



VAASAN YLIOPISTO

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# The Profile of a Decent Citizen

*Self-Evaluations of Citizens*

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<b>Tiivistelmä</b> <p>Artikkelissa pyrimme selvittämään tyypillisiä 2000-luvun kunnan kansalaisen piirteitä. Onko kunnan kansalainen lainkuuliainen, poliittisesti aktiivinen, tietoinen ympäristön tilasta tai suvaitsevainen maahanmuuttajia kohtaan?</p> <p>Tutkimuksen näkökulma on kansalaislähtöinen eli asioita on selvitetty kysyen niitä kansalaisilta itseltään. Alkuperäiseen otokseen kuului 5000 Suomen kansalaista.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoittaa, että kansalaisten mielestä kunnan kansalainen on ennen kaikkea sitoutunut maksamaan korkeat verot ja tottelemaan lakia. Legalistinen perinne ja hyvinvointivaltion tukeminen istuvat syvällä suomalaisten moraalisisissa arvotuksissa.</p> <p>Mielenkiintoisen kysymysosan muodostivat kansalaisten arviot kunnan kansalaisuuden ”uusista arvoista” kuten energian säästämistä, luonnonvarojen tuhlaamisen välttämistä, jätteiden lajittelusta ja vastuun kantamisesta ympäristön tilasta. Tärkeimmät taustaselittäjät tutkimuksessa olivat erot sukupuolten, iän ja koulutustason mukaan.</p>		
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<b>Abstract</b> The purpose of this article is to determine the characteristics of a 21st century decent citizen. Is a decent citizen law-abiding, politically active, aware of the environmental state, or tolerant to immigrants? This research has a special aspect because the answers come from the citizens themselves. The original sample of the survey incorporates 5000 Finnish people. In the eyes of the Finns, a decent citizen is above all committed to pay high taxes and obey the law. The legalistic tradition and the support of welfare services are deeply rooted in the moralistic perceptions. One interesting question is the estimations of the 'new values' of decent citizenship like saving energy, avoiding the waste of natural resources, sorting and recycling waste, and feeling responsibility for the situation of the globe. The most relevant background factors explaining the differences were gender, age and level of education.		
<b>Keywords</b> citizenship, decent citizen, administrative ethics, civil society, citizen survey, Finland		



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This article deals with questions of decent citizenship. Why is it important to research the concept of the decent citizen? We assume that it helps to determine the structures behind citizens' values and appreciations. Studying the notions of decent citizenship is relevant to the functioning and development of the political system, and above all it is important when defining the contents of the ethics of governance. In this article, citizens have expressed the responsibilities, rights and duties of being a decent citizen. The concept of a decent citizen estimated by the citizens themselves gives tools to authorities to develop a more ethical government in the eyes of citizens.

The theoretical background of our study lays on administrative ethics. Administrative ethics is a part of the research of administration where moral ethical principles are applied to administrative action and the decision making of public organizations. Cooper (2001: 1–36) has variedly considered the emergence, development and focuses of the research field of administrative ethics. This field of research has widened from the end of 1980s. Cooper has noticed that this field of research has partly become independent and found some established research subjects. Also, more extensive empirical research of administrative ethics is recommended in the research field.

According to Bruce (2001), the writings and research concerning administrative ethics from 1940s to 1980s has discussed, among other topics, the responsibility of administration, solutions concerning ethical conflicts, corruption, ethical codes, the confirmation of ethical behaviors, and ethical training. The administrative ethics of the 21st century has considered ethical legislation and regulation, corruption, trust, ethical decision making and leadership, ethos of public service, professional ethics, and the ethical operational environment.

What does the concept of a decent citizen have to do with the concept of administrative ethics? Administration is for serving citizens. The values of administration have to be approved by citizens. That is why it is relevant how citizens themselves estimate the concept of being a decent citizen. Legitimate administration needs support from citizens whose values are in full view of everyone in the results of political decision making – or at least that is the ideal situation.

This article concentrates on decent citizenship and the profile of a decent citizen, which is quite an exceptional area in the study of ethics (cf. Marshall 1964, Close 1995, Pierson 1996, Andersen and Hoff 2001, Hoffman 2004). Traditionally, citizenship is a part of research concerning society, democracy and politics.

A good example of Finnish research concerning the subject is the extensive research, 'Citizens and democracy', of Pesonen and Sänkiaho in 1979. This survey concerned, for example, the themes of political participation, influence and citizenship. Vartola and af Ursin (1987) have discussed, for example, the ethically dubious actions of public servants in their survey of public servants. Virtanen (1991) has discussed the sufficiency of public servants' competency in light of ethical training when he examined the instrumental competency of public servants and the education of public servants.

The one example of research from the 21st century is the surveys of the Canadian Centre for Management Development. Their surveys have gathered opinions and expectations of citizens and customers about the quality of service, improvement of quality and trust for different levels of administration. The surveys have been conducted from 1998 to 2007. So far, they have published five studies about the results on the report series.

The empirical evidence of this article is based on the data from a large-scale citizen survey implemented in the Faculty of Public Administration in the University of Vaasa, Finland. The three-year research program is funded by the Academy of Finland. (For more details about the questionnaire and analysis see chapter 3.1.) The 'Citizens First? Ethical Government in Terms of Citizens' research program deals with administrative ethics and explores citizens' perceptions of ethical government in the delivery of public services, conduct of public authorities, and political leadership.

There is empirical research concerning 'decent citizenship', but the indicators are not established. For example, in the European Social Survey the indicators of a decent citizen were helping the least-advantaged people, voting in elections, obeying laws and rules, taking part in voluntary work, and actively participating in politics. (Borg 2006: 123.) These indicators appear to be rather traditional ideas of citizens' roles. In addition, feeling responsibility for the situation of the globe can be listed as a new aspect of being a decent citizen (Salminen and Ikola-Norrbacka 2009: 28–30).

Citizens are seldom able to evaluate the ethicalness of practices and decisions in public administration. It is more typical that civil servants give statements about ethics in government, estimating the functions and organizations even in their own organization. However, citizens' opinions could be more objective than politicians' or civil servants' viewpoints. That is why we believe that the general picture of administrative ethics will be more comprehensive or 'real' when we estimate it from several viewpoints, including citizens' perspectives. Citizens have interests on services to be equally accessible and of good quality. In the eyes of

citizens, civil servants should comply with the laws and rules and citizens should also be able to have confidence in politicians.

### *Research problem*

There are many reasons why we chose this point of view. Modern democratic societies are striving for equality between different societal groups. Finland is a country with extremely high citizens' trust in public organizations and institutions and quite a low level of grand corruption<sup>1</sup>. How does the concept of a decent citizen appear in this context?

It is said that public administration is for citizens, meaning that the administration should serve the needs of the citizens. That is why the viewpoints of citizens of the public sphere are as such legitimate and valuable. As one participant of the survey said "Civil servants might sometimes forget that they work for the citizens, not vice versa".

Frederickson and Walling (2001: 37, 40) state that the field-based empirical research on administrative ethics in public management is less common than research based on normative and philosophical literature. According to them, the use of questionnaires is probably the most common methodology in administrative ethics research.

In this article we are going to find out how the concept of a decent citizen is perceived in an egalitarian society in the eyes of citizens. What are the elements defining the concept of a decent citizen? Are there some societal groups which find the concept in diverging ways? Do these societal background factors explain the attitudes towards the concept of a decent citizen?

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<sup>1</sup> The Transparency International CPI has ranked Finland among the least corrupt countries in the world.

## 2 THE CONCEPT OF A DECENT CITIZEN

### 2.1 Ethical grounds for citizenship

Citizenship is a central concept in western political discussions. Where to find evidence on that discussion?

Citizenship has been described in many different ways, from Aristotle's owner of practical wisdom to Machiavelli's soldier-citizens, from Hobbes' anarchy-fearing subject-citizen to Locke's government-fearing owner-citizen, from Rousseau's virtuous lawmaker-citizen to the contemporary voter-citizen who is actively seeking their own rights and interests.

The concept of a decent citizen is described here in terms of moral philosophy using the production of Häyry (2002). Through times, ethics pursues to answer what people are like and what they should be like, what kind of life is considered good and right and what habits, manners, rules and laws we should have, how people are acting and how they should be acting. Most of us have an impression of what is a good and right lifestyle. Choices of lifestyle are not usually perceived as ethical choices, but to define the good and right way of living is one of the main issues of ethics.

Aristotelian ethics can be described as the ethics of the Golden Mean. According to Aristotle (1989: 33) virtue is a human characteristic. Virtue is the desirable middle between two extremes. The mean is in the middle of two vices, because to vice it is typical to have too much or not enough of a certain characteristic. A concrete example for this is courage (Aristotle 1989: 52–54). An excessive amount of courage is foolhardiness (excessive fearlessness) and an inadequate form of courage is cowardice (fearing the wrong things too much).

According to Aristotelian ethics, a proper proportion of pleasure, respecting tradition and self-discipline are the grounds for a good life. Human nature affects all of this in one way or another. The stricter content of virtues derives from the prevailing circumstances and manners of society. (Häyry 2002.)

Hume's ethics makes a difference between natural and artificial virtues. Natural virtues are characteristics and manners which aim to a person's own (or his/hers relatives) welfare and happiness. These are virtues like courage, gratefulness, tolerance, diligence and carefulness. Artificial virtues are connected to the relation of the individual and society. They aim to promote human welfare but not as directly as natural virtues. According to Hume, the artificial virtues are, for exam-

ple, justice, obeying official authorities, respecting property, and keeping promises. (Häyry 2002.)

Over time, the moral philosophers have tried to describe the ethically good life and manners. Manners, happiness and rights are, however, defined by those who have the authority in society. Other views are easily rejected. The limits of freedom in relation to other human beings are best to be found in human rights which are justified through any moral philosophical tradition. However, a good life and right behaviour are justified through things that have nothing to do with other people's lives or freedoms. The theories of philosophical ethics have not always handled things that are important to everyday life. Still it is understood that it is not realistic to require that an individual makes long theoretical considerations of the right action in every choice in everyday life. In everyday life it is assumed that we follow the prevailing manners in society unless they are against the moral law. (Häyry 2002.)

Politics or religion is normally the reason why ethics in education are remoulded. The purpose of education is to make citizens diligent, harmonious – and decent. The concept of the decent citizen includes both human morality and communality. (Häyry 2002: 13; Ollila 1997: 21.) The challenge in the societal system of education has been to educate good and decent citizens to society (Niemi 2007; Nivala 2006; Nivala 2007).

It has been claimed it is not required to teach morals. According to Ollila (1997: 24–25) some of the psychological structures required by morality (like sympathy to living beings) can be part of a human as a disposition. The application of morality still requires a lot of interpretation, consideration and the creation of value-hierarchies. If an individual is not motivated to follow the legal norms of society, there are coercive means in the society which take care of the consequences. When talking about morality it is not the question of a system of formal regulation. The individual has to experience the meaning of morality himself/herself.

Notice of decent citizenship was already taken in the beginning of the autonomy of Finland. This happened in the form of the purposes of education at the parliament level (cf. Arola 2003). The focal area of citizen education from the beginning of Finland's autonomy has concentrated on the history of Finland, especially how the Finnish country was born and how the social order was formed. Citizens were educated from a nationalistic base. The parliament was nearly unanimous on the necessity of citizen education, but because citizen education was axiomatic it became an instrument of combat for the parties and it was used to justify totally opposing things. Patriotism has, however, become a strong value and it influences Finnish culture and how we think of or act as citizens.

Finland as a Nordic country, with 5.3 million inhabitants, has been a homogenous population for a long time. In Finland, the role of the active citizen is learned at a very early stage at home. We have adopted Protestant ethics with the values of work, freedom and solidarity. (Laitinen & Nurmi 2002: 74.) Political activity is seen as one of the main characteristics of citizenship. Commitment to public-spiritedness and commonly shared interests has been seen as one of the main virtues of citizenship. As an ethos of Protestant ethics, Finnish citizens, already in their early youth, are fostered to respect work and workers, and also to pay taxes to society. (Nivala 2007: 114–115.) The Finnish institutional welfare model comprises of an extensive public service sector with the efforts of maintaining equality between different social classes. The idea of hard taxation is connected to the extensive welfare services which are popular and also highly respected in Finland, regardless of the income level. However, the figure of public expenditures is rather high, almost 50% of the GDP.

Citizen education would be easy if everybody shared common values, but in fact it does not happen that way. Contemporary society is pluralistic, but we can still include values like solidarity, altruism, compassion, truth and charity in the values of modern social life. If common ethical values did not exist, which people live with, living in the society would be almost impossible. (Wahlström 1993: 109–111.)

## 2.2 Citizenship

According to Pierson (1996: 127) citizenship as a concept has a similar role as the concept of democracy. The concepts are universally respected and valued: who can think that it is a bad thing to be a decent citizen, but what does it really mean?

The concept of a decent citizen is not universal because it varies across nations and cultures. Peoples' perceptions of decent citizenship are affected by the historical background and the political system of the nation. Also the administrative processes and practices contribute to the conception. Socio-economic background is one of the main variables affecting the individual level.

There are several definitions for the concept of a citizen. Citizenship can be described as membership, as status, as the creation of rights and duties, as a universal equality and as active participation.

Traditionally, citizenship refers to the membership of the state and it gives a certain status to an individual. A citizen is a sovereign member of the state who has certain rights and duties. The rights of citizens are ensured by particular social

institutions. Citizenship simultaneously designates a status and a role. As a status it refers to civil, political and social rights for its citizens guaranteed by the state. Citizenship as a role takes into account the identity and mental representations that each individual designs for her or himself. (Pierson 1996: 134; Korsgaard 2001: 11.)

Historically, the main rights belonging to citizenship are the actual rights of citizenship, political rights and social rights. Citizens' rights include civil rights (e.g. freedom of speech, thought and faith), political rights (the right to vote) and social rights. The latter ones have emerged in the 20th century (including free education, health care etc.). It is extremely important that citizens have full freedom of speech, they can freely choose their words, they can get information about decisions concerning them, they can use their right of appeal and they can totally participate in social decision making when they are making their own evaluations about public administration. Fulfilling the duties, we reclaim the status of a decent citizen even if fulfilling the rights and duties are not enough alone to define citizenship (Oinonen, Blom & Melin 2005: 24). This juridical aspect does not always give the full picture of citizenship. Another point of view to citizenship is civic society, which is outside the apparatus of the government. Civic society works are organized outside the compulsory structure of the state and exercise of power.

Citizenship is also connected to nationality. Citizens can consider themselves as Finns, European Citizens or even global citizens. Subjective representations may be attached to a particular region or nation, to Europe, or the Global Village. (Korsgaard 2001: 11.) Citizenship is being a member of a community which affects personal identity and self-image. However, it is not a concept which is based on geographical location. It is a question of those special characteristics contributing to the historical development and context of environment. The identity of an individual consists of different levels of identity. Being part of different groups shapes the conceptions of ourselves: in addition to nationality for example gender, age, mother tongue, education, occupation, religion and place of residence affect how we experience ourselves in relation to others and to society. (Oinonen et al. 2005: 7–8.)

Citizenship also refers to membership in a political community and it can also be seen as the commitment to active participation in the community of the state. It invokes an ancient tradition of active participation in political life and also in modern circumstances citizens' involvement in organizational activities and in environmental protection. (Pierson 1996: 129.)

Thus, citizenship is considered the character of an individual member of society, belonging to a community of shared values and mutual identity. A subjective

evaluation of citizenship gives an impression of the roles of citizens and self estimations of participation and involvement in societal decision-making. Citizens' own conceptions of their roles as citizens are an important part of the research of participation. (Borg 2006: 115–116.)

Improving citizens' possibilities to participate and involvement has been one of the main focuses in the reform strategy of the Finnish government<sup>2</sup>. In western democracies citizens' activity in traditional political participation has shown a remarkable reduction in recent decades (Paloheimo 2005: 126). Hopefully, new forms of democracy, for example e-democracy, have found new favor.

Cooper, Bryer and Meek (2006, 84) define citizen participation in terms of high versus low ethical citizenship. High ethical citizenship conceives of citizenship as a responsibility. Then there should be a wide distribution of authority rather than being focused or centered on a few. Low ethical citizenship, on the other hand, conceives of authority as hierarchically distributed. Individual citizens are limited in the extent to which they should and can participate in public affairs. The distinction, functionally, is between legislative or administrative information exchanges and more deliberative, consensus-based approaches to engagement.

According to Frericks, Maier and de Graaf (2009: 135, 151–152) the changing European welfare systems have some influences on citizenship. Now, the behavior of citizens' is rewarded if it supports the long-term developments of society as such. This also redefines citizens' obligations and entitlements. Frericks et al. (2009: 152) speaks of a kind of anthropological system-sustaining citizenship, which rests on a more holistic understanding of responsibilities. Citizenship is defined in terms of the differentiated contribution to society, not in terms of acquired status. According to Frericks et al. (2009: 152) this new form of citizenship can be delineated to the concept of 'productive citizen'. In this context the term productive refers to a contribution to sustain society.

Active citizenship contains a notion of membership in a community, willingness and the power to affect issues. An active citizen takes the chance to participate and influence, thus making the surroundings a better place to live. Active citizenship involves engaging people in decision-making processes and to give them a voice in developing services. It has something to do with politeness, respectfulness and social capacity. Active citizenship is involved in such core values as

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<sup>2</sup> Becoming an active citizen has been one of the main policy programs during Prime Minister Vanhanen's I cabinet in 2003–2007.



human rights and social responsibility, democracy, legality, and freedom as legal values, and tolerance and empathy as human values. (Cleaver & Nelson 2006.)

### 3 WHAT IS THE DECENT CITIZEN LIKE ACCORDING TO THE CITIZENS THEMSELVES?

#### 3.1 The survey method

The way citizens experience decent citizenship might tell something about how they experience administration or at least what the administration should be so that it would correspond to the needs and expectations of citizens. Decent citizenship is not a common conceptual definition which can be adapted to other nations. It is quite probable that Finnish people's opinions about the decent citizen and decent citizenship are going to be different from, for example, the Spanish, Indian or Peruvian opinions.

How do Finnish citizens experience the concept of a decent citizen? That is what we are going to find out. Some of the statement can be categorized as the traditional valuations of a decent citizen and some are newer, rising from the present day requirements.

The questionnaire was sent to 5000 Finnish citizens, aged 25–65. Although incentives were not used, the response rate rose to 40,4 %. Altogether 2010 carefully completed questionnaire forms were returned.

The sample was chosen to represent Finland in miniature. The survey-sample was received from the Finnish public agency called the Population Register Centre. All the questions were multiple-choice questions and they were executed in Likert's scale to secure the statistical runs. The answers were recorded in the statistics program SPSS. The significance of the means between the different background factor groups were tested with the Mann-Whitney U -test, which is a non-parametric test for assessing whether two independent samples of observations come from the same distribution (Heikkilä 2008: 233–234; Metsämuuronen 2006: 1211–1212).

In the survey data of our study, citizens express their views and attitudes towards the questions of what a decent citizen is like. This question is only one among the 18 question groups in the questionnaire form. The main report of the survey is

published ‘Are we being heard? Ethical governance and citizens’<sup>3</sup> (Salminen and Ikola-Norrbacka 2009).

The original questionnaire consisted of citizens’ assessments of the ethics of public services, good administration and virtues of public authorities, and the ethics of the political system. In the survey data of our analysis, citizens express their views towards the question of a decent citizen. The data is also explained by seven societal background factors. In this article we use six background factors, leaving the working history out. Six societal background factors were investigated. They were gender, age, mother tongue, place of residence, level of education, and income level. We concentrate on the extremes of the different societal groups in this analysis, meaning that we compare the extreme groups inside every background factor. Our explanatory background factors are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The explanatory background factors of the study.

<b>Gender</b>	Females (n=1057–1072) Males (n=907–917)
<b>Age</b>	Younger generation, 25–34 years (n=275–277) Older generation, 55–66 years (n=731–738)
<b>Mother tongue</b>	Finnish speakers (n=1865–1885) Swedish speakers (n=103–104)
<b>Place of residence</b>	Southern Finland (n=802–807) Northern Finland (n=72–74)
<b>Level of education</b>	Low level of formal education, basic education/comprehensive school (n=316–322) High level of formal education, higher vocational level/polytechnic, university (n=594–597)
<b>Income level / household</b>	Respondents with low level of income, 0–1500 € / per month (n=158–162) Respondents with high level of income, 9001–30 000 € / per month (n=75–77)

We looked at the concept of a decent citizen through Principal Component Analysis<sup>4</sup> to find out the profiling elements of the concept of a decent citizen. With

<sup>3</sup> The research is published in Finnish called ‘Kuullaanko meitä? Eettinen hallinto ja kansalaiset’.

<sup>4</sup> Rotation Method = Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Principal Component Analysis we wanted to find out the different groups of elements of the concept of the decent citizen. There were five different groups of elements to identify<sup>5</sup>. We named them 1) traditional elements, 2) ecological elements, 3) political elements, 4) elements of publicity and 5) elements of social responsibility.

The first group consists of very traditional elements like paying taxes (and television license fee), fighting against the grey economy and civil obedience, appreciating law and regulations and appreciating any honest work. The second group consists of ecological elements like sorting and recycling, responsibility from the situation of the globe, avoiding the waste of natural resources, trying to save energy, and appreciating domestic production. The third group is about politics. To that group belong the elements of voting in elections, activity in political parties and social organizations, following the work of political institutions, and being active and taking initiative.

The fourth group differs from the others, being most familiar to the nowadays modern feature of discussion and participation culture. To that group belong the elements of influencing things through media and participating in discussions on the internet. It is a question of taking advantage of publicity and public opinion. It is notable that to this group of elements the traditional, ecological and political elements were often charged negatively. That means that if you are interested in participating in discussions on the internet or influencing things through media, you, on the law of averages, do not appreciate, for example, traditional elements like paying taxes, or ecological elements like sorting waste according to instructions, or political elements like voting in elections. The last group consists of the elements described with social responsibility. Those elements are helping the least-advantaged and tolerance towards immigrants. Appreciating domestic production did charge negatively to this group of elements, like some of the elements belonging to political elements.

The whole picture of a decent citizen is dependent on many factors. The relations of these five elements in our value world make the picture we are appreciating as the actions of a decent citizen.

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<sup>5</sup> The limiting value of the Initial Eigenvalue (the variances of the factors) was set to be over one. Communalities of variables varied between 0.44–0.77, which are rather high meaning that they measure principal components quite reliably. Both The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy (0.878) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $p < 0.0001$ ) are evidence that the correlation matrix is suitable for Principal Component Analysis.

### 3.2 What is the decent citizen like in the 21st century?

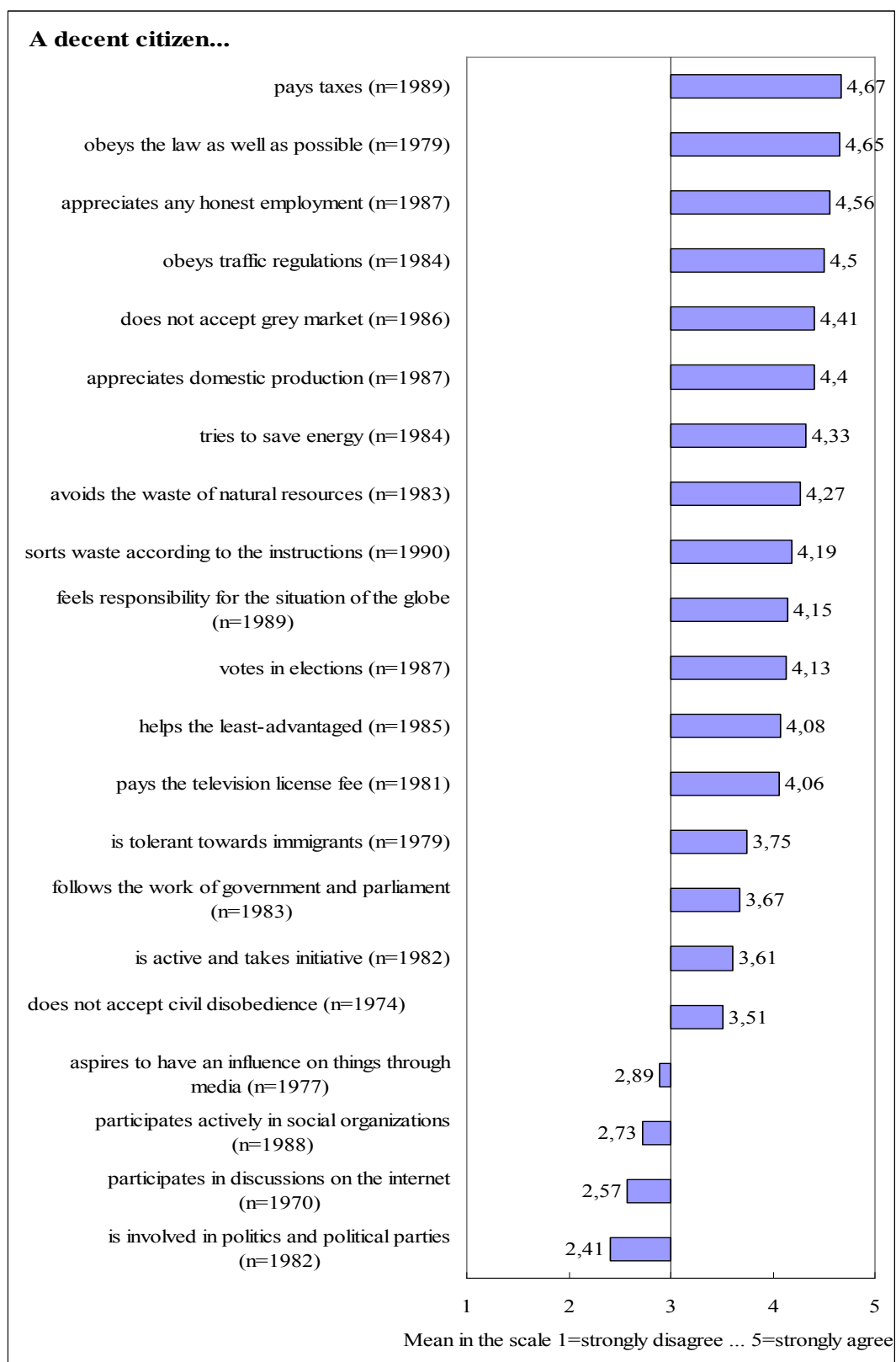
In Figure 1 the estimations of the content of a decent citizen estimated are presented. The results are presented by mean: the higher the mean the more important the aspect is in defining the concept of a decent citizen.

In the eyes of the Finnish people, a decent citizen is above all committed to pay high taxes and obey the law. The Finnish people emphasize the same features as the state and political system in Finland. The legalistic tradition and the support of welfare services are deeply rooted in the moralistic perceptions. What decent citizen is not? According to Finns, a decent citizen is not necessarily interested in politics. A decent citizen is not necessarily an active citizen. That is where the system value differs greatly from the values of citizens. Even if citizens feel that it is important to vote in elections they refuse to see participation in political activity as a duty or a civic-virtue. Also active participation in social organizations is not seen as an eligible feature of a decent citizen. Many of the areas of our societal lives are nowadays on the internet. Also administration has done much work to improve citizens' channels to influence through the internet. However, citizens do not feel that the concept of a decent citizen is hanging on how actively they are participating in discussions on the internet. Still we have examples when citizens' opinions and judgments on the internet have created a hurricane in the public debate<sup>6</sup>.

One interesting question is also the estimations of the 'new' values of decent citizenship like saving energy, avoiding the waste of natural resources, sorting and recycling waste, and feeling responsibility for the situation of the globe. We argue that these are not fully realized yet, but the change in values is real and visible. However, environmentally linked valuations and actions are estimated as more important than voting in elections or following the work of government and parliament which are traditionally seen as important democratic actions.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the sales director of a well known firm in Finland resigned because of public condemnation of his talks and comparisons concerning women and cars. In this case the public debate dictated the context even if the sales director was giving his opinions as a private person. The public debate defined the actual context when the question was not private but concerned the equality between men and women.



**Figure 1.** Finnish citizens' estimations of a decent citizen (Salminen and Ikola-Norrbacka: 2009).

We also investigated the results by using the balance measurement -indicator. The extreme response alternatives 1 and 2 (disagree) and 4 and 5 (agree) were counted together. As a result, balance measurement includes the statistical difference of these alternatives, excluding the neutral response alternative 3. The difference between paying taxes and obeying the law versus involving politics and political parties is very remarkable (paying taxes and obeying the law +94 to involving politics and political parties -41). Some of the extreme results are shown in Table 2.

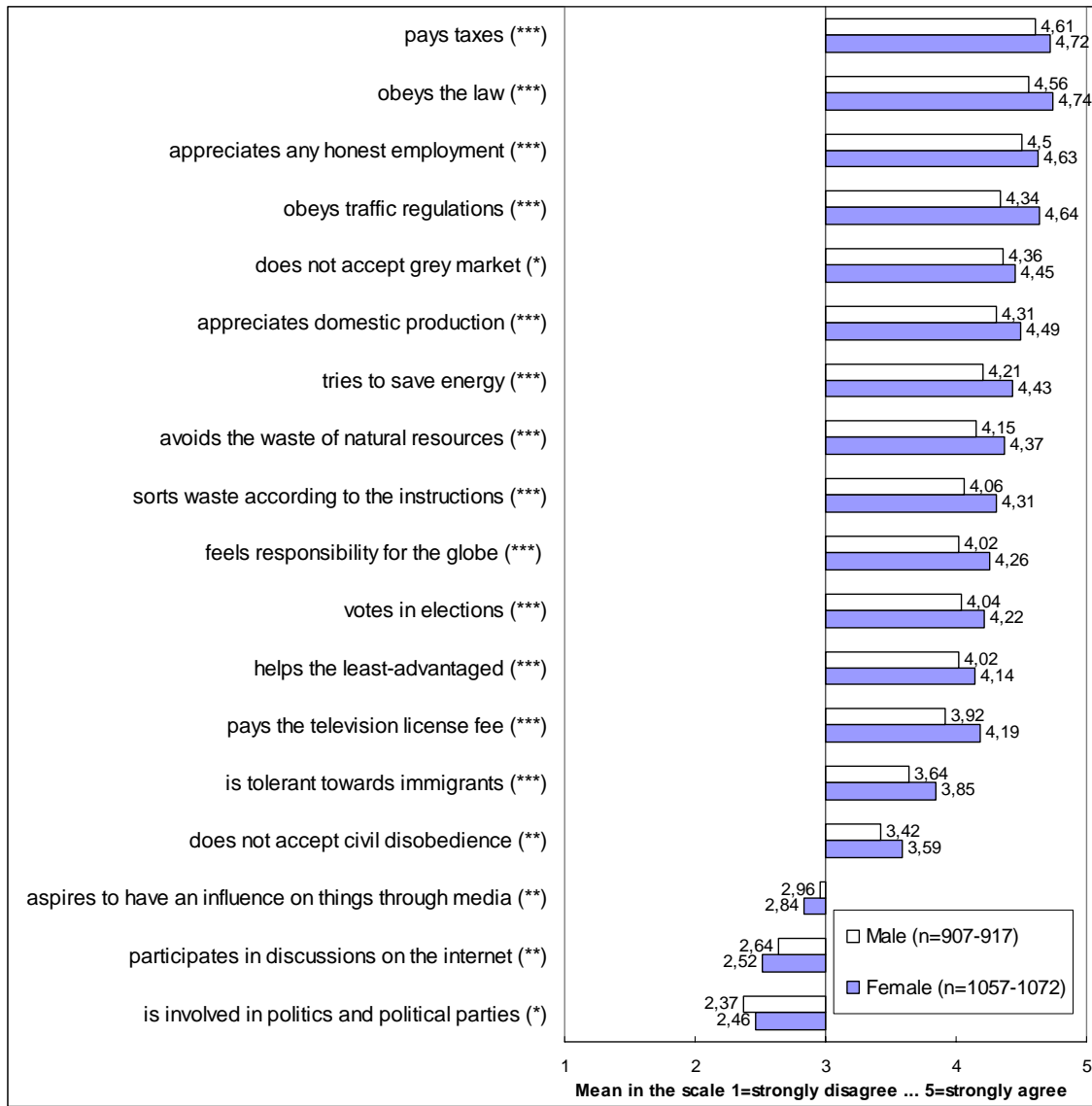
**Table 2.** Characteristics of a decent citizen: the summary of citizens' views 2008.

	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Balance measurement</b>
is involved in politics and political parties	52	11	-41
participates in discussions on the internet	43	13	-30
feels responsibility for the situation of the globe	4	83	+79
sorts waste according to the instructions	5	86	+81
avoids the waste of natural resources	3	88	+85
tries to save energy	3	91	+88
appreciates domestic production	2	90	+88
does not accept grey market	3	88	+85
obeys traffic regulations	3	93	+90
appreciates any honest work	2	94	+92
obeys the law as well as possible	2	96	+94
pays taxes	2	96	+94

### 3.3 Decent citizen seen through different societal groups

We looked at the citizens' valuations through different societal background factors which were gender, age, mother tongue, place of residence, level of education and income level. Especially gender, age and level of education had a strong influence on estimations and valuations. In the next figures we report only those

items where differences between the examined groups are statistically significant.<sup>7</sup> Gender influences strongly on the estimations of the concept of a decent citizen (see Figure 2).



\*\*\*  $p \leq 0,001$  very significant; \*\*  $0,001 < p \leq 0,01$  significant; \*  $0,01 < p \leq 0,05$  almost significant

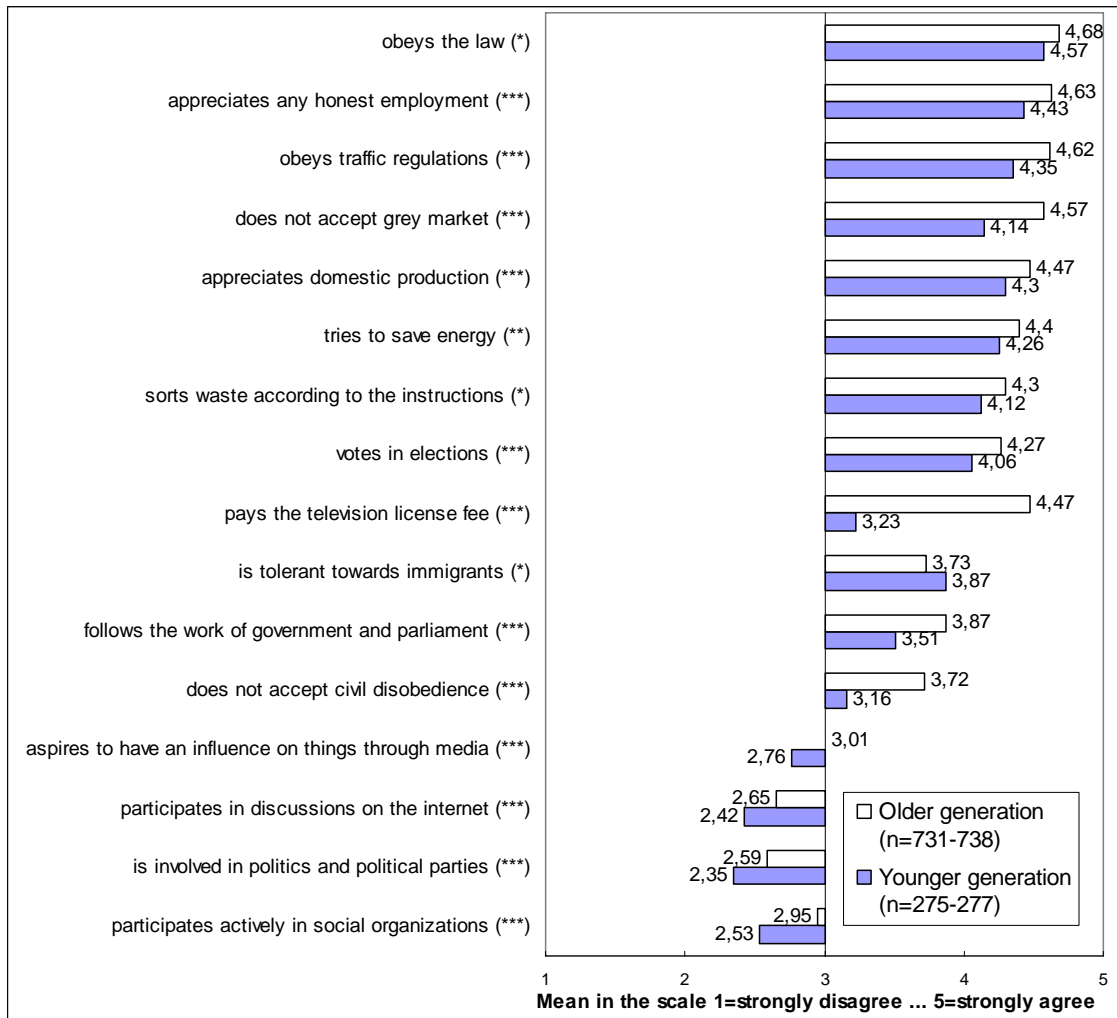
**Figure 2.** Significant differences between genders.

<sup>7</sup> Mann-Whitney U -test.



Women tend to estimate both the traditional elements and modern ecological elements to be more important in the concept of a decent citizen than men. Both groups feel, for example, that paying taxes and obeying the law belong to the actions of a decent citizen but women see them as significantly more important than men. Women also emphasize voting in elections and helping the least-advantaged.

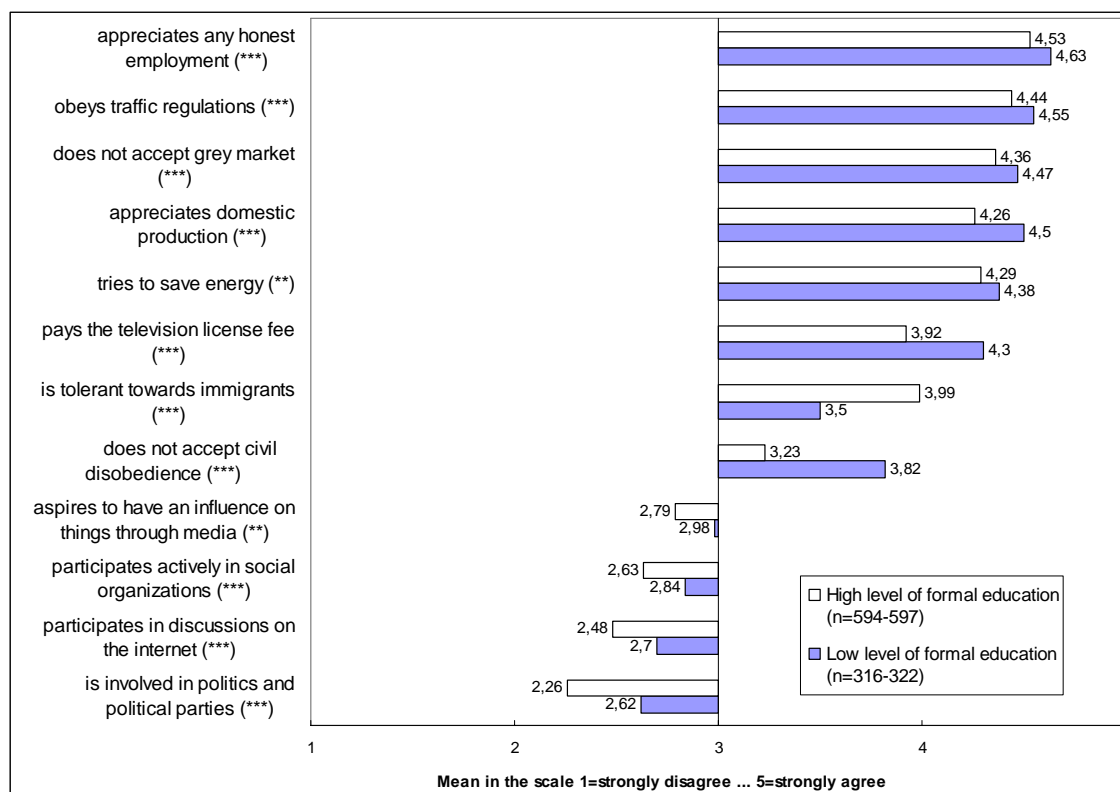
Age also has a strong influence on what is emphasized (see Figure 3). The older generation (age 55–66 years) supports many of the asked elements than the younger generation more strongly (age 25–34 years). Especially big differences were in the attitudes of paying the television license fee, following the work of government and parliament and not accepting the grey market and civil disobedience. Age does not influence the estimations of paying taxes, which tells something about the acceptance of the welfare system on the whole. The younger generation was more skeptical about many of the asked elements, but not towards tax payments.



\*\*\*  $p \leq 0,001$  very significant; \*\*  $0,001 < p \leq 0,01$  significant; \*  $0,01 < p \leq 0,05$  almost significant

**Figure 3.** Significant differences between generations.

The level of formal education does influence some of the asked elements (see Figure 4). The respondents with a higher level of formal education gave more statistically significant positive estimations only in the tolerance towards immigrants. Those respondents with less formal education emphasized significantly more, for example, appreciating any honest work and domestic production and obeying traffic regulations. Both groups do think that participating in social organizations and being involved in politics and political parties are not the main elements of a decent citizen. However, those respondents with less formal education had a slightly more positive attitude towards those traditional elements.



\*\*\*  $p \leq 0,001$  very significant; \*\*  $0,001 < p \leq 0,01$  significant; \*  $0,01 < p \leq 0,05$  almost significant

**Figure 4.** Significant differences between highly and less educated citizens.

According to these three main influencing background factors, we also tested the significance of mother tongue, level of income, and place of residence. Mother tongue does influence some elements. The Finnish-speaking respondents emphasized significantly more the elements of obeying the law and traffic regulations and not accepting the grey market. On the other hand, Swedish-speaking respondents emphasized tolerance towards immigrants significantly more than the Finnish-speaking respondents.

Place of residence only influences one asked element at a statistically significant level. The respondents from southern Finland stress avoiding the waste of natural resources more than the respondents from northern Finland. Both groups, however, estimated that the ecological elements of a decent citizen are important.

At the beginning of the research we were assuming that income level is one of the main dividers of the estimations of the elements of a decent citizen. The income level does affect in some elements but surprisingly little. The lower the income,

the higher are the estimations of the importance of participation in social organizations. The respondents with a higher income level emphasized the element of paying taxes, but also the respondents with lower level of income do feel it is a very important characteristic of a decent citizen.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

This research is based on the large-scale citizen survey implemented in the University of Vaasa, Finland in spring 2008. The results profile the concept of a decent citizen in the eyes of the citizens themselves. The selection process of the respondents raises the validity of the results of our study. Another thing for the validity is the relatively high response rate. Even if the profile is from Finland the results can generalize, to a certain extent, all western welfare societies. However, we have to keep in mind that the profile is the ideal picture. The citizens did estimate the elements of being a decent citizen. It was not a question of how things are or how the citizens themselves fulfill the elements in their own lives.

The purpose of this article was to examine the roles of being a decent citizen as a Finnish citizen and as a social actor. The Finnish citizens are as a nationality very law-abiding people even if the trust in the legislative body (politics) and supervisory bodies (judiciary and court of justice) has decreased remarkably in the last few years (Salminen and Ikola-Norrbacka 2009). Law-abiding becomes evident when seeing the results of citizen survey 2008 where law-abiding is appreciated second in the list of the different elements of the virtues of a decent citizen. Even the following of traffic regulations is emphasized.

In Table 3 we have concluded the results concerning the background factors and different elements of the decent citizen according to citizen survey 2008.

The table shows which background factors influence different elements and to what extent. Gender is the most influential background factor. It influences all elements very or quite much. Age and level of education are also very influential background factors. They both influence all elements. In addition, age is the most influential background factor concerning political elements and elements of publicity. Mother tongue influences all the elements excluding ecological elements, but the influence is not as strong as in the case of gender, age and level of education. Income level noticeably influences only political elements and elements of publicity, and place of residence only influences ecological elements.

**Table 3.** Influence of background factors on different elements of the concept of decent citizen.

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Mother tongue</b>	<b>Income level</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>
<b>Traditional elements</b>	+++	++	++	+		
<b>Ecological elements</b>	+++	+	+			+
<b>Political elements</b>	++	+++	++	+	++	
<b>Elements of publicity</b>	++	+++	++	+	+	
<b>Elements of social responsibility</b>	+++	+	++	++		

+++ = influences very much on nearly every part of the element

++ = influences very or quite much on some or nearly every part of the element

+ = influences quite much on one or two parts of the element

The public sector functions with the support of tax revenues. The well-known fact is that taxation in Finland is high. In spite of that, the statement ‘A decent citizen pays taxes’ gets wide support from the Finnish citizens, in all social groups under examination. It reveals something about the legitimacy of welfare services: the citizens experience the public financed welfare state with extensive services as legitimate and approve the fact that they themselves pay for keeping the system going as citizens. The results of the survey tell us about the strong belief in authority among the Finnish citizens. Devoted to the public sector, citizens are willing to diligently do their duty as citizens. Especially women appreciate the elements and virtues of traditional decent citizen higher than men.

Participating in politics is not seen as an important characteristic and duty of a decent citizen. It is possible that citizens are looking for different channels to make things better than the traditional channels like party politics and confidential post. Such new channels may be the new environmentally connected elements like recycling and concern of the situation of the globe.

The decent citizen has the spirit of ecology with real actions of doing things with more concern. This came up strongly in the estimations of citizens. We believe the trend will only strengthen in the future. It can already be seen that day-nursery and schools have taken environmental values to the syllabi which will emphasize the ecological elements of being a decent citizen. It would be interesting to re-search the opinions of young people about the same topic.

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