

Reading Landscapes – Identity and Citizenship Issues: discovered by students on a fieldwork visit to Belfast

Dr Gerry O'Reilly

Geography Department, St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Drumcondra, Dublin
gerry.oreilly@spd.dcu.ie

Abstract

In the sustainable development framework a cardinal element is negotiation between top-down institutions and bottom-up groups and actors. Central to this is the concept of citizenship. However with globalisation, individual citizenship has taken on ever-increasing scales; from the social contract perspective, the citizen has rights and responsibilities at varying community, state and global levels. Geographers are being challenged to translate the desiderata of good citizenship into their everyday practice of educating and working with future generations. In this context, fieldwork is essential in facilitating the process, in comparing and contrasting students' 'taken for granted' known places, and cultures with 'others' and their perceptions thereof. While the latter point may be applicable any place, it is very poignant in relation to societies in transition, and in post-conflict locations such as Northern Ireland where 50 students from St. Patrick's College, DCU, Dublin, carried out fieldwork in 2008 and 2009. On the ground, collaboration with *Coiste*, (Association of ex-political prisoners) helped ensure that the students heard different voices from post-conflict environments.

Key words; Sustainable development, citizenship, education, fieldwork, post-conflict, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Conceptual Framework

In the sustainable development framework for long lasting positive change, based on the principle of getting balances and checks between ecology, economy, and society - culture, a cardinal element is negotiation between top-down institutions and bottom-up groups and actors leading to good governance. Central to this is the concept of citizenship, which has evolved alongside the ideals of democracy, and the social contract – with negotiation being based on reciprocal rights and duties at the community and state scales (O'Reilly, 2001). However with growing flows of people and cultures, and the interconnections of globalisation, the concept of individual citizenship has taken on ever-increasing scales: community, state, federal, and global environment, development and human rights concerns (Herod, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005). Hence the citizen has rights and responsibilities at varying community, state and global UN scales, just as states have responsibility as with the United Nations programme R2P (Responsibility to Protect) (UN, 2005). While such an agenda is laudable, its application is not always evident as the citizen finds himself or herself challenged at multiple geographical scales by regulation, de-regulation and self-regulation; and where does the responsibility start or end.

Alongside economic globalisation and the consequent corporatist processes, this is being paralleled in cultural and political procedures, challenging individuals and communities to find 'their place' and 'their citizenship' in a globalising world. Bottom-up movements such as anti-globalisation groups and a myriad of NGOs manifestly challenge the democratic deficit. The acquisition of rights – human, civil and so forth – as embedded in the evolving concept of

citizenship, by its very nature challenges the established power structures. Educators and in particular Geographers are being challenged to translate the ideals of good citizenship, and by association good governance, into their everyday practice of educating and training the future generations (Clarke, 2006; Curriculum: Ireland CSPE, 2009; Patrick, 2009).

The Problematic

In order to make students, lecturers, teachers and trainers more aware of the multifaceted aspects of citizenship, and to counter the democratic deficit even in the more mature democracies, students have to re-discover their own citizenship, and through emotional intelligence or empathy 'to connect' with 'others' in real places, so enhancing their competencies of critical thinking and skills offered by the discipline of Geography. In this context, fieldtrip - work and research – is essential in facilitating the process, in the voyage of comparing and contrasting their 'taken for granted citizenships' and their known places, landscapes and cultures with 'other places and people' and the perceptions held thereof; student fieldtrip discoveries and experiences are central to this TandL process. While the latter point may be applicable any place, it is very poignant in relation to societies in transition, and in post-conflict locations such as Northern Ireland where fifty students from St. Patrick's College, Dublin, carried out fieldwork in 2008 and 2009.

As concepts of citizenship are increasingly expanding, research in this field in Geography is also progressing. This becomes evident when we contrast material in relation to 'citizenship' found in The Dictionary of Human Geography in 2004 (Johnson et al., 1994) and the new edition of this publication in 2009 (Gregory et al., 2009). Nonetheless, research falls broadly into two categories, and combinations thereof; analysis-based revealing 'differences' in concepts of citizenships; and the normative-based, postulating 'what should be' and the 'direction to be taken'. Of course the prescriptive content is at the heart of the political debate, and hence how this is played out in spatial contexts.

Rather than giving students specific classifications, parameters and discourses on citizenship - Classical, Enlightenment, Nation-State, Post-Modernist, or approaches based on such theorists as Gramsci, Foucault or Chomsky, in relation to power constructs, for instance, they were encouraged to 'discover' the different levels of citizenship through their fieldwork. From this, the major categories arose in a more 'evolutionary' manner:

Citizenship: a member of a political community, attached to city or state sovereignty;

Citizenship: social contract as embodying rights and responsibilities;

Active citizenship: people working towards the betterment of their community through participation and service;

Global Citizenship: local interests as well as global concerns including issues of human rights, environment and equality, with participatory action being central to this concept.

Methodology

Fifty third level Geography students were provided with resource material on their Moodle site, and asked to complete a pre-trip quiz four weeks before travelling to Northern Ireland (Lynch et al. 2008). While on the fieldwork in Belfast, students were divided into teams - to interrogate the cultural landscape, and look for features that were both familiar to them, and also characteristics that struck them as being different. Each team had a GPS and digital camera, with the task of taking photographs, representing familiarity, and showing differences

to their normal experience (Sidaway, 2002). They were asked to take the coordinates at each scene using the GPS and write down a description of the photograph.

In the days following the fieldtrip, students uploaded their work onto the Moodle course management system: photographs, coordinates of the picture, labels signifying 'familiar or different', and reasons for choosing that scene. Open-ended questions were also asked. Moodle's Virtual Learning Environment, acted both as a clearinghouse for the student data and an assessment tool. For a fuller description of the methodology used, see Ruth McManus and Susan Hegarty, *Becoming Geographers – promoting skills and citizenship in undergraduate fieldwork*, paper in this volume. In the same paper, they also analyse the 'familiar' label work of the students, while in this paper the 'different' label is presented.

Results

Comparative analyses of student photographs and texts, and open-ended questions revealed that their data fell broadly into four 'organic' categories:

(i) Citizenship in relation to the state: states and sovereign jurisdiction expressed as territorial and institutional constructs with the appurtenant iconography; for instance, post boxes being red in Northern Ireland within UK jurisdiction, instead of green as in the Republic of Ireland; distinctive car registration plates; statues such as that of Queen Victoria.

(ii) Citizenship linked to strong community identities and activities, and activists challenging power structures in the pursuit of development, expressed at their community scales, especially in the more economically deprived Falls and Shankill areas. Student photographs here presented images of wall murals expressing 'divided' ethno-communitarian identities. For instance, Bobby Sands in relation to the 'hunger strikes' of the 1980s and Republican traditions contesting state elites and institutions; the Battle of the Somme (1914) coupled with Unionist and Orange identities perceived as embedded within the defence of UK traditions. However, global citizenship or international issues and perspectives were photographed and commented relating to wall murals within Republican areas - human rights for instance, with images and quotations from the African American Frederick Douglas, abolitionist, champion of women's rights and supporter of Irish independence in the 19th Century; adaptations of Picasso's Guernica, and murals of contested areas such as Palestine / Israel and US involvement in Iraq. As one student stated: "*All these incredible murals – obviously the communities felt that their voices were not being heard or given a place in the regular media; and so they say what they have to say this way*". Significantly, another student commented: "*Those murals dealing with the 'Troubles' really mean nothing to me, as I wasn't even born when all that took place*".

In the Shankill area, where some redevelopment of land is taking place, a large graffiti reads: '*Local needs ignored over profits*' on one of the building site barriers, emphasising the major historical socio-economic deprivations in the area in contrast to many new developments stimulated by the post-conflict economic recovery so evident in city centre areas.

(iii) Other photographs and texts emphasized the significance of local memorial parks (e.g., Shankill) and gardens of remembrance (e.g., Falls) maintained by local communities referring to the 'fallen' heroes, or victims of the 'troubles' (1969-1998) which are not state maintained or funded, that reinforce ethno-memory and contested community, national and state citizenships. Issues related to a perceived sense of injustice and grievances that are not addressed by negotiation debilitate good citizenship.

(iv) Citizenship and boundaries within the city: photography and texts often emphasized the spatial and territorial divisions, especially the so called Peace Lines and Walls dividing communities and ‘hot spots’ in East and West Belfast, in contrast to the ‘normality’ or indeed normalisation found in Belfast city centre areas. Ruth McManus and Susan Hegarty (2009) discuss what students found as familiar in Belfast, with global images and texts of consumer culture, in their paper in this volume.

Conclusions

In this student fieldwork, issues related to citizenship were ‘discovered’ at the community, national, state and international geographical scales; and juxtaposed with their own lived experience of ‘taken for granted’ citizenship back home. Citizenship at the local scales and in certain areas of Belfast was mostly associated with community development and identities embedded within ethno-religious / Republican-Unionist traditions, loosely linked to national Irish and British cultures. This was in sharp contrast to the cosmopolitan citizenships and familiar discovered in central Belfast areas. Nonetheless, this was presented within the territorial construct of the Northern Ireland state and its iconographic red mailboxes and statues.

The fieldwork got the students out into the field to encounter the lived experiences of citizenship of people in Belfast, including a meeting with members of *Coiste*, (Association of ex-political prisoners) who told their stories of life in the city. Simultaneously students also had the opportunity to develop their competencies, doing individual and team work, including the use of GPS and digital cameras. The interconnecting linkages made by students between geography, concepts of citizenship, and geographical skills including digital work was positively commented on by students. As one student stated: “I want to do more geography like this”.

Note: I would like to thank Drs. Susan Hegarty and Ruth McManus for their help and support in writing this research paper.

References

- Clarke, L.M. (2006) A Single Transferable Geography? Teaching Geography in a Contested Landscape, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 15:1, 77-91.
- Curriculum: Ireland CSPE (Civil, Social and Political Education, Secondary School Level, Junior Cycle) (2009) See http://www.curriculumonline.ie/eng/Post-Primary_Curriculum/Junior_Cycle_Curriculum/Junior_Certificate_Subjects/Civic,_Social_and_Political_Education/Civic,_Social_and_Political_Education_CSPE_.html (Accessed 18/4/09).
- Herod, A. (2008) *Geographies of Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. London: Wiley Blackwell.
- Johnson, R.; D. Gregory and D. Smith. 1994 *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. London: Blackwell.
- Johnson, R.; D. Gregory., G. Pratt, M. Watts., and S. Whatmore. 2009 *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. London: Wiley.
- Lynch, K., Bednarz, B., Boxall, J., Chalmers, L., France, D. and Kesby, J. (2008) E-learning for Geography's Teaching and Learning Spaces, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 32:1, 135-149.

McManus, R. and S. Hegarty, (2009) *Becoming Geographers – promoting skills and citizenship in undergraduate fieldwork*, paper in this volume

O'Reilly, G. 2001 Scaling Democracy and Sustainable Development in the Irish Context: Slieveardagh, Co. Tipperary. in A. Buttimer (ed.). *Sustainable Landscapes and Lifestyles*. Cork: Cork University Press. Chapter 13.

O'Reilly, G. 2005 Ireland and Economic Globalisation: a Two-Way Process in *Geographical Viewpoint*. 31, pp. 17-28.

Patrick, J. (2009) The Concept of Citizenship in Education for Democracy. ERIC Digest. <http://www.ericdigests.org/2000-1/democracy.html> (Accessed 15/4/09).

Sidaway, J.D. (2002) Photography as Geographical Fieldwork, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 26:1, 95-103.

UN (2005) Report of the Secretary-General. In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all. UN Doc. A/59/2005.
<http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/pages/20> (Accessed 1/4/09)

E-sources:

Citizenship through Geography.

http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/pdf/secondaryschemes/citsubject_geog.pdf (Accessed 20/4/09).

Citizenship through Geography. The Nuffield Foundation.

<http://www.citizenship.org.uk/resources/citizenship-through-geography,68,NA.html>. (Accessed 18/4/09).

How can citizenship update geography? <http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/how-can-citizenship-update-geography-867>. (Accessed 12/4/09).

Geography, citizenship and education for sustainable development (ESD).

http://www.qca.org.uk/geography/innovating/key3/geography_plus/citizenship.htm. (Accessed 20/4/09).