

GOING GLOBAL: DEFINING, CHARACTERISING AND CONSTRUCTING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract: This article shares the rationale and outcomes of a research project, titled ‘Going Global’, which was funded by the Irish Research Council’s New Foundations fund resourced by Irish Aid. The project held two regional workshops with personnel in the development and global citizenship education (GCE) fields, one in Belfast and one in Dublin. The workshops had three objectives: to gather views from participants on the meaning and content of global citizenship; to provide theoretical input to inform these discussions; and to enable participants to envisage more practice-grounded means to construct global citizenship in their work. The main finding from the project is that workshop participant attitudes to global citizenship range from the pragmatic, through the agnostic to the sceptical, but that none of these positions are mutually exclusive. Rather, it is recommended that global citizenship be treated as a provisional rather than a materially realised conceptual placeholder, enabling greater discussion and debate on the concept. Such debate should be around some key paradoxes identified by participants in this project including: the lack of a global state to guarantee rights; the perceived Eurocentricity of the concept; and depoliticised, technocratic and individualised biases in dominant conceptualisations of it. Greater conceptual exploration around such paradoxes in the sector could help tease out these positions further for professionals in the field, facilitating a deeper connection with the concept among them.

Keywords: Global Citizenship; Development Education; Citizenship; Democracy; Globalisation.

Introduction

This article sets out the rationale and outcomes of a research project, titled ‘Going Global’, funded by the Irish Research Council and Irish Aid, which was carried out in 2023 by the project Principal Investigator (PI) and author of this article, in association with Comhlámh, Suas and the Centre for Global Education (Cannon,

2023).¹ The project was motivated by some key questions that emerged in previous research conducted by the author for Comhlámh regarding the challenges presented by globalisation to state/citizen relation within the nation state and how the concept of global citizenship has emerged as a response to those challenges but is riven with contested definitions and meanings (Cannon, 2022).

Global citizenship has become an increasingly dominant term in international development discourse and policy in the Republic of Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2019) and internationally, most commonly in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular in education (Irish Aid, 2021; United Nations Global Citizenship Foundation, 2022). Yet there is considerable discussion on the meaning (Carter, 2001), characterisation (Isin and Nyers, 2014a) and institutionalisation of global citizenship, particularly in the context of the persistent repercussions of colonialism (Lee, 2014; Tuck and Yang, 2012). As Isin and Nyers (2014b: 9), observe, while citizenship is changing as a result of globalisation no specific citizenship model can be pre-determined as a result of these changes. Citizenship in this changing context is ‘incipient’ rather than fixed, they argue, as while the globalising context is creating new conditions for the institution of citizenship, the latter has not yet fully transcended its traditional national context (Ibid.: 10). Greater conceptual discussion around this issue is important, then, as it allows us to generate shared meanings and hence provide more informed grounding for effective collective actions based on our changing contexts (Gerring, 1999). Nevertheless, the lack of consensus and clarity as to the meaning of global citizenship is amplified through its largely unproblematised use in the context of international development – a sector in which organisations face challenges with regard to achieving international development objectives in a culturally and

¹ Comhlámh is the Irish Association of Returned Development Workers based in Dublin; Suas, also based in Dublin, works on GCE and international volunteering with third-level students and recent graduates in the Republic of Ireland; the Centre for Global Education (CGE), based in Belfast, provides education services to enhance awareness of international development issues throughout the island of Ireland.

politically sensitive and relevant manner (Baillie Smith et al., 2013; Haas and Moinina, 2021; Loftsdóttir, 2016).

The ‘Going Global’ project sought to discuss these questions further with practitioners in the fields of global citizenship education (GCE) and international development more broadly, in the context of two regional workshops held in 2023, one in Belfast on 20 May 2023 and one in Dublin on 27 May 2023. These workshops, facilitated by global learning consultant Charo Lanao, had three objectives: to gather views from participants on the meaning and content of global citizenship; to provide theoretical input to inform these discussions; and, to enable participants to envisage more practice-grounded means to construct global citizenship in their work. Both workshops attracted a total of twenty-six participants for the two three-hour sessions.

The following section is an account of workshop proceedings and ensuing discussion, followed by a short concluding section discussing findings in the light of some of the literature on the subject. In the workshops, the author presented theory on the concepts of citizenship, democracy, globalisation and global citizenship, while the facilitator discussed with participants what they felt were the essential elements of global citizenship, the relationship between democracy and citizenship, the impact of globalisation on citizenship, their attitudes to dominant conceptions of global citizenship in GCE and how they approached the concept in their work. The following sections look at outcomes from participant discussions on each of these themes.

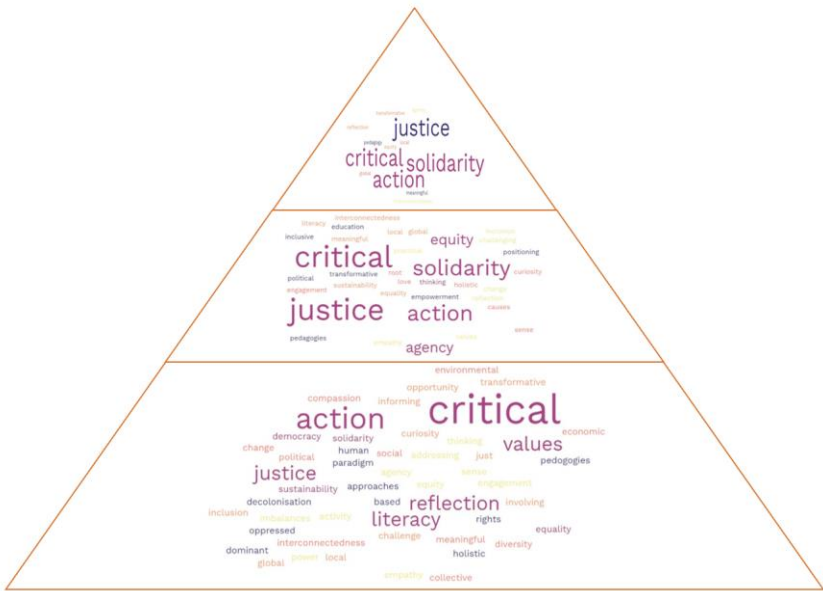
Essential elements of global citizenship

In this first section, using a World Café methodology, moving from individual to group consensus, participants were requested to identify four words which for them signalled the essential content of global citizenship. In the initial stages of the activity a very wide range of concepts were identified, but subsequently Belfast participants identified ‘learning’, ‘sustainability’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘justice’, with Dublin participants also identifying these last two, but additionally the words ‘critical’ and ‘action’ as central elements for the concept. Figure 1 below gives a flavour of the words chosen by Belfast participants, with Figure 2 doing the same for Dublin:

Figure 1: Content of Global Citizenship: Belfast (Cannon 2023: 14)



Figure 2: Content of Global Citizenship: Dublin (Ibid.)



Analysing these responses, what is notable first is the wide range of concepts and ideas provided by participants, revealing a rich and varied conception of the meaning and content of global citizenship even among relatively small groups. Secondly, it is instructive to observe Parmenter’s (2018: 332) distinction of citizenship as legal status (i.e. membership of a political collective, usually a state) and as activity, that is ‘related to a political form of life, the flourishing of which one deliberately strives to foster’ (Ibid.: 332, citing Seubert, 2014). Participant responses seem to bear out the truth of Parmenter’s observation, with participants placing an emphasis on citizenship as action (e.g. learning, activism, action, transformative, agency, communication etc.) and informed by values (i.e. justice, solidarity, equity, democracy). The concept of citizenship as status (i.e. tied to the state) is almost entirely absent from participant’s conception of global citizenship in both workshops, a revealing finding which deserves future exploration.

Relationship between democracy and citizenship

In this part of the workshop, the PI first made a presentation on definitions and characteristics of democracy and citizenship before exploring the relationship between the two. These concepts were chosen due to their emphasis in the dominant literature, which argues that citizenship and democracy are like two sides of the same coin, meaning that the greater citizenship rights are guaranteed by the state for citizens, the more democratic that state will be, and the more reduced citizenship rights, the less democratic is the state (i.e. a de-democratising dynamic) (Merkel, 2014; Marshall, 1950; Balibar, 2008). The PI concluded that while the meaning and content of citizenship and democracy are contested, they are also mutually co-dependent and historically tied to the development of the nation-state.

In response to this presentation, participants felt that democracy and citizenship regimes had been regressing rather than advancing in their respective jurisdictions. In Belfast, there was an emphasis on de-democratisation processes, both generally and in the UK. One participant commented, for example, that, 'In the era of neoliberalism and globalisation over the past fifty years, the state has gotten smaller', leading to greater inequality and higher levels of apoliticism among citizens, with a resulting reduction in civil participation for those left behind. Some participants commented that 'some rights exist above the level of the state', pointing to their universal character, while another pointed out that with a 'shrinking [national] state' and 'no global state' these cannot easily be guaranteed. In Dublin, participants also felt that the state was 'shrinking' with a negative impact on rights guarantees. One participant pointed out, however, that 'when we get into rights it's about inherent rights...the state isn't the ultimate authority'. Participants hence point to a paradox of global citizenship, already alluded to in Belfast, whereby on the one hand rights transcend states, but on the other, the state is the fundamental route of access to these rights. Additionally, in Dublin, some participants pointed to the Eurocentric nature of the global citizenship conceptualisation. As one participant put it, 'I'm so uncomfortable here. It's theoretical [given from] a man from the [Global] North. And we're here for global citizenship...to learn how to deal with people who are not included at all'.

The impact of globalisation on citizenship

The PI began this part of the workshop, presenting definitions, characterisations and impact of globalisation on democracy and citizenship. His conclusion was that in general globalisation has negatively impacted on the powers of the nation-state at the economic, political and cultural levels, which in turn has had negative impacts on the quality and reach of democracy and citizenship, particularly social citizenship. Participants in both workshops responded to this presentation with a wide variety of comments around power asymmetries between states and capital and between different categories of citizen. In Belfast, participants noted differentials of power among citizens both within states and also between national and global citizenship regimes. One participant noted that ‘in some states, some identities are not given the same status as others’. In Dublin, participants also noted differentiation of power between global capital and some states. One participant noted how the profits of companies like the United States (US)-based tech giant, Apple, ‘exceed the GDP of Norway’, illustrating the difficulty for states to regulate such large and powerful companies. Processes of neoliberal ‘deregulation’ were also pointed to as a source of such asymmetries of power. Other participants pointed once again to the Eurocentricity of the globalisation concept. One participant felt that the presentation ‘didn’t go global’ as the title of the workshop suggested, with most examples given from ‘Europe and the US’, but not from the global South. Hence, a tension was noted between the negative impact of globalisation on democracy and citizenship on the one hand and the need to respond with a truly global citizenship which can counteract these dynamics in a positive manner.

Global citizenship and its discontents

In the final part of the workshop, participants were shown a short video uploaded onto the Our World Irish Aid Awards webpage to encourage school children to think and act as ‘global citizens’ (Irish Aid Awards, 2020). The video provides examples of children from mostly developing countries acting to solve problems around education, water, waste, urban deprivation etc. mostly through technical innovation. This video was chosen as it illustrates in a short, succinct and approachable manner what being a global citizen can mean for international development agencies. Participants were asked to analyse the video in groups based around the four classic elements of citizenship: status, rights, membership

and participation. Belfast participants' overall evaluation was that the examples portrayed in the video were individualised and undifferentiated culturally (despite cases from different parts of the world being presented), whose solutions to development problems were technocratic and depoliticised, with an absence of reference to the state and collective action.

For example, regarding status, one group noted that the video 'rapidly considers communities in: Turkey, Bali (Indonesia), Bangalore (India), Jordan, Nigeria, Philadelphia (US) - interchanging cities and states without any differential - providing a thumbnail sketch at best of these communities'. Another group commented, regarding rights, that the:

"film is less concerned with rights than development deficits such as sanitation, plastic in oceans, child marriage, waste and pollution. The film is more reactive, looking at how to respond to these problems rather than consider them in the context of rights. The state is edited out of the film [with the latter] more interested in what you can do to make the world better".

Regarding membership and identity, participants thought that the:

"film focuses on individuals in each community it describes as 'young inventors, innovators and campaigners' who can make a difference. It appears to be more concerned with technological fixes through innovation than political responses and root causes".

Finally, with regard to participation, Belfast workshop participants commented that the film's 'framing device... is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda with each case study relating to a specific Goal. The kids are portrayed as individuals rising to the challenges of the Goals which are uncritically presented and assumed to be a development asset'.

In Dublin, commenting on the same video, the group considering status noted some differentiation between cases due to the social/legal situation of some of the children portrayed (one as a Syrian refugee, others as poor inner-city kids

in the United States). Regarding rights, one member of that group noted ‘there was nothing about rights’ in the film, while another exclaimed that the group ‘hated the video’, going on to comment that ‘children were bestowed with fixing the world. That child’s right is....to be a child. Bestowing that responsibility on children [i.e. fixing the world] is problematic’. The individualisation of the cases was also noted, with little reference made to collective struggle. Another participant questioned the film’s portrayal of ‘ordinary kids’. While this participant admitted that the film ‘tried to show other countries’, the group felt that the label ‘ordinary kids’ was ‘very subjective’ and may be more ‘relevant in Europe’. Another participant echoed comments in Belfast on the SDGs as the basis for the film’s portrayal of global citizenship, believing that it could limit alternative interpretations of the concept. The group considering membership and identity, questioned the ‘global’ nature of citizenship portrayed, feeling that ‘there was no relationship to being [a] global citizen because children were solving issues in their own area. There was no interconnectedness’. Finally, the group discussing participation was impressed by the film encouraging children to ‘take action’ on climate change and other pressing issues but noted the absence in the film of ‘institutions, governments, countries help[ing] that project to be accomplished’.

Constructing global citizenship in your work

In this section and, indeed, throughout both workshops, an analysis of participants’ discussions could be said to reflect three different ways of relating to the concept of global citizenship in their work: a pragmatic relationship, an agnostic one, and a sceptical one. No participant unreservedly endorsed the concept, but the categories nonetheless are useful for understanding how participants approach the concept in their work.

Pragmatists

Some participants in both workshops did not endorse the term wholeheartedly but found it useful to help understand or frame activities which connect local with non-local experiences (i.e. fostering intercultural understanding in local settings); to act as an ‘umbrella’ term to help encompass the breadth of activities carried out by their organisations; or to access funding. One Dublin participant, for example, saw the term as:

“aspirational. Clearly, it’s not materialistic. It’s a useful term for the work that I do, connecting people who are living in a flat complex in inner city Dublin with refugees down the road when they’ve been antagonistic towards one another. Using global citizenship as an aspirational term among these two cohorts...is more useful than Development Education”.

Another participant commented that, ‘The broadness of the umbrella [terminologies] allows us to do different things. Change happens in lots of different ways. It happens within systems as well as around’.

Some participants in Dublin felt that the term hasn’t really impacted on their organisation’s activities and that the change of terminology from ‘development education’ to ‘global citizenship’ was a mere formality. One participant ventured, for example, that the choice of the term ‘was a lot more functional than critical’ and that perhaps removing ‘citizenship’ from the term to make it global education might be more apt for the future. Dublin participants in particular felt that they had to work with the term in order to access funding for their activities. One participant voiced their curiosity about who in the workshop was ‘funded by Irish Aid and so has to write about global citizenship [in the application]’. Another noted that in applying for funding, ‘We have to promote the SDGs...[but] aren’t encouraged to have critical conversations about the SDGs’. In effect, it was argued, ‘Global Citizenship Education has become the Sustainable Development Goals’. Another Dublin participant commented: ‘what global citizenship is and how it’s defined doesn’t matter too much to me. As long as it’s rooted in the core values so I can get funding to do the programmes with the people who need the programmes’.

Agnostics

Agnostics acknowledge that the term can have uses, but it is important to debate and discuss its content more, particularly with other sectors such as academics. One participant in Dublin noted, for example, that the workshop was:

“one of the few sessions where we’ve actually had a definition of what [global citizenship] is. A kind of perceived definition. This is the only time I’ve ever been somewhere where we’ve actually interrogated the word in the first place. A definition is so badly needed”.

A Belfast participant commented that the ‘workshop has been important in facilitating discussion on what Global Citizenship means for the international development and development education sectors. It hasn’t been widely debated in that context’. A Dublin participant felt that ‘it’s important to talk about what we should do as global citizens, those actions would need to be meaningful. I want to hear more about research and what we should do...’ Another Dublin participant drew attention to the need to include excluded voices in discussions on the term:

“we’re always informed by dominant structures and narratives. Where the wisdom comes from is the non-dominant... We need to be accessing and involving authors from the Global South. I’d like to see a version of this [workshop] with the alternatives. This is half of what we need to do. I look forward to the other half”.

Sceptics

Sceptics find that ‘global citizenship’ is a depoliticised concept which lacks the critical edge needed to achieve the kind of changes necessary in our current global context, and is rather supportive of existing dominant systems, such as neoliberalism and Eurocentricity. One participant in Belfast compared GCE unfavourably with development education:

“Development education is a consciously political and radical form of learning with a literature steeped in [the Brazilian educationalist and radical theorist] Paulo Freire. By contrast, Global Citizenship Education appears to be a comparatively depoliticised and lightly discoursed concept without the same literature base”.

Conversely another Belfast participant reported a comment heard in another event ‘that GCE was used by the sector now because the term “development” in

“development education” is problematic. Global Citizenship more accurately describes what we do’. A Dublin participant commented on the neoliberal underpinnings of the concept of global citizenship:

“I think about the packaging and models of development and some of us have come to talk about it as ‘old wine in new bottles’. I was then asking, what are the vineyards we’re drinking from? This is the neoliberal vineyards - being raided and repacked and being sold to us”.

Conclusions

Participant positions on the concept of global citizenship - pragmatist, agnostic or sceptic - emerge from concerns found in the literature on the subject of global citizenship. Andreotti (2021) demonstrates, however, that such positioning is not of itself antagonistic, despite reflecting different professional and ideological approaches to the concept. Rather it points to the need to ‘learn to dig deeper and relate wider, together’ (Ibid.: 508) in our discussions, without necessarily arriving ‘anywhere specific’ (Ibid.).

A key finding of the project is the unfinished nature of discussion on the change from ‘development education’ to ‘global citizenship education’ which began with the consultation exercise on Irish Aid’s Global Citizenship Education strategy in 2021. Many participants consistently brought up comparisons of the two, with GCE tending to be viewed with less enthusiasm than DE. Additionally, we found in discussions a tendency to confuse ‘global citizenship’ with ‘global citizenship education’. Participants found it difficult to separate the two, and this may be due to the lack of clarity on the meaning and content of ‘global citizenship’ and the fact that in some quarters it was felt that the concept was imposed on the sector rather than being adopted freely after adequate deliberation. This points to a contradiction at the heart of global citizenship education in that professionals in the sector are being asked to prepare their students for a role whose content is disputed, which does not exist materially, and indeed may never exist. More work is, therefore, needed to discuss and debate the concept to help clarify these issues. In Northern Ireland on the other hand, while the concept is not used operationally in the sector, participants showed a clear interest in learning more about it and debating these questions further.

This project has been part of an effort to ‘dig deep and relate wider, together’, as Andreotti (Ibid.) recommends. It has done so by attempting, as Parmenter (2018) suggests, to bring political context to global citizenship discussions, drawing on political theory on key underlying concepts of global citizenship, specifically on citizenship, democracy and globalisation, as well as global citizenship itself, to help in this process. These efforts suffer from many of the critiques made in the literature and voiced in the workshop, such as Eurocentricity. Yet, an appetite was also apparent among participants to continue the conversation. One key issue which emerged in the Dublin workshop, as mentioned above, is the need to continue discussion on the relationship between the current dominance of global citizenship education in the Republic and its long history of development education. Additionally, within this, there could be discussions on funding for the sector, particularly on the suitability of having the sector under the purview of Irish Aid and not under the Department of Education.

Additionally, Parmenter (2018: 342) makes some further suggestions which can help to create ‘a valuable foundation for global citizenship education teaching and research’. These include more ‘research examining non-Western conceptualizations, perceptions, and experiences of the changing relationships between individuals and politics, and of citizenship at all levels’ (Ibid.); a greater research effort into those scattered elements of global citizenship that do exist, at least in embryonic form, ‘including the politics of global citizenship in global agendas, e.g., UN and OECD, and in diverse contexts’ (Ibid.); and more collaborative applied research ‘conducted...by politics and education specialists to explore ways of effectively using politics research and concepts to inform education for global citizenship’ (Ibid.).

Finally, there are a number of questions emerging from this project that can be considered by practitioners. First, practitioners could ask themselves where they would locate themselves in the typology of positions on global citizenship and why they would choose that location. That is, are they pragmatic, agnostic or sceptical of the concept of global citizenship, or a mix of some, all or none of these. They could further ask what needs to be done with the concept in future, based on their positioning on it, and how having such a position might impact

on their practice. Second, they could interrogate their materials from a more political perspective, asking what is included and what not in the content and construction of citizenship found in these, and why this might be the case. Here practitioners could consider the political content of citizenship, both real and suggested, the presence or absence of democracy in these materials, and if the materials are Eurocentric and if so, how might this be remedied.

A further key question is on the content, extent and impact of rights and duties in any putative global citizenship. Marshall (1950) famously identified three facets of citizenship: civil, political and social. Civil citizenship is traditionally associated with fundamental freedoms of movement, speech, religion, assembly, to own property etc. Political rights are seen as the right to stand in elections and the right to vote for a political representative in free and fair elections. Social rights are as Marshall (Ibid.) puts it, the right 'to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society' by having access to education, health, welfare etc. Global citizenship as currently conceptualised is based on the SDGs, which as some participants pointed out is not based on rights, but on aspirations and remain within the remit of individual nations to achieve, despite being promoted by the United Nations. While citizenship is predicated on equality, great inequalities remain in access to citizenship rights both within and between countries.

One fundamental right associated with citizenship is freedom of movement. Movement of people is highly restricted at a global level, despite an increasing death toll resulting from such restrictions, and is at the centre of much political debate, especially in the global North. Would global citizenship mean freedom of movement for all people of the globe, up to and including the eradication of borders and hence border controls (Jones, 2019)? If not, what should freedom of movement look like within a global citizenship regime? Additionally, which civil, political and social rights would those arriving have in their country of destination and who would guarantee them? And how should questions such as these relate to the concept of development?

Finally, on analysing their material, practitioners could ask how these absences in GCE might be made present and what research would be useful to

achieve this. Collectively these suggestions could make continued contributions to furthering discussions on the concept of global citizenship while deepening and widening that debate and enriching practice.

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