

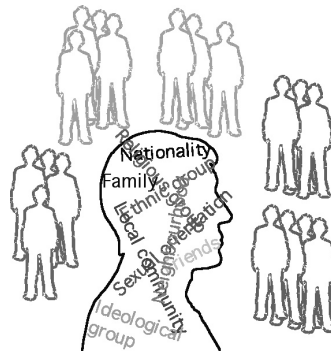


What senses of belonging do you recognise in yourself?
Which groups or communities do you feel a relationship to?



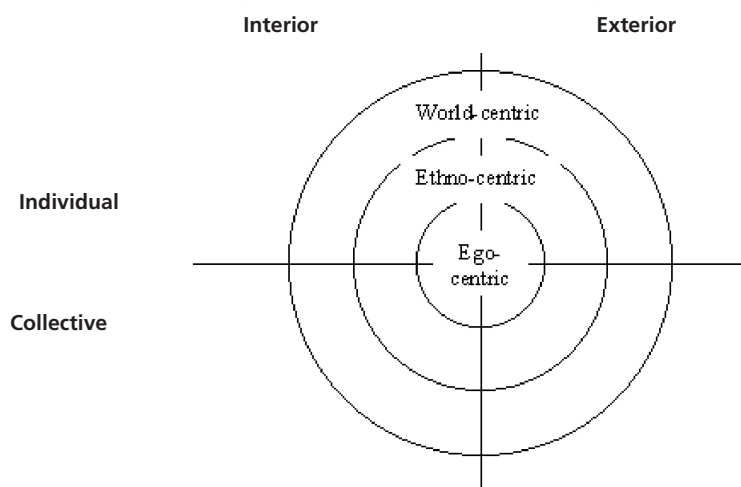
The more senses of belonging we recognise in ourselves, the more aware we become of the complexity of our identity. At the same time, each of these senses of belonging opens us up to a new group of people. The more senses of belonging we are aware of, the more able we are to relate to and interact with other people. In other words, identity - if it is considered in all its complexity - whilst distinguishing us from others, also implies openness to different individuals, other groups and our common humanity. However, this can only be the case if we do not reduce identity to solely a couple of senses of belonging.

Figure 8 – Multiple Senses of Belonging



This process of development involves a move away from ego-centrism and towards a more world-centric view of the world and approach to people, as our consciousness expands from an awareness of ourselves to one including those close to us to one embracing all humanity. Such a process is not always easy and sometimes provokes fears (e.g. losing one's national identity). It is important to remember that as a more world-centric consciousness emerges, it transcends and includes the earlier more ego-centric and ethno-centric ways of thinking – they do not disappear, they are simply framed within a more complex way of thinking, making their expression more healthy and constructive. (See Figure 9 – inspired by Wilber (2000))

Figure 9 – Developing Wider Senses of Belonging



The different senses of belonging of each individual do not have the same importance (e.g. you may rank your sense of belonging to a religious group higher than that of your nationality) .



**A History of Europe
and Citizenship**

**Contemporary
Approaches
to Citizenship**

**Future
Developments**

**Our Conceptual
Framework**

**Contemporary
Approaches
to Education
for European
Citizenship**

**Our Educational
Approach
to European
Citizenship**

**Citizenship
Scenarios –
Project Examples**

The order of importance changes continually, and new belongings appear. But their different levels of importance should not imply that one cancels another out, even if they seem to be difficult to combine. For example, being of Spanish nationality and also a German inhabitant.

In terms of values, this complexity and diversity of individual identities indicates that it would be unrealistic to think about a citizenship consisting of a fixed and inflexible set of values for all the different situations that individuals are confronted with. On the other hand, an awareness of the complexity of individual identities should not imply falling into ethical relativism by changing radically and constantly our personal behaviour, attitude or set of values, depending on the situation.

Complexity and diversity of individual identities implies the articulation of a minimum common ethical ground based on the so-called ethic of «responsibility»; I have an ethical responsibility because my acts have an impact on the community/ies I belong to; I feel responsible towards them. A growing consciousness of senses of belonging would, therefore, imply a growing universalism in the ethical awareness of individuals. As we recognise more senses of belonging in ourselves, we come to see the complexity in others as well. Simplistic prejudice tends to diminish, as our perspectives broaden and our capacity for dealing with diversity and complexity increases. It is important to note that although the potential for this kind of development exists in every human being, it does not happen automatically. It depends very much on the life conditions which we have to deal with, as well as the conditions for change present in us and our environment.

This approach rooted in the senses of belonging embraces two important affirmations. Firstly, everybody is different, is influenced by different life conditions, has different values and needs, and, therefore, needs to be treated as their individual condition determines. At the same time, it acknowledges that different individuals are connected with different groups and in the end all people are connected by the very fact of their being human – equality of being. In the words of the Council of Europe campaign, “All Equal, All Different”. Within these affirmations, all of us are negotiating our agency as individuals and our communion with others.

**“We are all negotiating our agency as individuals
and our communion with others”**

European Citizenship

Apart from nationalities, a lot of other adjectives have been used combined with citizenship: e.g. environmental citizenship, student citizenship, feminist citizenship. Too often those adjectives which emphasise a certain understanding of citizenship are only trying to promote a legitimate but exclusive sense of belonging in a specific group of individuals.

Should European be one more adjective of citizenship? Should “European Citizenship” be one more “kind of citizenship”?

 What is it that makes European Citizenship different from any other kind of citizenship, in your opinion? 



The identification of the individual with a continental reality which is already part of their life is probably desirable; the sense of belonging to Europe is important. This sense of belonging to Europe is necessary, with all the external symbols attached to it, but European Citizenship should not be reduced to it. European Citizenship, even considered from the point of view of the individuals, should be more than another sense of belonging to another «family» and the promotion of it.



Howard Williamson, a researcher and youth worker, underlines the importance of the local sense of belonging since, apart from being important in itself, it is the first and most immediate opportunity for practising citizenship (Bridges for Training event, 2001). An important step on the way to developing a more world-centric European Citizenship is therefore to develop citizenship on a more local level. This should not be forgotten – we cannot expect everyone to immediately embrace the whole of humanity.

From the perspective of the individual, European Citizenship should be the process and status which makes it reasonably possible to exercise our multiple and dynamic senses of belonging (including the local or the national one) even if sometimes it might be problematic to combine them. European Citizenship would mean then, for each European, to integrally live and develop their identity.

European Citizenship would be both a process and a status which ideally would allow individuals to be fully their own selves and at the same time to be an active part of their community/ies all around Europe. This, without renouncing any part of their identity or their senses of belonging, but deepening them.

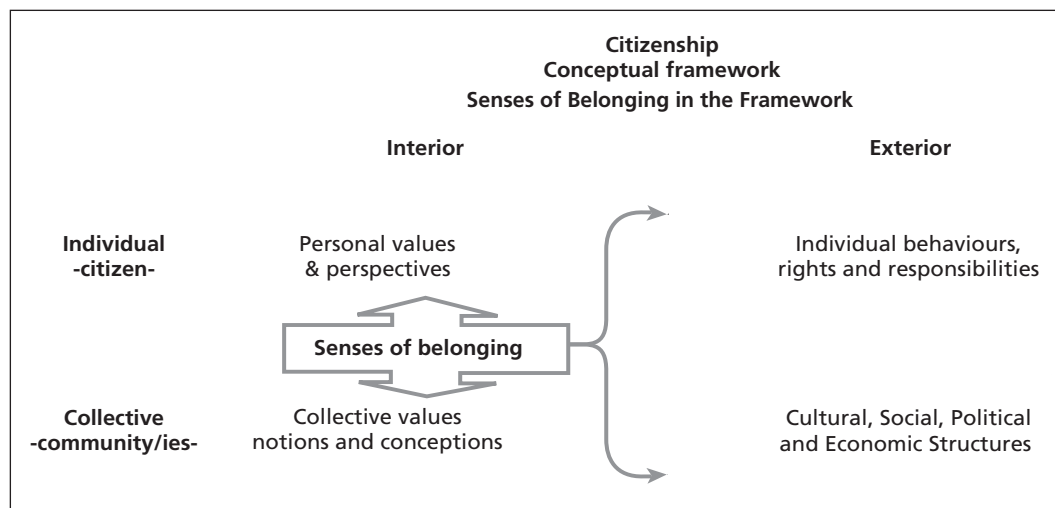
 Do you agree with this statement? 

European Citizenship would be a basis for allowing and encouraging somebody to have and develop multiple senses of belonging e.g. French, Ukrainian or Irish; from an ethnic majority or minority; female or male; a worker, student or manager; a mother or father; *and* a Christian, Jew or Muslim, and so on.

Relevance for youth work

This approach - senses of belonging - describes and relates the interior expressions of the collective and individual dimensions of citizenship. In this approach the exterior dimension of citizenship is considered as a consequence of the interior one.

Figure 10 – Senses of Belonging in the Framework





The idea of senses of belonging has been used by sociologists and psychologists to analyse the identity and role of the individual in complex post-modern societies and to describe the so-called “poliedric” (with more than one face) identities. Private companies, for marketing purposes, promote a sense of belonging with their member or customer cards. Social classes, trade unions, political parties and youth organisations quite often say that the sense of belonging among their members is lacking.

As we see, the notion of “senses of belonging” is very much present and used in different sectors of society. At least for this reason it is useful to start to draw some conclusions about its relevance for our youth work in relation to the concept of citizenship.

This second approach to the issue of citizenship through the senses of belonging gives us a perspective about what happens, from the point of view of the individual, in the interaction between individual and community.

We could say that this approach is “person-centred”, since the description of the relation between the individual and the community is done through an individual notion: the senses of belonging.

Without going too much into detail at this point and without pretending to explain everything through this approach, we think that it can help to understand the identities, behaviours, tensions and even apparent «contradictions» of individuals, particularly of young people.

Youth work, at the end of the day, is a question of working for and with young people. To consider the senses of belonging of individuals can, as a first step, help us to understand others’ identity and the mechanisms of interaction of individuals living in complex and demanding societies.

This is especially relevant in some youth work fields such as minorities, discrimination, anti-racism, where the attention to and the consideration of the individual dimension is particularly important.

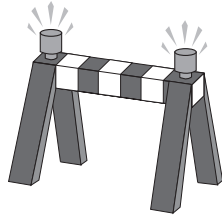
Citizenship as a dynamic, complex and integral concept ²

As we have seen in our historical overview, until recently the concept of citizenship has been more commonly understood in rather static and institutionally dominated terms: being a citizen was primarily a question of the legalities of entitlements and their political expression in democratic polities. The dimensions of identity and inclusion seemed to present few problems for the realisation of citizenship, in that European societies were understood to be essentially homogeneous in ethnic, cultural and linguistic terms – the presence of minorities notwithstanding. Internal difference and diversity may have been registered, but the dominance of majority ‘national’ ethnicity, culture and language remained largely unquestioned.

This is no longer so. Across Europe, the proportion of “denizens” (non-citizen residents) living in the different countries of Europe is bound to rise in the decades to come as a consequence of mobility between countries as well as inflows into Europe from outside. The assertion of the *right to difference* by minority groups – indigenous or otherwise – is now a well-established feature of European social and political life. This means that the concept of citizenship itself is shifting to a broader-based notion, in which legal and social rights and entitlements continue to provide an essential element, but in which negotiated and culturally-influenced understandings of citizenship are becoming more prominent.

Taking such a broad understanding of citizenship implies acknowledging an individual’s personal development, and a society’s interior development (e.g. their value systems and ways of thinking). An individual and society will engage differently with the four dimensions of citizenship - social, economic, cultural, political - depending on the way of thinking that is most influential for them at a certain time. Working with citizenship, therefore, also implies paying attention to both the personal development of the individuals, and the underlying group development in the society. An understanding of these states and dynamics enables one to work with the four dimensions in such a way as to be able to meet the needs of people in their specific context.

2. This section was developed partly in reference to «Learning for active citizenship: a significant challenge in building a Europe of knowledge» European Commission <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/citizen/citiz-en.html>



In national (or regional) groups, ask people to discuss and note down what they feel are the most influential values in their country or region. Note down what percentage of the population you think relates to each value. Compare the results of the different countries/regions, and discuss implications this might have for co-operation in Europe.

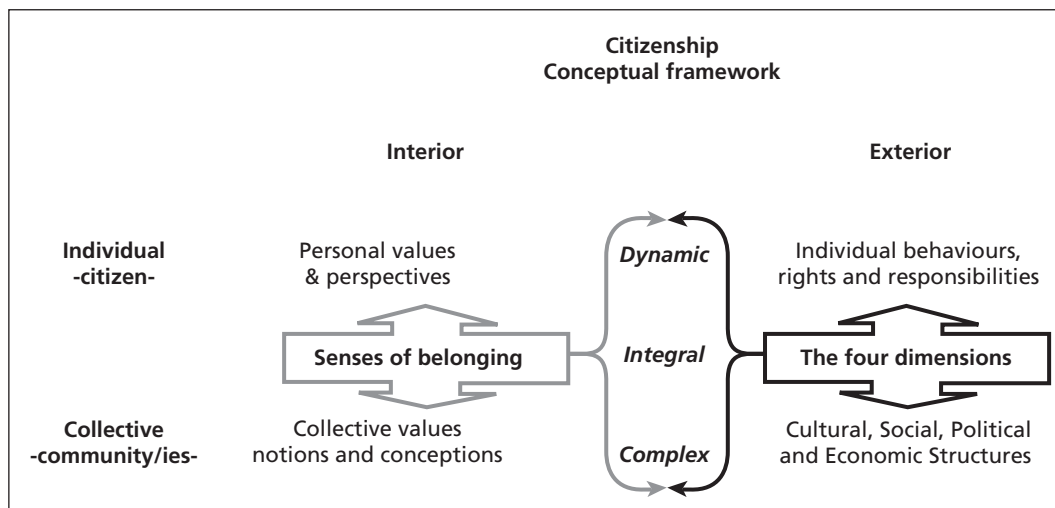
The concept of citizenship is, thereby, becoming more fluid and **dynamic**, in conformity with the nature of modern societies themselves. In this context, the practice of citizenship becomes a method for social inclusion, in the course of which people together create the experience of becoming the architects and actors of their own lives.

This implies that a more **integral** concept of citizenship is more appropriate to modern societies, which can incorporate legal, political and social elements as well as working critically with a foundation of diverse and overlapping values and identities.

Citizenship is a **complex** concept that enables the maintenance of a negotiated social integration that can adequately encompass all those who live in today's Europe and hence have a stake in its shape and future.

Looking back to the two approaches to citizenship previously described, we can see that the on-going development of all the four dimensions of citizenship and the changing and multiple senses of belonging of individuals are an expression of this dynamism, integrity, and complexity in the understanding of citizenship. Those two different and complementary approaches help us to connect the individual and collective dimension of citizenship and its interior and exterior expression.

Figure 11 – The Complete Conceptual Framework



Thinking about citizenship today involves, as in our conceptual framework, exploring the bridges and interactions between different and traditionally isolated approaches. It would be precisely there, in the connections and mutual influences of the different approaches, that we could probably find the richest keys to understand the complex and permanently changing nature of citizenship.

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Our Educational Approach to European Citizenship

Citizenship Scenarios – Project Examples



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Approaches
to Citizenship**

**Future
Developments**

**Our Conceptual
Framework**

**Contemporary
Approaches
to Education
for European
Citizenship**

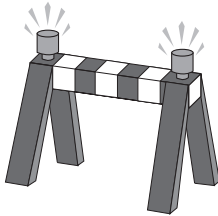
**Our Educational
Approach
to European
Citizenship**

**Citizenship
Scenarios –
Project Examples**



Using the framework above, make a map of your own citizenship.
The following questions go with different quadrants:

- What are your personal values? (Individual Interior)
 - How do you express your values?
What rights are important for you to claim?
- What responsibilities are important for you to take on?
(Individual Exterior)
 - What are your main senses of belonging?
What values do you share with those communities?
(Collective Interior)
- How do you engage with the cultural, social, political
and economic structures and systems of your communities?
(Collective Exterior)



Promoting a *complex* understanding of citizenship implies, especially nowadays, challenging simplistic answers (e.g. reducing citizenship to a list of rights and obligations towards the state), and providing space for everyone to be actors in their own plays, with their variety of needs, values and ways of thinking. Promoting a *dynamic* understanding of citizenship implies gently engaging people's resistance to the rapid changes in Society (e.g. the impact of technological changes or growing internationalisation processes). Promoting an *integral* understanding of citizenship implies putting back into its wider context every reductionism of reality (e.g. by considering the growing multiethnic and multicultural composition of our communities).

In other words, facing and promoting a complex, dynamic and integral understanding of citizenship implies engaging with the permanent challenge of constantly reconsidering the role and potential of individuals, as citizens in our changing societies.