THE IDEA OF CITIZENSHIP: AMERICAN AND ROMANIAN APPROACHES
- An Outline -

Introduction

Emerging out of the ancient Greek agoras and conceptualized by philosophers who associated it with immortality and cosmic symmetry, citizenship has never lost its affiliation with the public space. Due to the transformations suffered by the public sphere especially since the beginning of modernity, the concept has evolved along various lines so that nowadays citizenship is a very complex idea pertaining to all realms of the human existence. This may seem true only of contemporary western societies, where citizenship forms the basis of society and is able to carry on peacefully with its double, and, potentially, conflicting nature – individual and collective. In the so-called advanced democracies of today, the citizen is both holder of individual rights and an integral part of the political legitimation process. Access to political power and justification for decisions is gained by resorting to citizenry.

What is going on in the rest of the world? In those countries where there is a one-party regime and other political parties are either banned or reduced to the status of puppets of the ruling organization the collective side of the concept is conflated at the expense of its individual nature. That is why the countries where communism still remains the official state doctrine assume the label of popular democracies. However, the legitimacy that they claim to draw from the people, proudly called citizenry, proves its artificiality when the regime resorts to criminal actions to stay in power, or decision-making is in the hands of the party elite, no matter how “progressive” they might be.

In other parts of the world, there may be political pluralism and individual rights granted by a constitution, but the regime is too corrupted to be able to protect the rights of the majority and the citizens too impoverished and disappointed to exert their sovereignty properly. If such societies are menaced by the fact that individual identities may be defined exclusively on religious or ethnic grounds, the idea of citizenship is made redundant and the citizens’ most obvious instrument, i.e. elections, may prove suicidal. It often happens that the regime turns to dictatorship to prevent the fundamentalists’ or nationalists’ access to power, even if it means to trample on basic citizen rights.

Where does Romania stand? We are accustomed to say that ours is a country in transition, on the road to become an advanced democracy. All state-related democratic institutions are in place and functioning, elections are free and there is a market economy, appreciated as “viable” by the White House at the beginning of the war in Iraq. Romania has undoubtedly come a long way since 1990, when the miners ransacked Bucharest University and beat students, young people or people wearing glasses in the streets of our Capital, or when Hungarians and Romanians engaged in bloody street

fights in Targu Mures, all with the blessing of political authorities. In 2002, this country was invited to join NATO, and EU admission is not far either (Januay 2007). Yet, the level of corruption is so high that US and European officials have publicly warned Romanian authorities. According to all polls, the Romanian public opinion is well aware of the magnitude of this phenomenon. However, the same polls indicate that only a minority of Romanians thinks the citizenry can do anything to change that. In fact, except for voting, there are virtually no other citizenship "powers" that the vast majority of Romanians (90%) recognize. The final chapter will discuss a possible (and practical) solution to the crisis of citizen participation in Romania. What is worth mentioning here is that the crisis of citizenship has recently become an important issue in western democracies as well. The reasons are usually different, but sometimes they may converge. But first, a look into the protean nature of citizenship is necessary.

Citizenship Definitions

As always, a good way to start discussing a concept is to reproduce dictionary definitions. In the interest of this work, I chose four dictionaries and I did not restrict myself to one entry. The Merriam - Webster Unabridged Dictionary gives the following definitions of the word *citizen*: 1. An inhabitant of a city or a town; especially one entitled to the rights and privileges of a freeman; 2.a: a member of a state, b: a native or naturalized person who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to protection from it; 3. A civilian as distinguished from a specialized servant of the state. *Citizenship* is defined as follows: 1. The status of being a citizen; 2.a: membership in a community (or a college); b: the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community.

To know what *cetăţean* (citizen) and *cetăţenie* (citizenship) mean in Romanian, I turned to the prestigious Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language. Thus, the word *cetăţean* means: 1. an inhabitant of a state, who enjoys civil and political rights and has certain obligations towards that state; 2. (Vocative Case) an official form of address; a word used to address a person whose name we do not know. *Cetăţenie* is defined as a citizen's legal condition or the status of being a citizen.

Despite obvious similarities due to the universality of the terms, the definitions yield different conceptual approaches that are relevant for this thesis. First and foremost, the idea of membership is somewhat absent from the Romanian definitions. It is not just that the term *inhabitant* was preferred over that of *member*, but the kind of relationship envisaged between the individual and the state provides little room for other citizens or for interpersonal relations; the more so in the case of the citizenship definitions. The dictionary does not miss anything here. It is simply that the semantic content of the word in contemporary Romanian is restricted to the legal and lexical (derivation) aspects of *citizenship*.

The second subtler issue again refers to the relationship between state/ government and the individual. While the English definition alludes to liberalism and the idea of civil liberties, the form of social contract implied by the Romanian entry is closer to Rousseau's model, which presupposes a more abstract idea of citizen that transcends individual interests to become the expression of the General Will or Interest, the sole source of legitimacy for any power. It follows from here that the individual citizen is more likely to relate dialectically to the state, rather than the ever-changing but concrete government. It also means that the citizen becomes an integral part of collective sovereignty and does not need to focus on liberal values and individual rights.

Another French influence on the meaning of *cetăţean* is its use as a form of address. The idea of equality can be inferred here.

For a more specialized definition of citizenship I turned to a Romanian dictionary of politics, Sergiu Tamas's *Dictionary of Politics. Democratic Institutions and Civic Culture*, which defines the term as "a citizen's legal condition, which synthesizes the variety of social, economic, political and juridical relations between the citizen and a certain state". Similar to the entry of the explanatory dictionary, this definition alludes to the abstract nature of citizenship, which is seen here as a legal construct. However, the second part of this definition opens the semantic content, enumerating more areas of the public space in which the concept operates.

For comparison I resorted to Jay M. Shafritz's *Dorsey Dictionary of American Government and Politics*. The concept is defined as

> the dynamic relation between a citizen and his or her nation. The concept of citizenship involves rules of what a citizen might do (such as vote), must do (pay taxes), and can refuse to do (pledge allegiance). Increasingly, the concept involves benefits or entitlements that a citizen has a right to demand from government. In some jurisdictions, citizenship is a requirement for public employment[1].

This definition assigns citizenship the condition of a normative institution regulating the citizen's action. According to this view, the concept serves to change the meaning of *do*, the fundamental verb of human action. Maybe the realms of possibility, obligation and ability (here with a negative meaning, as refusal to do) are necessary mediators for the agent (the citizen) itself is also regarded as an institution. However, the tension within the dual nature of the citizen – human and institutional – can become problematic.

As a person, the citizen can disagree with what he or she must do according to citizenship rules. Such would be the case with someone practicing civil disobedience by refusing to pay taxes. This person, however, appeals to the so-called "higher law", thus

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[1] Jay M. Shaffritz, *The Dorsey Dictionary of American Government and Politics,* Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988, …

partially recovering the institutional character of the citizen's nature. If, for personal reasons, a citizen does not vote, he or she is in contradiction with one requirement and, allegedly, the relation with the community (nation) has to suffer. In either case, the person risks losing status for not having satisfied the requirements of quality citizenship.

The definition also points out the tendency to associate citizenship with affirmative action and welfare state policies. This idea seems to favor the human side of the notion of citizen. Both meanings of the concept imply a crucial relationship between citizen and action. I refer here to meaningful action which, according to Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory, is objectified in a way similar to texts, by the growing distance between its significance and the agent's intention. This can only happen during the continuous process in which history "records" human action, thus turning it into social action so that human actions become institutions. The hermeneutic action theory can provide an interesting rationale for this understanding of citizenship in connection with action rules. It is the significance of many previously objectified human actions that constitutes the institutional rule.

History has played a major role in the process of institutionalizing not only meaningful human action but also citizenship and even the citizens themselves. Let us now start probing the history of the idea of citizenship.

History of the concept

The difficulty of working with dualistic notions can be overcome if we distinguish between what is public and what is private. Stating his support for traditional categories such as public sphere, private sphere and public opinion, Habermas observed the incapacity of jurisprudence, politics and sociology to produce more precise denotations. At the starting point of his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas defines "publicity" in terms of accessibility but he also enumerates several understandings of the adjective including its association with state institutions and, therefore, authority, or "public force". The state owes this characteristic to the task of looking after the general public interest of all citizens. For a better understanding of the evolution of the concept of citizenship and its dialectic relation with the public sphere, I will follow the no less traditional path of starting with the Greek roots of western thought.

The origins of citizenship lie in the idealization of the *polis*, the ancient Greek city-state. This model of public sphere was defined in contrast with the private sphere, the *oikon*, crushed under the rule of the necessary and the ephemeral. The public sphere is the realm of liberty, equality and immortality. It is an abstract political community formed by citizens, who are seen as abstract entities, whose status involves the transcendence of their concrete individuality. This status, i.e. citizenship, presupposed the idea of equality of all citizens, despite all the differences that separate them as individuals. On

the grounds of their equality, the citizens can establish relations on a mutual basis, thus eliminating hierarchy and subordination. Therefore, citizenship also implies freedom.

The Greeks understood greatness as permanence and human greatness was conceived in terms of words and deeds. The public sphere was constituted around talking and debating (*lexis)*; things turn to words in the agora; in the dispute among equal citizens, the most virtuous, through their words and deeds, come to the fore and achieve immortal glory (Habermas).

In practice, the Greeks created direct or participatory democracy. Every citizen could expect to participate in the ruling assembly at least once during his lifetime. Citizenship was, nevertheless, an exclusive status. It relied on property and birthright (gender, ethnicity). Non-Greeks, women, slaves and laborers were excluded from the public sphere. They were confined to the obscurity of the household and "shameful" and "miserable" economic relations driven by necessity.

The Roman law operated the distinction between public and private and defined the public sphere as *res publica* thus creating an institutional environment for citizenship that exists even nowadays. Less idealized than the Greek model, Rome's contribution to the development of citizenship is more enduring. Rome institutionalized citizenship defining it in terms of legal status. It was therefore much more inclusive. Although it still excluded women and slaves, citizenship as defined by Roman law was not an ethnic matter. Personal wealth was not a criterion to qualify as a citizen. However, birthright and material status made the difference between first class citizens, or patricians, who had real access to political power and the plebeians. Even so, citizens from the lower classes had their civil and individual rights and, at least in theory, could make their way to magistracies and political assemblies. The Romans' most important contribution to the idea of citizenship was its openness and universal vocation.

Throughout the Middle Ages citizenship had no meaning. Feudal domination relying on land property and vassalage was private in nature. Even if those individuals that possessed and exerted this authority had privileges, they had no institutional instrument that would allow them access to the fore of the public sphere. England and Iceland are the particular cases in which this situation changed (exclusively for landed gentry). For the rest of the population, rudiments of citizenship began to emerge only in the cities. In Western Europe, taking advantage of this fundamental concern with land property and, consequently, of a limited royal power, the cities were able to develop a certain degree of self-government. The city dwellers, or citizens in the etymological sense of the term, earned fundamental rights and obligations. This moment coincides with the birth of early capitalist relations. As Habermas observes, the re-creation of the public sphere and citizenship depended on the new types of commodity and information exchange. The *loci* of this newly emerging public sphere were the market and the press (soon to be followed by clubs, literary salons and pubs). It is still subject to the private domain because it is a "public sphere" of private individuals. The public sphere proper

was still confined to the state, representing the public power and the aristocratic society of the Court.

In England, the transformation of the public into reasonable citizens capable of assuming the functions of political control was a long and steady process. In late 17th century it was boosted by the adoption of the constitution and particularly the *Habeas Corpus Act* (1679) and *The Bill of Rights* (1689), which instated the rights of individuals and their protection against arbitrary power. Moreover, despite the fact that large parts of the average and small bourgeoisie were still denied the right to vote, with the help of the press, they had access to parliamentary debates and decisions and formed a genuine public opinion acknowledged as such by the Parliament itself. Towards the end of the 18th century, the relationship between the citizens and the parties became effectual as the latter began turning to popular support.

Eventually, the English public would turn to a genuine community of citizens, with distinctive cultural features, crystallized by generations of liberal thinkers. Such values left their mark on the English political culture, producing a type of citizenship that could be described as individualist (protecting particular interests against the abuse of state power) but also pluralist (tolerating the diversity of particular interests).

By contrast, the other major European influence on the American idea of citizenship, the French one, is centered on a model of the democratic citizen who transcends private interests, directly expressing the general will, and establishes a close and direct connection with the state, relying on his status as part of the collective political power. This model of citizenship is egalitarian and national (citizenship equals the nation).

The contribution of the French Revolution to the historical development of citizenship is crucial. It involved a more abstract level of conceptualization to respond to the claim of the whole population to inclusion. Through citizenship, the individual is equated with the body politic. Through the social contract, he (for although citizenship was universal, its political practice would be restricted to a male bourgeois community) willingly consents to pledge allegiance to the law that “he himself” imposed. The implications for the issue of representation are obvious.

In the United States, where colonists thought of themselves as British citizens, the Revolution started over the controversy of taxation without representation. The Declaration of Independence was drawn-up in terms indicating a high level of understanding and practice of citizenship. If the Declaration was the nation's birth certificate, then this was the first nation of citizens in history. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed, for the first time in history the principle of popular sovereignty and formulated the unalienable rights of man (13 years before the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen). Yet, the greatest American contribution to the modern idea of citizenship was the invention of representative democracy. After ten years of experimenting with an imitation of the Greek model of direct democracy, the American Constitution, ratified in 1788, turned the US from a "pure democracy" to a "republic" to use the terminology of *Federalist No. 10*.

Although not specifically defined by the Constitution, citizenship nevertheless appears as a requirement for state officials (Article I, Sections 2 and 3, and Article II, Section 1), as a subject of law in the issue of extending the judicial authority of the US to various citizen – state or citizen – citizen relations (Article III, Section 2 and Article IV, Section 2). The first ten amendments enumerate the civil liberties that refer to persons and the people, thus making a clear distinction between the abstract notion of citizen and the concrete individual. However, citizenship would eventually include civil liberties in its sphere of reference. That is why citizenship became the main objective in the legal battle to put an end to slavery. Besides refusing to grant citizenship to a person of "African race" in the Dred Scott case (1857), the US Supreme Court also reasserted its right to judicial review and declared a Congressional Act (the Missouri Compromise which outlawed slavery in the northern territories) unconstitutional. This only hastened the Civil War for a legislative solution was now virtually impossible. However, citizenship remained the sole legal instrument through which slavery could be effectively abolished. Therefore, Amendment 14 automatically abrogated the Supreme Court decision granting US citizenship to former slaves and their descendants. Although the African Americans were given the right to vote almost specifically by the 15th Amendment, making their citizenship effective would take another one hundred years (the Voting Rights Act of 1965).

In Romania, the history of the idea of citizenship is marked by interesting particularities. First, one has to say that the Romanians lived most of their history in separate state formations or princedoms that only sporadically experienced political independence. If two of the three major historical princedoms, Walachia and Moldavia, managed to preserve the old "rule/custom of the land" of Byzantine inspiration, in Transylvania, the Romanians, although the largest and oldest ethnic group there, had to live under foreign rule (Hungarian for the most part). Although confined to rural areas and banned from the emerging public sphere (*Unio Trium Natiorum* did not acknowledge Romanians as a "nation") they preserved their language and Greek Orthodox faith also

by maintaining close connections with the Romanians living on the other side of the Carpathians. Towards the end of the 18th century, when a Romanian religious and cultural elite (middle class, actually) began to emerge, the civic rights they claimed were completely subordinated to national interest.

In the other two princedoms, not only economy, but all aspects of human life depended on land property. Caught in the midst of a traditional and autarchic political system, an Orthodox ethic that condemned commerce as sinful and trivial, a preference for the more abstract idea of justice rather than written laws, the public sphere maintained its medieval character (Habermas's notion of representative public sphere) well into the 19th century. The middle class was insignificant both in number and economic power. Capitalist relations were discouraged in these predominantly rural states. The exchange of information was reduced to nothing before the first newspaper in Romanian was published in Bucharest, in 1829. Secular education was in its infancy. However, the influence of Western Europe, particularly France, was rapidly spreading among the young cultural elite. The idea of citizenship along with many others was sucked in by the young men who eventually made the 1848 revolution in the Romanian Princedoms in an almost desperate attempt to modernize society, even if that meant leaving key elements out of the equation.

In the years before the 1848 revolution, the notion of citizen was identified with that of patriot, probably under the influence of Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania and the Greek movement for independence (the *Etairia*). Around 1848 and especially in the aftermath of the revolution, the French model of citizenship became widespread. In conclusion, one has to say that the idea of citizenship and its institutions, the modern public sphere itself were established artificially, in the hope that society would somehow create its citizens and not the other way round.

Constitutive Elements of Citizenship. The Crisis of Citizenship

This chapter is intended to deal with the relationship between citizenship and its major constitutive elements, i.e. political culture, education, market, and political institutions. It will also address some of the most recurrent issues in the theory of citizenship, such as the tension between individual and collective citizenship, the relationship between citizenship and nation, and the issues of multiculturalism and globalization. It might be the case that some of these tensions indicate a crisis of citizenship. The idea will be developed in the following chapter dedicated to the contemporary models of citizenship. The discussion in both chapters will be restricted to the US and Romanian public spheres.

Since the previous chapter dealt with the historical development of the concept of citizenship, I am going to refer to focus on political culture as a basic ingredient of citizenship. In addition, the theoretical notion of political culture, with its behaviorist

reliance on empirical data, provides solidity to the idea of citizenship, which may often fall prey to its universal and normative nature, sacrificing its connection with practice and actual living communities.

Although political culture has been given various definitions since its emergence within political science, in the 1960s, they all purport to the psychological and subjective dimensions of the political realm. Political culture is a particular distribution of political attitudes, feelings, information, skills and orientations towards the political system. What makes this distribution particular to any given community is the set of beliefs, or values that represent the source of political cultures. For the purpose of this outline I shall refer to the beliefs that underlie American political culture as they were identified by Daniel J. Elazar: popular sovereignty, the obligation to political participation, individual rights, individualism, and equality.

Popular sovereignty rests on the principle that the people are the source of governmental power, an idea expressed at the very beginning of the Preamble of the Constitution: “We the People of the United States”. The impact of this belief on citizenship is the importance attached to free elections and the role of public opinion in policy making. Politicians seek to gain legitimization for their actions by public opinion approval.

Political participation implies the civic duty to participate in the nation’s political life. Bureaucracy is therefore held in contempt as it inhibits meaningful citizen participation. In fact the argument for political participation is as old as the history of the United States. Its origins can be traced back to anti-federalism, which supported local and state governments for being “close to the people” as opposed to a strong federal government, standing aloof from the citizens.

In the Declaration of Independence there is the statement that all men… “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This is the first American proclamation of the belief in individual rights. In terms of concrete political action and public policy, we can now distinguish between two types of individual rights: negative rights also known as civil liberties, which seek to limit state intervention in its relationship with the individual citizen, and positive rights, or civil rights, which lead to more state intervention in the issue of turning formal citizenship into real citizenship (the welfare state and affirmative action policies).

Individualism is so deeply embedded in American culture that the association America – individualism has become a cliché. In a few words, individualism is the belief that people should make it on their own, and therefore, they must be rewarded on the grounds of their own merits, efforts and achievements, not according to class and origin. The commitment to individualism also reveals how the middle class view government assistance programs and the welfare state’s attempts to redistribute resources. Among

the members of this class (by far numerous, if not the most influential) such programs fail to acquire general support.

Equality goes hand in hand with individual rights. “All men are created equal” states the Declaration of Independence even before asserting that people have “unalienable Rights”. Political equality is implicit in the Constitution, which stipulates that all citizens of legal age have the right to vote and also, in the Fourteenth Amendment it requires that states grant all the “equal protection of the laws”. Culturally, equality is often perceived as equality of opportunity. However, American political culture is not at all egalitarian. Not everyone should be equally well off; Americans are quite prepared in fact to accept large disparities in the economic status of their fellow citizens.

Even if the traditionalistic pattern is absent from this description of the major beliefs underlying American political culture there is the recognition of the fact that there is much value attached to strong presidential leadership by American society.

This set of values seems to provide an ideal framework for citizenship. However, almost every American will now admit that there is a crisis in citizenship. Every time someone tries to address the issue in terms that are contingent on political culture, the focus is almost exclusively on *the effects* of political culture, such as political actions and public policies, despite the tensions and inconsistencies that arise once you put individualism in dialectical relation with the other enduring beliefs and values. The deterministic process of turning these lasting beliefs into behaviors and attitudes, and then into political actions and public policies is not just fundamental to political culture, it is also intimately connected with *the practice* of citizenship thus recommending political culture as a valuable instrument for getting a more complete picture of citizenship.

In this outline, I am only going to touch upon some of these tensions (which are symptomatic of the contradictions underlying the idea of citizenship) within the structure of American political culture. These issues, together with their manifestations or effects on politics, will be discussed in more detail in the book. Tocqueville’s contribution to understanding individualism and the relationship between individual interest and public interest in American democracy is crucial here. The case of individual rights and their impact on citizenship has already been suggested; inspired by the welfare state and under the influence of multiculturalism, the issue of cultural rights distorts the value of individualism and gives birth to a kind of citizenship that is discriminative in nature. One of the manifestations of popular sovereignty, the importance attached to public opinion, suffers under the impact of the media, new information technology, communication and opinion leaders. This is another indication of the contemporary crisis in citizenship in the US as everywhere else in the democratic world. Finally, in the context of globalization, the war on terrorism, and America’s role in a redefining world order, the idea of national identity implied by the very concept of American political culture will probably become more appealing. Will that unsettle the balance with the universality of democratic principles, i.e. the grounds of the American idea of citizenship? In response to such

critical issues, certain new models of citizenship have emerged in American political thought, but they will be discussed in the following chapter.

Since 1990, the concept of political culture has enjoyed a brilliant career in Romania. In their effort to understand the toils of Romanian society in its evolution toward democracy, political scientists have acknowledged and exploited its potential. Writers such as Cristian Parvulescu, Stelian Tanase and Stefan Stanciugelu have identified typologies, attitudes and beliefs that would characterize Romanian political culture. Corroborated with the latest sociological data and reports generously provided by the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society, I was able to focus on some of the values and relatively stable beliefs at the basis of Romanian political culture: paternalism, egalitarianism and consensus.

Paternalism is associated with the authority of the state, which is understood as an abstract entity rather than an instrument or institutional apparatus (Cristian Preda). Although reinforced by the decades of communism, this aspect of Romanian political power has its roots in the traditional belief that the people need a powerful, authoritarian leader. As far as the contemporary notion of citizenship is concerned, this belief translates as the permanent need for state support and regulation of citizens' associative practices. The role conferred to the state not only hampers political participation, but also encroaches upon the principle of popular sovereignty (Daniel Barbu). Actually, by clearly asserting that the state is the sole legitimate agent of the common good in Romanian society, the 1991 Romanian Constitution (still in force today) sanctioned paternalism.

Egalitarianism is probably the most widespread influence of communist legacy on the political culture of Eastern European nations. While it is in tune with the idea of equality presupposed by citizenship (equal rights, equal status and equality before the laws), egalitarianism is extended to the community of concrete individuals. It follows from here that the Romanians, unlike the Americans, are not prepared to accept economic disparities. As a concrete manifestation of political culture, this leads to the valorization of poverty as a source of political legitimization.

The value attached to consensus explains why the Orthodox Church and the Army are constantly credited by a wide majority of Romanians (around 80 and 65 % respectively) with trust and popular support as opinion polls have been indicating since the fall of communism. At the same time, a non-consensual institution, which is one of the fundamental political institutions of citizenship, i.e. the parliament, is the least appreciated (10 to 15 %). Consensus is intimately connected with nationalism, which provides a unitary logic and a coherent discourse usually meant to hide the very lack of cohesion within a particular society. Thus, in Romanian political culture, consensus tends to look to the past instead of the future. The tensions between citizenship and nation have already been touched upon.

It is obvious that Romanian political culture has less in common with the idea of citizenship than its American counterpart. However, Romanian society is now

undergoing massive changes at all levels and, despite the notorious resistance of the beliefs and values embedded in any nation's political culture, we must not remain prostrated before the crushing force of determinism. Human action is itself a force to be reckoned with. As to the limitations of pure determinism, let me quote Paul Ricoeur: "Causal explanation applied to a fragment of world history is not possible without acknowledging, identifying a power that belongs to the range of our own capacities for action"[2].

I plan to continue this chapter by taking a closer look at the practice of citizenship in both Romania and the US, as I refer to education, economic conditions, and political institutions. It is in the practice of citizenship that I can identify the elements of crisis. As far as I can tell from the amount of data available to me so far, the low level of participation (albeit for very different reasons) may be a common ground for comparison and, hopefully, prescription. A view of the current role and activity of the NGO sector in the effort to redefine citizenship will also make the object of this chapter.

Contemporary Models of Citizenship

In reaction to the crisis in citizenship or simply to the present career of this fashionable concept, there are now various approaches to citizenship, some of them leading to solid theories and models of citizenship. This chapter will be an attempt to explain and review several models of citizenship. The Romanian dimension will be represented as well. One more thing: distinctive theories of citizenship start from various conceptions of the good life.

One of the most influential contemporary models of citizenship comes from John Rawls's liberal theory of justice as equity. It has much in common with an illustrious tradition parented by Kant that has created an image of the citizen as a productive member of society who always obeys the laws. According to Rawls's view, the citizen has a moral personality (the capacity to have a sense of justice and a particular conception of the good), is endowed with rationality and reason (the powers of judgement, thought, and inference). Thus, a citizen is assumed to have a reasonable comprehensive view of what the good is, but also the capacity for cooperation in his/her quality of a member of society. Citizenship shares one fundamental quality of the modern legal system: its neutrality. Modern law should only provide the framework for individual citizens to exert and promote their different, incompatible and irreconcilable conceptions of the good life. Similarly, citizenship remains neutral toward such reasonable doctrines since it relies on cooperation, which means reaching an agreement over the basic liberties. Reaching this agreement falls under the duty of free public reason. The principle of public reason, which regulates citizens' conduct, pertains to

[2] My translation from Paul Ricoeur's Romanian edition of *Du texte a l'action. Essais de hermeneutique II*.

common sense, public knowledge and non-controversial scientific conclusions and procedures. However, as Seyla Benhabib notices, free public reason is limited to the manner in which public associations account for their doings and conduct their affairs in a polity. The term applies less to citizens' reasoning of the kind needed for democratic discussion or parliamentary debate (Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self*). Further limitations of Rawls's model of citizenship from a political perspective have been analyzed by John Gray (in *Two Faces of Liberalism*), who draws attention to the fact that the conflicts among individual values are likely to produce a set of rival, not harmonious liberties.

Realizing the dangers of indifference and inherent to Rawls's idea of neutrality, Charles Taylor and other scholars associated with communitarian thinking (Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Walzer) propose a different approach to the dynamics of interpersonal relations, based on authenticity and dignity. In reaction to the liberal model of the abstract citizen, they call for a new idea of citizenship that would respond to the human need for dignity (whose attributes of universality and egalitarianism recommend it to citizenship), but also authenticity (which depends on the sense of belonging to a particular culture). Therefore, in a real democracy, the separation between the public and the private spheres is no longer constructive. The solution out of this ontological crisis of citizenship (or the annihilation of the concept?) resides in the public recognition of multiculturalism. The multicultural model of citizenship is based on communities that enjoy cultural rights. In defense of the classical model, Dominique Schnapper identifies several risks involved by the idea of differentiated citizenship. First, the existence of particular rights risks subordinating individuals to a group, which contradicts their freedom to choose or reconsider membership. The second risk is that of isolating individuals, making them withdraw within communities that are not, after all, historically stable. Finally, it is impossible for communities to have equal status, if they are granted differentiated forms of citizenship.

Another approach to citizenship owes a great deal to Hannah Arendt's model of public space. Inspired by the Greek *polis* and the Roman *res publica*, this model is one of political and moral greatness, a space in which one competes for recognition and acclaim, seeking protection from the futility of individual life. From the modern experience of politics, Arendt draws her "associational" view of the public realm, as a space that emerges whenever and wherever men act together in concert. Human action results only in power.

The implications of this model for the contemporary crisis of citizenship, especially the preeminence it assigns to participation, have proved inspiring for a whole set of new models of citizenship in the US. Thus, William K. Dustin, in *Toward an Ethic of Citizenship. Creating a Culture of Democracy for the 21st Century*, also influenced by Rawlsian ideas, suggests an ethical model of citizenship based on the duty of representation. This model is an example of radical approach to the issue of citizen

participation, seeking to replace election by random selection. So, it challenges one of the fundamental institutions of modern representative democracy.

Others, such as Robert Dahl and Benjamin Barber embrace an ideal of deliberative democracy relying on citizens' assemblies. Influenced by communitarian and Kantian thinking, they focus on the problem of civic virtue, or civic competence grounded on empathic knowledge. Barber in particular (Alvin Toffler, Kenneth Laudon and others) develops a model of teledemocracy advocating the use of modern communication and information technologies as a means to reinforce citizen participation[3].

One major criticism of the Arendtian model of public space involves its limitation to moral and political criteria for "publicity". There is a tendency to relegate social and economic issues to the private realm, "ignoring that these activities and relations, insofar as they are based on power relations, could become matters of public dispute as well" (Seyla Benhabib). Jurgen Habermas's model of public space based on the discursive concept of legitimacy is more inclusive as far as participation is concerned. Participation is not confined to the political realm; it is an activity that can be carried out in the social and cultural spheres, without diminishing the citizen status.

Usually associated with communitarianism, Michael Walzer develops a theory of citizenship that echoes Hannah Arendt's neoclassical model of the public space idealized by "republican" or "civic virtue". He views citizenship in terms of participation, but his understanding of the concept shows the influence of Habermas's discursive model of the public sphere. Walzer's most important contribution is the attention he pays to small-scale activities, which could supplement the focus of citizen participation on political power.

> The kinds of "action" discussed by theorists of the state need to be supplemented (not, however, replaced) by something radically different: more like union organizing than political mobilization, more like teaching in a school than arguing in the assembly, more like volunteering in a hospital than joining a political party, more like working in an ethnic alliance or a feminist support group than canvassing in an election, more like shaping a co-op budget than deciding on national fiscal policy[4].

In a critical approach to Habermas's bourgeois conception of the public sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that it promotes weak publics since its discourse does not result in any binding decisions that would counterbalance the power of the state. However, when

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[3] For a comparative study of deliberative democracy and teledemocracy, see Scott London's article "Teledemocracy vs. Deliberative Democracy. A Comparative Look at Two Models of Public Talk" in *Interpersonal Computing and Technology: An Electronic Journal for the 21st Century*, April 1995, Volume 3, Number 2

[4] From Walzer's article "The Idea of Civil Society" in

she suggests several loci for the proliferation of strong publics, she resorts to the Habermasian rationale for the increase and growth of autonomous public spheres in contemporary democratic societies: “In self-managed workplaces, child care centers, or residential communities, for example, internal institutional public spheres could be arenas both of opinion formation and decision making”[5].

Harry C. Boyte is more specific in asserting the importance of individual action and experience for an expanded meaning of citizenship. For him, participation is public contribution by ordinary people in everyday environments. He advances a model of citizenship based on public work, or public agency based on a poststructuralist understanding of power as relational, interactive, and dynamic. In proposing the image of the citizen as a creator of public goods, Boyte claims to retrieve an older American understanding of citizenship, which was that of the New Deal. He is keen on distinguishing this model from the communitarian approach to citizenship in terms of voluntarism, warning that when the two are equated, the focus turns to process (resulting in policies such as citizen participation or citizen deliberation) not to the creation of public goods that demand accountability. Its absence weakens citizens’ capacity for action. Boyte’s views are shaped by his background of closely working with and for the so-called third sector. His model of citizenship grounded on public action will be dealt with in the last chapter.

All the contemporary models of citizenship presented so far are obviously founded on the solid grounds of American political culture and institutions (fundamental for citizenship, as we have seen in the previous chapter), despite the tensions and crises that the public sphere is undergoing in the US. Romanian political thinkers are still primarily concerned with the foundation of citizenship, which is the reasonable thing to do under the circumstances of Romanian “transition”.

A notable exception is Cristian Pirvulescu, who has a coherent vision of citizenship that is indebted to Hannah Arendt’s theory of the autonomy of the political realm in relation to other spheres of human society. He discusses several aspects of the participation crisis such as apolitical attitudes, which must not be viewed as a rejection of political commitment, but as the symptom of a growing distance between the citizen and the current political environment; the problem of competence, which moves political debate to a technical field. Like Boyte, Pirvulescu has the experience of working in the non-governmental sector and, therefore, he knows that democracy is not only theory, but also practice and a particular state of mind.

The idea of citizenship in relation to a public sphere not necessarily restricted to politics is a reality in Romania. In this country, and in the United States as well, NGO activity holds the key to advancing a possible solution to the crises of participation and citizen education.

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[5] Quoted from “Rethinking the Public Sphere” published in *The Kettering Review*, winter 1997

To Conclude: One Suggestion

I do not want to end in indeterminacy. Returning to the practice of citizenship, I will try to draw attention on the potential of Boyte's model of citizenship for the Romanian public sphere, and, particularly, for a way to counterbalance the crisis of citizenship. I must say that his idea does not come on bare soil. Cristian Pirvulescu, Gabriel Andreescu and other Romanian political thinkers (not accidentally, many of them associated with the nonprofit sector) claim that the time for seminaries has passed, and citizen participation must be encouraged through practice.

As I explained in the third chapter, it is one thing to say that a democratic society based on citizenship needs a balance between its political practice and the population's political culture, but it is a totally different thing to believe that all one could do for citizenship is useless because of the slow-changing values and beliefs of a traditionalist political culture. The model of citizenship focusing on participation that is not necessarily political has the advantage of working with individual values and can shape attitudes. If the public space is conceived according to the Habermasian discursive model, which allows for the increase and growth of autonomous public spheres among the citizenry, then encouraging them to formulate problems within their professional or social environment, to make decisions, carry them out and claim responsibilities is making citizen participation real.

Naturally, nobody expects all citizens to act according to this pattern. But in a country where the low level of citizen participation is matched by the low level of willingness to participate, encouraging ordinary citizens to act within their everyday environment is a logical step to take. If some of them manage to carry out small-scale projects, it is a good starting point to change attitudes[6].

If we are to think of the political stake (i.e. political participation) of this model of citizenship, we cannot ignore the role of public policies, such as decentralization. However, Romanian citizenry themselves need to redefine their role and understand that power is closer than they expect.

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[6] Here, I could refer to my personal experience as a translator for The Dreyfus Health Foundation, a US-based international NGO, which has been developing successful training programs in Romania. Their objective is to turn professionals in education, nursing, social work, medicine into community oriented citizens, able to draft and carry out projects on better health.

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