**S.I.: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING FOR URBAN SUSTAINABILITY**

# Educating for participatory active citizenship: an example from the ecological activist field

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## Abstract

Based on a short-term ethnography with a grassroots group of young environmental activists in the city of Porto, Portugal, this paper describes and problematizes their use of participatory methodologies to engage individual, community and organizational actors in tackling the problems of global climate change. By initiating what they call a "friendship network" that seeks to achieve democratic and participatory forms of activism, the group brings together both experienced and circumstantial activists (Ollis & Hamel-Green in Aust Adult Learn 55:202–219, 2015) in order to foster plural and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, Situated learning legitimate peripheral participation, 1991). The group does so by promoting the commitment of all actors (including opposite-minded ones) to the co-creation of a 4-day-municipal event on the theme of environmental sustainability. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the strategic mechanism of the group and their actions as a nucleus, we firstly examine some of the groups' views on civic and political participation (Stack, in Citizenship Studies 16:871–885, 2012) and, secondly, describe and discuss the methodologies they intentionally use to put citizenship-in-action and to foster the activation of 'standby citizens' (Amna & Ekman, in Amnå, E., & Ekman, J., Eur Political Sci Rev 6:261–281, 2014). This ethnography enabled us to learn how the group strives to achieve its goals by placing itself in-between the institutional sphere and the public realm: the ethnographer had the opportunity to observe their attempts to, on the one hand, influence decision-making by acquiring a degree of insider status in institutions that legislate and, on the other hand, to engage with large publics, encouraging citizens' voices and involvement in processes of co-participation focused on promoting ecological consciousness and political change.

**Keywords** Environmental activism · Ethnography · Sustainable citizenship · Political participation · Co-creation

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# 1 Introduction

In studies of citizenship, the young are one of the most targeted groups. Despite the variety of ideological orientations underpinning these studies, much of this research remains—arguably unreasonably—critical of young people, condemning them for their passivity toward formal politics (Henn et al., 2002). However, even if one accepts that the young express very little interest in participating in conventional politics, such as joining a political party (O'Toole et al., 2003; Quintelier, 2007), they seem to be very active in communitarian and environmental issues, revealing a variety of interests that can be targeted to understand and foster their participation (Haste & Hogan, 2006). The analytical framework on citizenship and political participation proposed by Amnå & Ekman (2014) introduced a new category: the "standby citizens". This category includes individuals "who stay alert, keep themselves informed about politics by bringing up political issues in everyday life contexts, and are willing and able to participate if needed" (p. 262). Against this backdrop, this paper argues that it is in places of situated-learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991)—which involve processes of collaborative pedagogy and social interaction—that "life-long" activists (Ollis & Hamel-Green, 2015) engage with the so-called standby citizens—as well as with "circumstantial activists"—in ways that enable them to move from the "periphery of practice" to become actors in the "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As such, these spaces can be a kind of "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1963) that can both promote and support the participatory engagement of "newcomers" (using Lave & Wenger' terminology, 1991, p. 32). In this paper, we explore this phenomenon by looking at the experiences of an activist group created in 2011 by two "life-long activists" (Ollis, 2011, p. 250), Mateus and Branco[1], who wanted to foster a 'place' where common people, politicians, entrepreneurs and environmental specialists could meet and freely discuss the relationship between ecology and politics. Cidade+[2] emerged aiming at being such a 'place': it is a major event, organized in a semi-professional way by 4 professional activists (aged between 30 and 37[3]) that occurs every year since 2013 in a big public garden in Porto (Portugal). Figures. 1, 2, 3, 4

We begin by conceptually framing the relationship between citizenship, democracy, and social change; then, we present the activist group and the methodological design of our study and later analyze the group's conceptualizations on citizenship and the strategies they use in order to put 'citizenship' in action. We give particular attention to the intersection of 'citizenship', 'community and 'participatory methodologies', as it sheds light on the group' efforts to promote collective modes of citizenship.

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[1] These two main actors—Mateus and Branco—have been involved in the projection of the idea behind Cidade+. All names in this article are pseudonyms, chosen by the ethnographer, in order to preserve the participants' anonymity.

[2] Cidade+, freely translated as 'City+', is an informal group, integrated in a formal association, "Moving Cause", located in the city of Porto, Portugal.

[3] The participants' age corresponds to the time frame when this research was conducted.

**Fig. 1** Cultural moment with a concert in the acoustic Shell (people are relaxed and amused mostly coming in family groups)



**Fig. 2** Moment of sharing after small group discussions. An afternoon using open space technology as a participatory methodology during the "warm-up-cycle"

**Fig. 3** Open workshop on vegan food during the event—morning time



**Fig. 4** The event' hallway in the Palace Garden [The wooden swings propose a relaxed and familiar setting]

## 2 Citizenship, democracy, and social change

Academic debate on citizenship has gained impetus in the last decades. For Berger (2009, p. 335), civic engagement is a buzzword, encompassing actions that range "from voting in elections to giving money to charity, or from bowling in leagues to participate in political rallies and marches". In trying to understand the intersection of the concepts of 'citizenship', 'political' and 'participation', scholarship in social sciences delved in four arenas of academic debate that highlight the difficulties in defining these concepts (Author, 2017, p. 12): (a) the civic and the political; (b) the attitudinal and the behavioral[4]; (c) the conventional and the non-conventional[5]; and (d) the individual and the collective". Each of these arenas entails conflicting visions of engagement and participation that we will try to shed light during the development of this article. There is a tension that cuts across these four arenas of academic debate. This is the tension between citizenship understood in terms of participation in the realm of formal politics (i.e., in relation to the apparatus of the nation-state and its institutions), and of citizenship understood in terms of the civic action of people engaged in creating positive social and political change in everyday life. In fact, viewing citizenship as a "fluid" and "flexible" concept (Taylor & Wilson, 2004) is already a form of being aware of its disputed and multi-dimensional nature. Adopting a processual perspective for this concept, that is, seeing citizenship as a process rather than a descriptive category, allows us to see citizenship in terms of practices that are embedded in everyday life. These are practices through which people demand and embody different social and political relationships (Clarke, Collins, Dagnino & Neveu, 2014). Dalton (2008) identified two categories of citizenship: i) "duty citizenship", which entails more normative forms of participation in the democratic life and has a "nation-state-oriented focus"; and ii) an "engaged citizenship", focused on activities that are not "stated-focused", encompassing a local and community dimension. In a different vein, McBeth et al., (2010) found an overall continuum between these two polarized categories—the "duty-based citizenship", encompassing more individual, normative and "good citizenship" behaviors, and the "engaged citizenship" holding a more global orientation, enlarging the scale of the problems and—in the case of ecological issues—making corporations accountable for environmental deterioration (Dalton, 2008). Eco-pedagogy principles join these two poles: for the proponents of eco-pedagogy, citizenship entails a constant creation and recreation of the citizen amid a group, chasing communion between individuals, groups, and institutions to pursue a common goal (Gutierrez & Prado., 1999). Misiaszek (2018), when pointing eco-pedagogy's roots (drawing on Paulo Freire's work), emphasizes the importance of praxis, dialog and transdisciplinarity when looking to environmental education and sustainable development. Micheletti et al., (2014) emphasized "sustainable citizenship" as an increasingly important concept focused "on how citizens, both individually and collectively and in different settings, can participate in sustainable development" (p. 203). The authors consider this type of citizenship as a way to create political and collective possibilities of change, relevant for social movements and for the creation of a more dignified life in the future. In fact, other authors defend an eco-democracy that would entail active participation of people to

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[4] Different authors discuss if all the layers of human capacities—affective, cognitive, behavior—can be called political/civic participation/engagement. Berger (2009) called upon the multiple possibilities of attention, activity or the combination of both being called engagement. Ekman & Amna (2012) distinguished them in two types of participation: latent and manifest.

[5] The limits between these poles are rapidly changing—from formal to informal ways of participating, from legal to illegal—the boundaries are an on-going discussion tempting to include new repertoires that challenge the idea and nature of politics.

"connect every organism on Earth into one planetary and complex interdependent ecosystem" (Kopnina et. Al., 2021, p. 46).

To understand the factors and conditions underlying sustainable behaviors, there is a need "to look at the experiences and actions of such young people" as to understand the conduction toward sustainable lives (Jaufar, 2021). This will give us access to divisions over citizenship that are present in the ecological matters: from liberal perspectives—focused on civil rights and duties (Bell, 2005)—to critical and participatory perspectives—reflecting concrete and structural challenges to the dominant system (Dobson, 2003). The adjectives added to citizenship' conceptualization are a revealing aspect: ecological (Dobson, 2003), environmental (Waldman, 2003), planetary (Boff, 2009; Gadotti, 2010), sustainable (Micheletti & Stole, 2012) to name a few. Maurício Waldman (2003), one of the proponents of environmental citizenship, considers the need to participate concertedly in the three levels of common life: i) state and public administration; ii) educational and civic society structures (schools, associations, social movements); and iii) individual levels (daily choices and habits). Understanding citizenship as "political subjectivity shifts our attention from fixed categories" (Isin, 2009, p.383) to more fluid categories of citizenship that can be said to be "participatory" or "active". However, these categories can be either an instrument of empowerment or domination (ibid.). We will look to these tensions from our case-study.

## 3 Methodological notes

The ethnographic method pays attention to the lived experience of the political, favoring a "privileged access to its processes, causes, and effects' of broader political processes" (Tilly, 2006, p.410). By looking at the encounters between civil society, its networks and formal politics, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the actors and institutions in multiple dimensions. Without limiting agency to a battle of top-down forces, we can grasp the richness of the interactional process between the different actors and the group's daily living (Baiocchi & Connor, 2008), its passions and sacrifices (Mahler, 2006). The ethnography conducted with Cidade+—which enabled the observation of both formal and informal encounters—provided us rich information about the daily struggles of belonging to a group. Lasting from March to July 2017, the ethnographer (the first author) observed most of the group' activities on a weekly and sometimes daily-basis through participant observation, and reported them through field notes, including visual records. Those activities encompassed: i) internal group 'meetings (taking place on a daily-basis between the group of 3 full-time organizers plus the sporadic help of volunteers); ii) extended meetings with local actors and partners (occurring two or three times a month); iii) "warm-up cycle" (one-day event per month before the final event); and iii) the 4-days' event Cidade+. Except for a meeting at the City Hall, in which the presence of the ethnographer required formal authorization, the group always welcomed the ethnographer in its activities, either formal or informal. The ethnography also included six semi-structured interviews, conducted at the end of the fieldwork, with the main participants (3 full-time organizers, one

part-time organizer and one enterprise' actor[6]) aiming to explore their individual conceptualizations of citizenship.

# 4 A short description of Cidade+

Cidade+ is a cost-free event around the theme of "sustainability", happening once a year, throughout four days, in a municipal public garden of Porto (Portugal). It is organized by an informal group that is part of the formal association "Moving Cause".[7] The Cidade+ holds different partnerships—with chamber hall, LIPOR (an intermunicipalized Waste Management Service of Porto) and other multiple institutions and enterprises—that help fund and advertise the event and its procedural costs. Created by two friends—Mateus and Branco—Cidade+ holds a professionally minded commitment in its origin and was born out of a need to politicize the ecological struggle [Branco's main willingness] and to address the lack of environmental events in Porto [Mateus is an event' producer]. Mateus and Branco, former acquaintances from students' movements, were the authors of the idea behind Cidade+, which ended up materializing in 2014 in different formats. Both the organization and the event suffered changes across time: a quest to survive, mainly due to the unstable funds, created different organizational structures in order to guarantee the financial sustainability of the project. By the time of our ethnography, Cidade+ comprised in its core three young-adults[8] (aged between 30 and 37), two females and one male, working full-time in daily-office activities throughout the year and a part-time organizer, mainly allocated to the website' design. According to these actors, Cidade+ has three main goals: i) to raise environmental awareness (reflected on day-to-day actions—from the private sphere, e.g. at home, to the public sphere, e.g. the way people relate with each other and make business); ii) to promote a network of civic, economic and political actors concerned with environmental action and social responsibility; and iii) to make an effective change in politics, pressing measures that are needed at a legislative level.

To achieve these goals, the group tries to involve different actors (including opposite-minded ones) in public dialog and create meeting spaces where the co-creation of the event can happen. This is done through several strategies that range from a set of activities based on participatory methodologies, organized during the 3 months preceding the main event (called the 'warm-up cycle'), to activities through which the group builds and reinforces a network of people supporting the cause or the event (called "friendship network") to pursuing alternative financing methods (e.g., co-financing and crowdfunding). The "friendship network" includes the volunteers present on the days of the event (23), interested individuals (137), organizations (69), companies (35) and local partnerships (3). The event itself entails conferences and debates to reflect on ideas, from institutional to academic or common citizen' audiences; "Business plazas"—for companies which work

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[6] The 3 full-time organizers were Mateus (logistic production), Viviana (coordinator of Cidade+) and Verónica (co-coordinator of the event); the part-time organizer was Henrique (design and informatics); and the enterprise' actor was André (a shareholder of a renewal/green energy enterprise). The data from this last interview were not used in the present article.

[7] Original name: it's a formal association, in Porto, created for international cooperation with the motto "To mobilize real utopias".

[8] We do not encompass Branco, one of the founders of Cidade+, targeted above, because he is currently living outside Portugal. However, he is still one of the central figures of the organization.

for sustainability to be close and get to know each other and regular citizens; "Merca-deco" [little marketplace]—a space for trade and to present on-growing projects related to handicraft, food, clothing, with an area for associations; workshops—to schools, families or interested individuals—tapping several dimensions, from physical health to recy-cling tools; and Shows—music, performances, and dance—to celebrate sustainability and the environment with a positive attitude. In the group of Cidade+, the effort to engage other people in the struggle over sustainability is very consistent both by (i) including non-activists as collaborators—a consequence of ngoization that entails different tensions and strategic viewpoints (already addressed in Author, 2020); and (ii) by addressing a mixed audience—encompassing both activist and non-activist audiences. In this way, the group facilitates opportunities for sharing experiences and fostering plural and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), aimed at finding new actors for enacting social change.

## 5 Framing active citizenship in Cidade+

Based on the interviews and the participant observations, we collected data about indi-viduals' perceptions on civic and political life, while paying attention to the methodologies and strategies developed by the participants aiming the coherence between the practices as a group and views of citizenship. Drawing on Stack's distinction (2012) between "state-focused citizenship" and "beyond-state citizenship", we identified four categories of citi-zenship that emerge from the group's views of "active citizenship": i) citizenship focused on the state; ii) the market; iii) social interactions/connections; and the iv) individual (Table I). Our analysis of people's perceptions on civic and political life is also informed by our understanding of citizenship (discussed above) as a process that encompasses both participation in the realm of formal politics (as in the category "focused on the state"), and the civic action of people involved in creating positive social change in the realm of every-day life. Each category of citizenship relates to a type of individual actions that is seen as characteristic of active citizens. In a similar vein, each category of citizenship can also be linked to distinctive group strategies implemented by Cidade+ as a collective entity. This allows us to appreciate the tensions between the group's normative conceptions of citizen-ship (i.e., their views regarding what "active citizenship" should be at the level of indi-vidual action) and the group's actions and strategies at the level of collective action (i.e., how they put citizenship-in-action). Table 1 presents the four categories of conceptions of citizenship.

### 5.1 Citizenship focused on the state

This category of citizenship comprises both instrumental and expressive dimensions. Indi-vidual acts of resistance, publicly voicing common concerns, intending to raise awareness on how things work and the need to change the world is an important aspect of citizenship (e.g., Weiss, 2020; Isin, 2009; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Dalton, 2008). The act of responding to and being reactive in institutional politics involves complaining in formal and institu-tional instances.

"Participation, I think it involves more the act of responding. I think it involves more action. It's actually doing something. Also, when it comes to people com-

**Table 1** Four Categories of conceptions of citizenship

| Citizenship Definitions | Individual conceptions (how individuals conceptualize citizenship) Individual | Actions and Strategies of the group (how the group implements citizenship conceptualizations at a collective level) Collective |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Focused on the State | To react, to be responsible, to act when needed | To hold spaces where political discussions can happen; to hold a lobbying space inside the Municipal Chamber hall, where they can monitor municipal actions |
| Focused on the Market | Responsible consumerism (local and biologic products, vegetarian diet); Boycott and Buycott certain enterprises | Boycott to big and mistrustful enterprises; Promote small, local and ethical business |
| Focused on the social interactions | To co-create; to express; to experience; and to connect | To enable "spaces of experience" and a "friendship network" ("warm-up cycle" and "Cidade+event), where co-creation and co-participation are fueled with affection, conviviality and personal encounters, creating and sustaining participation |
| Focused on the individual | To be interested; to search for information; to be aware and attentive; to express in public | To hold pedagogical and expressive spaces linked with conscientization (conferences, workshops, warm-up-cycle), example-giving (through the sharing of inspirational stories); and amplification of voice |

plaining formally, complaining about the various services, this is also civic participation." Viviana (Interview, 4th October, 2017)

There is a need to acknowledge the meeting point between daily things and municipal decisions, as a reason to get involved. This resembles the notion of the "monitorial citizen" (Schudson, 1998), a form of staying alert and interested to institutional political actions. Moreover, as stressed by Viviana, "it involves action" and, thus, a 'standby' position (Amnå & Ekman, 2014) that can be activated, if need be, at any moment. Recalling the four arenas of academic debate presented in the theoretical section, particularly regarding the tension between attitudinal and behavioral components of civic and political engagement, more than two poles, what is at stake is a continuum influenced by circumstantial dynamics of proximity. Such seemingly NIMBY (not in my backyard) rhetoric has actually been found to underlie local environmental struggles (e.g., Batel & Devine-Wright, 2020). The excerpt below shows the critical stance regarding a measure taken by the municipality—such viewpoint is related to the group's presence in local politics, deriving from its professionalization.

"Here's a funny example: in the latest Cidade+, there was an elderly woman very annoyed with the weeds growing in the streets and sidewalks. When we explained to her that the only thing that eliminates the weeds is glyphosate; and that Porto city council banned it for being extremely harmful; and that that was the reason why the weeds grow, she got really surprised. By the following day she returned to thank us, saying that she now looks at those plants in a very different way" Verónica (Fieldnotes, 21st April, 2017)

Regarding the collective dimension, the efforts to maintain links with other organizations, especially with state institutions, reinforced the group's political strength and ensure its role in the local political arena (cf. Landriscina, 2006).

"(…) we know that we have direct influence [on the urban political decisions]… They already invited us to take part on an event where we would think together of ways to adapt to climate change in a municipal level... I mean, the opinion of Cidade+ already started to count for something… and also the fact that we are a project that aims to bridge citizens, associations and chamber hall… we are a mediator between these agents to get into municipal urban political changes…" Viviana (Interview, 4th October, 2017)

By adopting a holistic form of advocacy toward both the public and institutional arenas, the group optimizes the insider/outsider role toward the maximization of the goal of raising citizens' awareness and promoting an actual change in local politics. This relates to another (tensional) arena of academic debate pinpointed at the outset of the article: conventional and non-conventional participation. We not only agree with Lamprianou (2013) about the possibility of such distinction being actually elusive—once acts previously considered as unconventional increasingly become widespread and acceptable— but also the empirical data presented in this article calls attention to the intertwinement of those dimensions. Indeed, as illustrated by Viviana's excerpt, the degree of influence on institutional urban politics is quite built upon a political capital rooted in an informal, participatory group (Cidade+), the expansion of which eventually made local politicians take it seriously; this, in turn, reinforces the group's grassroot relevance. Again, it is about a processual unfolding of citizenship (Clarke, Collins, Dagnino & Neveu,

2014), practiced and enacted as a continuum of interaction between different contexts, modes and levels—even if not without tensions and contradictions.

The path of professionalization meets state, enterprises, and private needs, but can also enable access to official funds and opportunities to advise on governmental decision-making processes.

> In a formal meeting with Fonseca, an actor from the Friendship Network, he advised Viviana: "The municipalities are now in charge of designing the plan to combat climate change. This could interest you (…) maybe the whole plan' design would be too heavy for you but they could purchase part of your services to help them (…) and Verónica is already a member of the commission that supervises the plan [designed to combat climate change]. She cannot be paid but it's a lobby ... she can verify if they are doing something or if it's going to rest on a drawer." (Field notes, 5th May of 2017)

The negotiations with authorities and the provision of services in "environmental management" gives Cidade+ the opportunity to work where the government does not want to act, fails its action or does not have basic knowledge (Lang, 2013). Within a variety of approaches—highlighted in the following pages—they represent a valuable source as creators and sustainers of interested audiences.

> Verónica talked passionately, as always, about what was happening. She was delighted with the meeting in CITY A[9] "they found us, it's really lucky." (...) They like the idea, the co-creation of Cidade+, and want our knowledge of how to do it. They are building a virtual lab to apply to a funding and they want our help. (...) we do not know what they really want yet, but they want our help on this issue!" (Field notes, 11th May of 2017)

Yet, this link can also entail risks of co-option or deviance from the main goals, which was openly discussed by the participants in different occasions.

> We were meeting with the city councilor [of another City] and the assistant. When we were walking, Verónica told me "I do not know if we will be doing this next year. This helps, the money, the network, but it has nothing to do with us. Every time I feel this more strongly. The way they do these things is just to fill in the agenda. We do not like to work this way, you know?" (Field notes, 26th May of 2017)

## 5.2 Citizenship focused on the market

Approaches to normative and legal-framed citizenship, consumption and private lifestyles are seen as linked to discourses of sustainable citizenship, which imply a "fuller view of the responsibilities entailed in citizenship" (Micheletti et al., 2014). Maniates and Meyer (2010) identified two tendencies in the individual choices of consumption related to environmental problems: i) the need to combine private and governmental measures; ii) the acceptance of the centrality of the market, which means shifting the focus from the government to markets, and from citizens to consumers. The core assumption of the latter is the Marshallian idea that consumers are sovereigns on the

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[9] A is just a letter to anonymously name the city.

market, as goods fail to have a value of their own and depend on the value they bring to the consumer (Zaratiegui, 2002).

> "I think at the moment, almost all my household products, cleaning and that, not all, but almost all of them are organic (...) whenever possible I prefer a bicycle, I prefer to get a ride, the maximum possible. The action of being a vegetarian also has a lot of impact, right? Anyway, everything that meat production implies and so on..." Henrique (Interview, 20th October, 2017)

What Giddens (1991) has called life politics—conscious behaviors based on political/ethical decisions — can contribute to deepen democracy (e.g., Andolina et al., 2002; O'Toole, et al., 2003), through the politicization of everyday attitudes and choices. Jaupar (2021, p.2) calls upon the feminist critiques to justify the fundamental relationship between the "decisions made in the private sphere around areas such as consumption, transport and energy conservation" and their impacts in the planet.

Regarding the collective dimension, Cidade+'s actions take into account the monitoring of partnerships and invited "friends", enterprises and associations in what concerns ethical behaviors and products. The group makes daily options, frequently holding debates concerning the ethics of consumption and the power of coherently choosing not only products, but also partnerships and marketers.

> Discussing a touristic trip for the invited entity, Viviana refocused the others: "I wouldn't really like to contribute to that company.... Do they have the monopoly of that? Can't we find a smaller one? There must be more than that one!" (Field notes [10 April, 2017])

The group tries to be conscious about the risk of being unable to preserve its collective identity—as an ethically sustainable group—due to some of the partnerships, especially with bigger companies. Then, another arena of academic debate—the individual and the collective modes of participation—overlap when individual stands and life choices embody a collective dimension and, in our empirical case, inform the group's critical engagement with the market system. Indeed, as pinpointed by recent studies discussing the 'inward turn' in environmental sustainability, neither individualist approaches can tackle the time and place aspects of environmental challenges, not the collectivity should be overemphasized (Boda et al., 2021). Rather, there is the need for "collective actions by individuals" in the context of social movements (Ibid., p. 1). At the same time, the rapid growth of Cidade+ is often seen by participants as a problem for their collective identity and dilemmas around this concern are often discussed in the group:

> "And now this group with Cidade+, you have to be careful. Beware of growing up. You are now moving on the razor edge and it is not easy. It is not at all easy." Said Renata.
> "We should invite PARTNER Z. Despite of everything, it makes sense to go to the international [level]", said Verónica.
> "But will it already make sense to do that? We are only three years old. I feel some pressure on the part of the municipal hall to widen. Even at conferences to go more international. And I feel we have to be careful about being sustainable, in making a sustainable growth", argued Viviana. "I feel it more in relation to the business world. In bringing bigger companies."(...) (Field notes, 10th April, 2017])

Lauren Copeland ([2014]) distinguishes acts of "boycotting—punishing companies for unfavorable behavior—and buycotting—rewarding companies for favorable behavior" (p.2), emphasizing this distinction, as the former favors a more normative reasoning on citizenship, as "responsibilities and duties", and the latter points toward an "engaged" type of citizenship, that favors helping others, implying informal learning that can help to differentiate between products and companies that are more ethical and value-consistent.

> "I think [Cidade+] is the voice of all those projects that try to survive from arts and crafts in a coherent way, which strive to do things in a sustainable way. They are not in the same competition market as the others, companies and other projects. With the restaurants for example, "RESTAURANT O" and "RESTAURANT L"... they work on doing things well MUCH more than the others. They are very concerned: that packaging comes from there, that fruit comes from there and it doesn't come from Chile. This is the same with us. As we also assume this coherent position, we are respecting this and giving voice to these..." (Viviana, Interview, 4th October, 2017)

## 5.3 Citizenship focused on social interactions

This type of citizenship appeals to the capacity of "self-making", enacting on the beliefs individuals and communities have about themselves (Ong et al., [1996]). This implies relationships and communication between citizens, aiming at transforming the social structure and caring for each other's voice, expression and individuation. In this sense, the "creation of opinion" expressed by Viviana is what Dahlgren ([2009]) understood as "public talk", as communicative interaction among citizens is fundamental to—and an expression of—their participation in public life.

> I think that just the fact that you express yourself already has a huge impact. It doesn't matter if there is a consequence after this or even any change of laws or paradigms... but a citizen who uses their voice and expression (...) from music, let's see, graffiti, going to assemblies and expressing. Also, someone who provokes, that also expresses in common places, common spaces like: coffee shops, squares. It has to do with creating culture, it's to create public opinion." Viviana (Interview, 4th October, 2017)

Citizenship was also understood as a creative act, where co-creation and co-participation would be the key to developing active citizenship. This involvement in society would oppose a neoliberal economic system which leaves little room for freedom, self-thinking or creation.

> Many problems in society that begin with the young people who are going to be tomorrow's adults, is that they don't have that good challenge or that motivation, let's say, that feeling of being alive. Because in fact, they don't feel alive because they're not co-creating! (...) it's something that happens in connection with life and with people. And that's very important, that sense. (Henrique, Interview, 20th October, 2017)

This means that, in order to re-create a fairer world, people need to re-create and work over the internal oppressions, that comes from "the dictates of the positivist rationality and its consequent mutilation of the power to imagine" (Giroux, 1986, p.43)—by using communication and expression tools, in order to re-create and impact the surrounding environment. However, it is necessary to question whether this claim for creativity is part of the pervasive notions that "stood the test of time (…) [and that are] productive and located at the

side of the individual" (Thornham, 2013, p. 1). This "creative" focus can actually be part of the neoliberal paradigm that shifts "the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible,' 'rational' individuals [with the aim of] encourag[ing] individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form" (Lemke, 2001, p.201). The individual "shining" and self-care can then be both the symptom and the solution of social deficits (Hobart & Kneese, 2020) as we could witness when it comes to exhaustion, overwork and precarious attachments (cf. Author, 2020).

Regarding the collective dimension, two of the main strategies of the group are: i) to establish a "Friendship Network" that can embrace different actors: activists, the common citizens, local politicians and entrepreneurs; ii) to build a community (Comunidade+[10])—more restricted than the former—with a strong identity to strengthen attachments between participants and their multiple partners. These strategies are pursued through "warm-up cycles", where they use participatory methodologies and techniques of co-creation that, together with dialog, create pro-horizontal participation and togetherness. These spaces resemble possibilities of "situated-learning practice". By establishing a "friendship network", the group puts together "life-long activists" and "circumstantial" ones (Ollis & Hamel-Green, 2015), facilitating spaces where "the purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation [but] to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 108—109).

> "I think that we are getting wiser in using the time of the sessions (...). There's a subliminal, experiential objective which is to provide a positive experience: Give them [the participants] time and attention. Empower the participants into becoming citizens. The main objective is to embrace, to create community." (Fieldnotes, 19th May, 2017)

Practicing participation as action, these activists provide spaces of open public dialog, where everybody can be heard, and engage in responding to the practical needs of the Cidade+ event. To achieve this, they use participative methodologies, such as "open space technology", "world café", and other group dynamics that can develop participants' interest, knowledge, values, and skills as citizens, aiming at switching from passive consumers to active organizers of the Cidade+ event:

> The moments of open space technology and beyond this. Deep down, Cidade+ appears to raise questions, does it not? To bring knowledge, to create, to provoke citizens. This provocation is only to awaken consciousness, [for people] to become more active, socially more active." (Verónica, Interview, 28th September, 2017)

As Tracey Ollis (2011, p. 255) argued, "activists' learning occurs through immersing themselves into a practice with other organisers". This co-creation process, extended to the wider network they hold, provides space, time and voice for citizens, enterprises, political institutions and academics. Then, everyone takes responsibility for the decisions, processes and outcomes of the event.

> [in the evaluation meeting of one of the warm-up-cycle' events] "That we have some weight to take their voice forward and these are their expectations" said Mateus. "I

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[10] Translated freely as Community+. It is the network of different agents worried about social and environmental issues, they eagerly pursuit as part of their job. This network is maintained by giving different roles to the actors that are involved with the event of Cidade+. The difference with Friendship network is that "Comunidade+" has a formal membership.

feel how incredible that was yesterday. The room was full. I now feel the responsibility we have to offer the next steps. For [Comunidade+] to be born there must be accompaniment". (fieldnotes, 19th may, 2017)

Elliot and Turner (2012, p.11), when contrasting society and community, argue that society is founded on "impersonal [and] instrumental relationships [that] sharply contrast with the more spontaneous [and] integrated forms of social association in small-scale communities". The search for community is then, they argue, "more pressing than ever". Sustained by ethical and political principles of horizontality, solidarity or reciprocity, personal autonomy and self-organization entail the idea of transforming oneself while transforming the world. The predominantly informal encounters, where celebration has a big role, are also moments of creation and group development, and seen as opportunities to deepen and formalize some inter-associative connections. These connections are strengthened through formal attachments in what they call "Comunidade+" [see above]. The idea of forming a community resonates with Lave and Wenger's conceptualization (1991) of legitimate peripheral participation, where "newcomers have broad access to arenas of mature practice [and] an apprentice's contributions to ongoing activity gain value in practice" (p. 110—111). Recalling the arenas of academic debate explored in the theoretical section, 'the civic and the political' take a complementary role in the idea that civic approaches—theoretically defined as mainly related to volunteer activities and community-level engagement (Zukin et al., 2006)—are aimed at positively shaping, even if in a long run, the collective political life of the city (Berger, 2009). To be sure, the support-basis created around Cidade+ is built through co-creation logics and an intentional investment on social (affective and effective) interactions. Echoing eco-pedagogy principles, the pursuit of a communion between different actors, the exchange and "clash of ideas leading to the emergence of a deliberated set of shared values" (Kurian et al., 2014, p. 437) means to see concrete and transformative possibilities in connection with active citizenry.

What is also at stake here is a self-recognized move from "apprenticeship to mastery" that was discussed, for example, in the debates held during the evaluation meeting. As exemplified in the words of André, the desire for a different status demands a recognition of his engagement at Cidade+' event.

André said "I think there should not be a distinction between organizers and volunteers". Several people reacted against this "I disagree. I think that is easier to understand that, because I am a volunteer, I don't have to know everything. If I was an organizer people would expect me to know more (...)". Verónica said "(...) It would not be the first case of a volunteer becoming an organizer, but each case must be observed carefully (...)". Fonseca agrees "Those who stand out due to their commitment, knowledge and good-will towards Cidade+, should be treated as such." (Fieldnotes, 11th July, 2017)

This excerpt illuminates an important distinction between "complete participation"—which implies the acquisition of knowledge by "newcomers" to belong to a central and closed vortex of participation—and full participation which "is intended to do justice to the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 37). This distinction is present in the routines and 'hierarchies' of Cidade+ and it is felt by the participants. Most of the perceptions that volunteers have about their work in Cidade+, however, is based on feelings of happiness and gratitude toward the experience. And the very fact of participating seems to trigger the will to continue to know more and get more involved:

Then, one of the volunteers (a woman in her fifties), said: "I like the positive energy that exists here—I am always greeted with a smile. And this creates empathy with people! The way I was welcomed ... I like very much people your age, I like young people! I did not know that much about the topic, and from this I learned new things, and I loved it! Next year I want to have strength to continue! If there are things to be done, let's do it! This will to change, that is what I saw here, let's do it! Thank you!" (Field notes, 11th July of 2017)

Social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) seems to have an important impact on the group and on the participation of its members. This relational net seems to be important for the recruitment of new members—both as staff, as "friends" of the movement, and as part of the networking in general—enterprises, associations, and workshop members. In fact, phenomena of connecting and disconnecting—which Bauman (2003) considers as distinguishable elements between network and community—were apparent in the fieldwork, together with the concern of not being enough caring and sustained:

(...) Nelson said "I always wonder how Ilídio will feel after these peaks of affectivity [referring to the 4-days' event]. After each one of us gets on with our own lives, he will feel lonelier than we do. For our lives are very different: we are always surrounded by people and making plans, whilst he will keep working in that factory (...)" (Field notes, 18th July, 2017)

The idea that "I am wanted" underpins recruitment processes and invites a shift from passive to active citizen. In the case of Cidade+, this is very clear: their capacity to build and sustain relationships is viewed as one of their main achievements.

[in an event of the "warm-up-cycle" when Viviana asked people why they were there] (...) Peralta said that he has known Cidade+ for over a year and continued: "After traveling extensively and even having attended a huge international conference on sustainability, I realized that what is missing in this movement for sustainability is not greatness, it is actually in the human relationship that are created around it. It is these relationships that will bring change to life and they will truly transform. It is not the event in itself but the relations that are at the base of this event and that do not exhaust themselves in this event, which give strength and the necessary connections for continuity outside of it." (Field notes, 18th may, 2017)

## 5.4 Citizenship focused on Individual development

If we accept that citizenship is a daily act—also stated as one of the main goals of the group—the conception of active citizenship is very much linked to being informed, interested and conscious. We witnessed some of the group' discussions on how to educate and inform citizens. Here, an example of a discussion that took place during the evaluation of the event:

[when talking about 'food area'] "The environmental ethics must be present. We should have moopies and posters with information of where it [the food and table ware] comes from to force the reflection", said one of the 'friends of Cidade+'. "Yes, but from my experience it is not because I have information that habits change, even with people knowing that napkins pollute a lot the second time they go there they are going to take a few just the same, they will no longer remember. Having information is not enough". said Isabel. (Field notes [11th July, 2017])

This reasoning seems to rest on the assumption that "increased knowledge results in more interest, capacity to participate, and thus increased participation among young people" (Manning & Edwards, 2013, p. 2). Micheletti et al. (2014) suggested a relationship between citizens' awareness on the articulation of interest toward government, engagement in civil society organizations, and choices in political consumption. Interest together with attention could be categorized as "involvement" and are, according to Amnå & Ekman (2014), a "latent form of political participation" where interest is understood as a first level of "civil participation" or even part of the category of "standby citizens", a segment of the non-participatory group that easily transforms their interest and awareness into an action, if the ideal circumstances arise. "Citizenship" is also understood by these actors as a form of attention that would, ultimately, be transformed into action:

> Active citizenship is (...) a daily attention for the events that occur in the day-to-day (…) A stance of action in matters that interfere—which are all the matters—with the act of being a citizen, of living in society, in community, in a collective." Verónica (Interview, 28th September, 2017)

Cidade+'s response implies a dual strategy: on the one hand, education and information-giving about the ecological crisis; on the other, the sharing of concrete tools and inspiring stories to sow a "seed" in their audiences and bring utopia nearer. In fact, one of the mottos under debate for the 2017 event was: "Cidade+ : da Utopia ao dia-a-dia" [from utopia to daily life].

> "[to] help find concrete alternatives for the citizens who are coming from the outside of this topic and are curious about sustainability but who do not have responsible habits yet. For example: "I want to start cycling in the city but I'm afraid! Who can help me?" (...) very concrete things like these. Viviana (Interview, 4th October, 2017)
> "(...) it's a question of changing people's daily behaviors and also bringing a bit of awareness to this active citizenship. We have several things that appeal to a more active citizenship. If people change certain behaviors, there it is: active citizenship." Mateus (Interview 31st July, 2017)

"Bringing a bit of awareness" and "changing certain behaviors" are referred by Mateus as dual parts of active citizenship. Resorting to academic debates on participation and citizenship, 'attitudinal and behavioral' dimensions are at stake. While fostering knowledgeable and attentive citizens is a stepping stone toward action, information is far from enough. As recognized by the participants of Cidade+, the affective and commonness dimensions of citizenship are important in individual (sociopolitical) development.

During different encounters—both in Cidade+ event and "warm-up cycle"—the participants work on raising audience awareness and on developing a continuity of interaction to promote and sustain individuals' commitment to change. According to Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualization of learning, the expansion of learning to more than the schematized structure of learning of skills encompasses the ability to "actually do practices" and acquiring the "ability to play various roles in various fields of participation", developed through the co-participation and engagement in different participation roles (p.20).

# 6 Conclusions

> In the end of our interview, Viviana opened her heart in an act of self-reflection: "It is as if this event was, in reality, the result of a world in ill-being. So you need to keepsticking Band-Aids, don't you?" (Viviana, Interview, 4th October, 2017)

In our research on Cidade+, we tried to grasp some of the conceptualizations of civic and political participation, vis-à-vis the group' strategies and methodologies for change. If, as Lang (2013, p.2) suggests, public engagement is "the most salient source of legitimacy of the non-governmental sector", this group can be an example—despite all the underlying tensions—of how to strive for a coherent action that encompasses a full participatory process (the dynamics within and around the group) toward the promotion of more conscious and participatory citizens (who can act in both public and private spheres beyond the group). By organizing an event with a strong collective identity, the group works toward a "kind of world that is not, unfortunately, within our reach—but in which we would like to live and hope to get" (Bauman, 2003, p. 9). In this case, through different strategic actions, the group undertakes a process that can activate citizens and engage a variety of actors toward the transformation of passivity into activity, and complexify their civic engagement and political involvement. Spaces of encounter, intentionally sought and nurtured by the group—of which "friendship network" and "Comunidade+" are exemplary—can be a way of fostering (social and political) solidarity as well as political struggle. Integrating affection into the fabric of social movements promotes meaning, consistency and commitment to a common struggle. If the environmental crisis can be seen as a problem of human greed (Speth, 2014), the environmental struggle must integrate the emotional and the relational endurance. The conviviality fostered in the depicted spaces aimed to enable "circumstantial activists" and "standby citizens" to feel attuned to other activists and to experience being a subject and an active actor in the world (Author, 2020a). By establishing a "we" and a "them" "as a form of symbolic interaction", the group assumes an "inside the movement" community, where participants can "express common grievance and communicate discontent, to protest and, in the best-case scenario, to effect changes in attitudes and practices of those inside and outside the "movement" (Eyerman, 2005, p.46).

To create hospitable spaces for taking up the hard questions of our time is possibly one of the main contributions of this group: to offer opportunities for a civic-oriented market (by holding space for small and local production), to create dialogical channels connected to the state (for connecting citizens and stakeholders), to make visible individually driven experiences (for learn-by-doing and setting the example) and to politicize conviviality-triggering moments (where alliances can emerge from social interactions and continuing social encounters). However, some convivial spaces risk doing little to challenge the structural power relations and "might appear naïve, routinized and banal in the face of global inequalities" (Author, 2019, p.142). What is at stake here is the risk of becoming part of neoliberal forms of governance, which relates to the theory of political and economic practices that extend market rationality and values to nearly every sphere of human activity (see Dimick, 2015). To avoid this, NGOs need probably to work on strategies that include the marginalized (the non-public-minded citizens) into the public sphere (Lang, 2013). The group's inner-reflection and collective thinking must, then, be a barometer of effective and lucid direction, recognizing assets and the limitations of their methods.

By departing from the actors' visions of the world, we can get a better understanding of their position—their forms of action and movement organization—and, therefore, of their attempts and subjective relentlessness as they pursue social change. As Beck (1992)

reminds us, "environmental problems are not problems of our surroundings, but (…) are thoroughly social problems, problems of people, their history, their living conditions, their relation to the world and reality, their social, cultural and political situation" (p. 81). Whether we work with one or all the layers of the problems depends on our visions of the world, and on the positions we adopt. We should, then, question whether the intentions of behavioral change and refining institutional management are enough to address the origins and consequences of the world's environmental problems. This being said, the need for change must configure an adequate apprehension of a world full of injustices and economic imbalances. Indeed, the link between imagination and resistance cannot be taken for granted, as it always runs the risk of fading away when social movements and organizations become more oriented toward prefiguring (in their individual lifestyles and within the groups) the desired political model, rather than pushing for institutional reforms and participatory democracy. Groups such as Cidade+, then, while having to navigate institutional politics, should use co-creation and participatory community projects as political tools that empower citizens, individually and collectively, to resist and push for change in the promotion of environmental sustainability.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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