What Is a “Good Citizen”? a Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract The concept of “good citizenship” has long been part of discussions in various academic fields. Good citizenship involves multiple components, including values, norms, ethical ideals, behaviors, and expectations of participation. This chapter seeks to discuss the idea of good citizenship by surveying the academic literature on the subject. To map the scientific discussion on the notion of good citizenship, a systematic review of 120 academic articles published between 1950 and 2019 is carried out. The review of the literature shows that good citizenship is broadly defined, incorporating notions from multiple fields, although these are mainly produced in Western countries with comparatively higher income levels. Additionally, although there is no single definition of good citizenship, the academic literature focuses on three components: the normative, active, and personal dimensions. This systematic review informs the estimation of citizenship profiles of Chap. 3 using the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2016.

Keywords Citizenship norms · Good citizenship · Systematic review · International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)

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1 Introduction

The concept of “good citizenship” is part of a long-standing discussion in various academic fields, such as political science, education, sociology, anthropology, evolution, and history, among others. In addition, good citizenship involves various components, including values, norms, ethical ideals, behaviors, and expectations of participation. Finally, the idea of good citizenship is related to diverse contemporary issues, such as patterns of political participation, the meaning of democracy and human rights, the notion of civic culture, equal rights, and the role of technology in the digital era (Bolzendahl and Coffé 2009; Dalton 2008; Hung 2012; Noula 2019).

In this regard, the notion of good citizenship can be considered as a concept with three basic characteristics: multidisciplinary, multidimensional, and polysemic. Therefore, the definition of good citizenship is a topic of constant debate and academic discussion. This chapter seeks to discuss the idea of good citizenship, with the aim of contributing to the understanding of this phenomenon and its social, political, and educational implications. In this way, this chapter aims to map the academic discussion and literature regarding the notion of good citizenship, presenting the key debates about the limits and possibilities of this concept in the framework of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2016.

In order to organize this complex debate, we start from the premise that any notion of good citizenship is composed of the interaction of two definitions. On the one hand, it involves a certain notion of membership, that is, of belonging to a community. As Stokke (2017) shows, the definition of who is (and who is not) a citizen is, in itself, a subject of debate, since the definition of citizenship implies political, social, cultural, and legal components. On the other hand, the definition of good citizenship always implies a conceptual position regarding how citizens are expected to act and what they are expected to believe (the “public good” component). In this sense, the debate focuses on the types of behaviors that should be promoted and their ethical-political basis, which is highly dynamic depending on the cultural and historical context (Park and Shin 2006). Finally, in order to answer the question about the meaning of good citizenship, it is necessary to first decide who qualifies as a citizen, and how they are expected to behave.

Considering these objectives, the chapter is structured into five sections, including this introduction. The second section describes the systematic review methodology used to select the literature and analyze the discussion regarding the concept of good citizenship. The third and fourth sections describe the results of the analysis, mapping the main trends and characteristics of the academic discussion on good citizenship and exploring its different meanings. Finally, the fifth section presents the conclusions, focusing on the conceptual challenges and methodological limitations to be considered in future research.

2 Methodology

2.1 *The Systematic Review*

We conducted a systematic review to map the academic discussion on good citizenship. This review seeks to identify, evaluate, and analyze the publications in relevant fields of study, in order to determine what has already been written on this topic, what works and what does not, and where new studies are needed (Petticrew and Roberts 2006). Through the definition of eligibility criteria, the systematic review is an explicit and reproducible methodology that allows for both an evaluation of the validity of the results of the selected studies (Higgins and Green 2011) and the objective valuation of evidence by summarizing and systematically describing the characteristics and results of scientific research (Egger 1997). In this regard, the systematic review, unlike other forms of literature review, allows for recognizing “gray” spaces in the literature, describing trends in academic research, and analyzing conceptual and methodological aspects of studies.

2.2 *Procedure*

The systematic review was conducted using five academic databases, including the main journals in the fields of education, social science, and the humanities. These databases are: (i) Journal Storage, JSTOR (<https://www.jstor.org>); (ii) Educational Resource Information Center, ERIC (<https://eric.ed.gov>); (iii) Springerlink (<https://link.springer.com>); (iv) WorldWideScience (<https://worldwidescience.org>); and (v) Taylor & Francis Group (<https://www.tandfonline.com>). For each search engine, the keywords used were: “good citizen” and “good citizenship.” Additionally, each search engine was tested with other related concepts, such as “citizenship norms,” “citizenship identities,” or “citizen norms.” The results showed that articles containing these latter concepts represented no more than 10% of new articles. For this reason, we decided to concentrate on the two keywords described above.

Considering the importance of these key concepts, the search was limited to those articles that contain these terms in the title, abstract, and/or full text. Of the five search engines, only two had the full-text option in the advanced search and only one allowed searching by keywords, then all results were filtered manually. The search was conducted from May to July 2019, obtaining 693 academic articles.

The search was restricted to those academic articles written in English and published between 1950 and 2019, as a way to study contemporary conceptualizations of good citizenship. We discarded letters to the editor, responses to articles, and book reviews. As a result, we obtained 693 articles to which, based on a full-text review, we applied an additional criterion, excluding those articles about other subjects or from other disciplines. Included in the first search exclusively for having the word “citizenship” in the abstract, there is a wide range of articles including

studies on biology, entomology, and film studies. Similarly, with this search strategy we retrieved articles on a related topic but not specifically about citizenship (e.g., leadership, public participation, social values, and immigration), articles on the concept of corporate or organizational citizenship, and articles on social studies in the school curriculum and its contribution to the education of citizens.

After applying the abovementioned selection criteria, we analyzed the abstracts of the articles to verify that they were related to the general objective of the study. As a result, all articles were selected that sought (directly or indirectly) to answer the question, “what is a good citizen?” Specifically, this involved incorporating studies that: (i) study or analyze citizen norms in conceptual, historical, political, educational, or social terms; (ii) generate models or analytic frameworks that define variables or dimensions that should make up the concept of a good citizen; (iii) explore factors on how good citizenship occurs, studying the educational, institutional, and cultural factors that would explain this phenomenon; (iv) relate the expectations (or definitions) of a good citizen with other dimensions or aspects of the political or social behavior of the subjects. The research team, which was comprised of two reviewers, held a weekly discussion (six sessions in total) during which the selection criteria were discussed and refined. This analysis resulted in the selection of a total of 120 articles (see list in Appendix A).

2.3 Analytical Strategy

The data collected in a systematic review may allow for a wide variety of studies, but the analysis depends on the purpose and nature of the data. Given that the review included quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as both theoretical and demonstrative essays, such heterogeneous literature does not allow for statistical analysis. As a result, the recommended methodology is to carry out a narrative synthesis and an analysis that focuses on relationships between different characteristics and the identification of gaps (Grant and Booth 2009; Petticrew and Roberts 2006).

The narrative synthesis is a process that allows for extracting and grouping the characteristics and results of each article included in the review (Popay et al. 2006), and can be divided into three steps: (i) categorization of articles; (ii) analysis of the findings within each category; and (iii) synthesis of the findings in the selected studies (Petticrew and Roberts 2006). The first step towards the narrative synthesis consisted of reading, coding, and tabulating the selected documents in order to describe their main characteristics. A set of categories was designed to classify documents according to four dimensions: general characteristics, purpose, methodology, and results.

To analyze these categories, we transformed data into a common numeric rubric and organized it for thematic analysis, using the techniques proposed by Popay et al. (2006). The first category was used to summarize the quantity and characteristics of the published studies, while the thematic analysis focused on systematically identifying the main, recurrent, and/or most important concepts of good citizenship.

3 The Concept of Good Citizenship in Academia

Despite being a topic of interest for several decades, academic production on good citizenship tends to be concentrated in the second decade of the 21st century. Since 2009, there has been an explosive increase in the number of scientific papers published on this topic (Fig. 1). Although an important part of this growth may be due to the global pressures of academic capitalism to publish in academic journals (Slaughter and Rhoades 2009), it could also be the case that academic communities have cultivated a growing interest in studying this issue.

Although few in number, the earliest articles published represent a landmark for the discussion. Thus, for example, the text of Almond and Verba (1963), which analyzes through interviews the perceptions of individuals in communities in five countries (United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, and Mexico) and highlights their different participation profiles, has been repeatedly cited in the discussion with 263 references (as of August 2019), according to Google Scholar. Another classic text is Ichilov and Nave (1981), which aims at understanding the different dimensions of citizenship by surveying young Israelis. To this end, it generates the following five criteria, which have been widely used in academic discussions: (i) citizenship orientation (affective, cognitive, or evaluative); (ii) nature of citizenship (passive or active); (iii) object of citizenship (political or non-political); (iv) source

Fig. 1 Academic papers by year of publication

of demand (mandatory or voluntary); and (v) type of guidance (support principles or behavior).

The selected articles are geographically concentrated in two aspects: by institutional affiliation and by the location of their studies. Considering the institutional affiliation of the authors, 32.77% of the articles were produced in the United States, a figure that rises to more than 60% when the countries of Western Europe and Australia are included. This bias is maintained, although to a lesser extent, when analyzing the countries where the studies were carried out. Moreover, more than 50% of the studies were carried out in the United States, England, and the democracies of Western Europe. Africa (4.24%) and Latin America (2.54%) were the regions least represented in the studies. These characteristics, which tend to be representative of global academic production in the social sciences (Connell 2007), may encourage certain notions of good citizenship that are anchored in Anglo-Saxon traditions, such as the liberal conception of citizenship studied by Peled (1992), or more recently, the conception of active citizenship (Ke and Starkey 2014), both of which have had an important influence on academic discussion about good citizenship.

Finally, the third characteristic of academic production is related to the multiple research fields and diverse purposes of the studies that deal with the concept of good citizenship. Research on good citizenship is published in multiple disciplines. Of the articles included in the review, 82.29% are concentrated in three disciplines: education, political science, and sociology. However, there are also articles associated with journals of history, philosophy, anthropology, and law. Additionally, we identified six main objectives from the articles reviewed (Table 1). The most common objectives are related to bottom-up research, which seeks to gather information on how diverse populations understand good citizenship, and top-down research, which seeks to conceptualize and/or define the idea of good citizens based on conceptual, historical, or political analysis. In addition, there are a wide variety of studies that

Table 1 Distribution of papers by main objective

Main objective	Number	Percent (%)
To study citizen norms in conceptual, historical, political, educational, or social terms	26	21.67
To generate models or analytical proposals on what variables should make up the concept of good citizenship	12	10.00
To explore factors on how good citizenship occurs, investigating the educational, institutional, and cultural factors	18	15.00
To associate good citizenship with other dimensions or aspects of political or social behavior	9	7.50
To study the perceptions of the population regarding the concept of good citizenship	26	21.67
To study education programs or policies that promote citizenship	27	22.50
Other	2	1.67
Total	120	100

seek to explain good citizenship, as well as studies that use the idea of a good citizen to explain other behaviors, skills, or knowledge. In other words, in addition to being multidisciplinary, research on good citizenship has multiple purposes.

In sum, although the academic discussion on good citizenship has been mainly developed during the last two decades in the most industrialized Western countries, the academic research is a field of ongoing and open debate.

4 Understanding the Meaning of “Good Citizenship”

As an academic field with a lively ongoing discussion, the notion of good citizenship is associated with different sets of ideas or concepts. Some keywords were repeated at least three times in the articles reviewed (Table 2). Only those articles that used a keyword format were included. The most frequent concepts are related to education, norms, social studies, political participation, and democracy.

Table 2 Frequency of keywords

Keyword	Number of times appeared as keyword	Frequency (%)
Citizenship	25	7.35
Citizenship education	15	4.41
Good citizen	9	2.65
Good citizenship	9	2.65
Social studies	8	2.35
Citizenship norms	7	2.06
Civic education	7	2.06
Democracy	5	1.47
Active citizenship	4	1.18
Engaged citizenship	4	1.18
Citizens	3	0.88
Duty-based citizenship	3	0.88
Civic engagement	3	0.88
Political participation	3	0.88
Education	3	0.88

This indicates that, first, studies tend to associate good citizenship with civic norms and citizen learning, highlighting the formative nature of the concept. Second, studies that associate good citizenship with other dimensions of citizenship (such as knowledge or civic attitudes) or contemporary global problems (such as migration) are comparatively scarcer.

Another way to approach the concept of good citizenship is by analyzing the definitions proposed by the authors in the articles studied. Most of the articles propose characteristics or aspects of good citizenship (in 43.8% of the cases) that, instead of creating new definitions, are often based on existing political, non-political, liberal, or philosophical concepts. In this regard, many papers define good citizenship based on specific behaviors. In contrast, other authors (18.6%) refer to citizenship rules when it comes to voting or participating in politics, thereby seeking to relate the concept of the good citizen with a specific civic attitude—participation in elections. Finally, a large group of studies define good citizenship in terms of the values, virtues, or qualities of a good citizen (22.6%). Within the group of studies that propose new definitions, it is possible to identify two main categories: studies that propose types of citizenship, such as Dalton (2008), distinguishing between “duty” and “engaged” citizenship, and works, such as Westheimer and Kahne (2004), which differentiate between “personal responsible citizenship,” “justice-oriented citizenship,” and “participatory citizenship.”

Finally, the meaning of good citizenship can be analyzed by studying the variables used in the studies. Among the quantitative studies included in the review, only 28.3% use international surveys such as ICCS, the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the United Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID) Survey, and the European Social Survey (ESS). Each of these surveys contained a slightly different definition of good citizenship and the variables used to measure the concept (Table 3).

In general, the indicators used to measure citizenship in the different surveys share certain similarities. Variables associated with rules (such as obeying the law or paying taxes) are present in all surveys. Additionally, variables related to participation also have an important presence, especially (although not only) related to voting in national elections. To a lesser extent, surveys include variables related to solidarity (supporting people who are worse off than yourself) as well as attitudes related to critical thinking and civic culture (knowing the history of the country, thinking critically).

5 Discussion and Conclusions

The concept of good citizenship can be considered an umbrella term, which includes ethical, political, sociological, and educational aspects and discussions about who qualifies as a citizen and how they should act. The systematic review has shown

Table 3 Dimensions and variables of good citizenship in international surveys

Survey	Dimension	Variables
Citizenship, involvement, democracy (CID) survey 2000–2001	Patterns of good citizenship	(i) Form own opinion; (ii) Be self-critical; (iii) Obey laws; (iv) Not evade taxes; (v) Think of others; (vi) Show solidarity
European social survey 2002	Good citizen	(i) Active in politics; (ii) Active in voluntary associations; (iii) Forming independent opinions; (iv) Obeying laws and regulations; (v) Supporting people worse off than yourself; (vi) Voting in elections
International social survey program 2004	Citizenship norms: Civil, political, and social responsibilities	(i) Never try to evade taxes; (ii) Always obey laws; (iii) Always vote in elections; (iv) Active in social and political associations; (v) Keep a watch on the actions of government; (vi) Try to understand the reasoning of people with other opinions; (vii) Choose products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons; (viii) Help people in your country who are worse off than yourself; (ix) Help people in the world who are worse off than yourself
International civic and citizenship education study (ICCS) 2009	Good citizenship behaviors	(i) Voting in every national election; (ii) Joining a political party; (iii) Learning about the country's history; (iv) Following political issues in the newspaper, on the radio, on TV, or on the internet; (v) Showing respect for government representatives; (vi) Engaging in political discussions; (vii) Participating in peaceful protests against laws believed to be unjust; (viii) Participating in activities to benefit people in the local community; (ix) Taking part in activities promoting human rights; (x) Taking part in activities to protect the environment; (xi) Working hard; (xii) Always obeying the law

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Survey	Dimension	Variables
ICCS 2009 asian regional module	Student perceptions of good citizenship	(i) A person who obeys the law is a good citizen; (ii) A person who obeys the law but does not behave morally is not a good citizen; (iii) One can only be a good citizen if one is a good moral person; (iv) Having good morality is more important than having good knowledge for one to be a good citizen; (v) Self-cultivation is an important process of becoming a good citizen; (vi) For one to become a good citizen one must have a high quality of spirituality; (vii) Even if a person behaves properly they cannot be a good citizen without a high quality of spirituality

that good citizenship is broadly defined, although these notions are mainly valued in Western countries with comparatively higher income levels.

For this reason, the definition of good citizenship used is, in large part, highly dependent on the research objective of the academic endeavor. In our case, the analysis is based on ICCS 2016, which defines good citizenship in relation to notions such as conventional citizenship, social movement citizenship, and personal responsibility citizenship (Köhler et al. 2018). The variables included in ICCS 2016 are related to the three main dimensions of good citizenship: normative, active, and personal. These three components of good citizenship have been essential in the academic discussion in the last seven decades, constituting the central corpus of the concept, although this definition does not incorporate current discussions on good citizenship, which focus, for example, on the notion of global citizenship (Altikulaç 2016) or the idea of digital citizenship (Bennett et al. 2009). These latter concepts are part of the ongoing debate on good citizenship, although it seems that more work is needed to better understand how these notions of citizenship are related to the ways in which individuals or groups in society relate to power and exercise it to shape the public sphere.

This systematic review has mapped the academic discussion to date on good citizenship. However, despite its usefulness, this review has a number of limitations. Firstly, it summarizes and analyzes the academic discussion, ignoring the gap between the scientific debate on good citizenship and the social discussion related to this subject. Secondly, it focuses on English-language literature, which may result

in a bias towards publications produced in Western countries. In spite of these limitations, the review allows us to study the process of defining the concept of good citizenship, and to identify the main debates related to this notion, which is the central focus of this book.

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Appendix A

The following list of publications is the reviewed references for the systematic review conducted in this chapter.

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