for all.

Within each of these practices, the challenge is to preserve the openness of a space in which people's involvement with each other and with the world can be articulated. This openness could be the condition for what Rancière (2007/1992, p. 63) calls 'the particular configuration of being-together without which thought and action are bereft of the virtue of generosity which distinguishes the political from mere business management'. In the practice of the participatory citizen – while also contributing to the debate and policy concerning social issues – 'preserving openness' means that a space is created in which everyone is equally able to think and speak. Equality means that everyone is involved and entitled to judge and speak. The adult education practice

inspired by the relational citizen 'preserves openness', because it enables conversations that have no utilitarian goal. These are part of a fragile and ongoing conversation in which each person's unique response to the world is valued. In the practice inspired by the indefinite citizen – characterized by encounters with strange and unknown others – 'preserving openness' means enabling people to encounter others in a way that involves being exposed to others who are strangers to us, whom we cannot understand, but who touch our lives nonetheless. We do not intend to establish a hierarchy by considering the first type of citizenship inferior to the second type and the second type less meaningful than the third type. Rather, we argue that these images co-exist. They complement each other and may inspire diverse adult education practices at different times and in different contexts. The relational citizen can manifest herself in contexts where the participatory citizen is active. The indefinite citizen manifests herself whenever we do not make ourselves immune to passers-by (Devisch, Lijster & van Rooden, 2009) and whenever our routines are disrupted by the presence of others or by something unusual.

We have explored the way in which adult education practices may play a role in these three types of citizenship. This analysis remains preliminary. We started by questioning the influence of an approach that expects citizens to insert themselves in existing relationships and in clearly delineated communities. We have challenged this view, arguing that this is only one of the many possible ways of viewing the development of citizenship. We have tried to demonstrate that this is not the only perspective that can provide inspiration to adult education and that citizenship and a sense of community also emerge in other ways. The disruption of this specific rationality – rather than its continuity -, may open up other, unfamiliar perspectives. Society in general, and adult education in particular, seem to have reached a point at which creative approaches to exploring new, unexpected roads are needed. An unorthodox way of looking at things could bestow 'ontological fullness' on other conditions of citizenship and senses of community (Hansen, 2007, p. 50). For this reason, we have emphasized the importance of an attentive attitude and we invite adult educators to, time and again, address the question of the sources and stimuli of citizenship and community at one particular place. Hopefully, the three images of citizenship analyzed above can be inspirational in this regard.

Note

[1] www.permanentbreakfast.org

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