

**IHSS Covid-19 Working Group  
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**Title: Citizenship, Duty and the everyday politics of Covid-19 in the European Union**

Reflection piece prepared for the IHSS QMUL working group on Covid-19

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What has been the impact of the pandemic on our sense of civic duty and the notion of citizenship? Confining us in our homes and constraining our freedom of movement, the pandemic has challenged our societies and our 'living together'. Our social norms have had to adapt to the sanitary crisis and public policies have actually relied on nudging people to stay home, to wash their hands and called upon our sense of civic duty. Throughout the world and throughout Europe we were called upon to behave as responsible and good citizens. This paper suggests two venues to study the way our civic duty has been impacted by the pandemic in the EU. First it argues that there is a case for studying everyday politics of civic duty in Europe. Rather than traditional studies focusing on voting patterns or civic education, I argue that an analysis of everyday practices, sites of resistance and contestation is enlightening as to understand the interrelation between state-citizen relationship in times of lock downs, quarantine and confinement. After exploring the concept of everyday politics, I review how the pandemic has transformed citizenship, from the 'good citizen' image to the relevance of 'digital citizenship' and what it tells us about state-citizen relationship in times of crisis. Finally, I concentrate on how the freedom of movement in Europe has been impacted by the pandemic, how government have used different tools to control populations and their mobility and how this has impacted our practice of citizenship in everyday Europe.

## **1. The relevance of the everyday in understanding the pandemic**

This paper engages conceptually with the concept of 'everyday politics' which sees the mundane, the quotidian and the invisible as a site of practices worth exploring. This everyday politics has become more prominent in times of lock down and quarantine as it was difficult to exert more political debate in the public sphere. It has also become more digitalised and transnational. Everyday politics is defined as a site where actors exercise agency and some degree of autonomy: 'The everyday, then, is not a signal of one's position in politics or the economy. It is instead a site, and not normally a place or activity that one can choose to opt into or out of unless they opt out of society itself.' (Stanley and Jackson, 2016: 231).

Popularised by Kerkvliet (2009), the study of everyday politics pays attention to the distribution of resources in everyday sites. It is about 'studying how elite discourses are simultaneously reproduced and contested in everyday political sites' (Stanley and Jackson, 2016: 232). The relevance of the quotidian has been popularized by French scholarship such as De Certeau, Henri Lefebvre Karl Barthes who have given more attention to the 'quotidien': spaces, sites, rhythms, objects and practices.

**The importance of the everyday and practices in the EU** has been highlighted by McNamara (2015). Without symbols and rituals which would become embedded in daily life of European citizens (Euro, Schengen etc), the EU would have trouble building a European identity. McNamara in particular studies institutional and individuals' everyday practices as diverse as mapping Europe or the Eurovision Song Contest watched by 125 million viewers worldwide (quote p. 86) and stresses the relevance of analysing whether these practices are shared, as the relational is key in building European identity.

In this paper I provide a very first exploration of everyday practices that have been disrupted or have emerged during the time of the pandemic both in the everyday

institutional and social realms, both at the individual and collective level. Practices can be discursive and be resisted or contested by their audience. So one important aspect is to understand to what extent discourses' **reproduced/ resisted** in the mundane practices of everyday life?' (Stanley and Jackson, 2016: 224). Narratives also help to understand 'how political order and change are legitimated and resisted in sites of everyday practice across a number of different issues within world politics'. We indeed abound in quantitative data/ polls about how people/ public opinion thinks and vote but 'there is little room [...] for analyzing (or aggregating) the stories people tell about politics, how people justify their own position on various political issues and the ways in which elite actions may be contested or resisted' (Stanley and Jackson, 2016: 228).

This is why it is important to pay attention to **everyday resistance**. In *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott (1985) raises the importance to study the 'infrapolitics' or as it has been explained in post-colonial studies the 'subaltern voices' (Spivak). Space is a site of everyday resistance that is 'localised, regionalised and globalised at the same time that economic globalization slices across geopolitical borders' (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2016: 425). Sites can be as diverse as the virtual cyberspace, workplace, kitchen, street, neighbourhoods, cities but also imagined spaces/ social imagery mythologies, myths, symbols, discourses (Zaiotti, 2011). 'Marginal spaces' (hooks, 1990) and third space 'Bhabba, 1994). i.e.: 'The Wall has a strong disciplinary function in making Palestinians into visible and docile bodies, and by creating its own paradoxical effects, the Wall simultaneously produces a space for Palestinian resistance and counter-hegemonic practices' (Johansson and Vinthagen, 427).

It is within this context that we attempt to analyse how the restrictions to freedom were put in place and how it related to the everyday politics. Before doing so, it's important to study how the concept of citizenship and civic duty has evolved during the pandemic.

## 2. Revisiting the concept of citizenship and civic duty in times of pandemic

During Covid-19 the concept of civic duty has been revisited by states and citizens. From a state perspective the language of 'responsibility' or 'being a good citizen' has been importantly mobilised. For instance, in the case of the UK, the discourse around what it was to be a good citizen has been constructed around three main paradoxes: **Freedom/control, passive/active citizenship and individualism/collectivism** (Andreouli and Brice, 2021). This approach in a way engage with the concept that citizenship is not only about having rights and duties on paper and recognised in constitutional law but it is about enacting citizenship in line with Isin (2009) but also about how states and other stakeholders 'have a voice and/or a stake in how citizenship is defined and enacted (Andreouli and Brice, 2021:2). In the UK, the rhetoric has evolved from the good citizens that stayed at home in the first wave of the pandemic while heroes such as NHS nurses and medical staff was on the frontline. This involved handing over citizens 'freedom to the authority of the state' (Ibid: 9). What the authors interestingly highlight is that 'whilst freedom is constructed [in the British context] as an individual right in our data, health is constructed as a matter of collective responsibility' (Ibid:10). The discourse has also been embedded in a neo-liberal discourse as this responsibility to behave as a good citizen was also connected to the responsibility of making sure the economy does not collapse. Discourses emphasizing the 'good citizen' imagery and 'seeks to solidify a citizenship model of

personal responsibility and self-management' (Andreouli and Brice, 2021:1) which tends to de-responsibilise the state from its own duties.

Yet these 'containment policies' have been successful depending on whether populations trust their institutions and decision-makers (Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020). Interestingly enough, some research on the early days of lockdown has shown that people tend to 'stay home' when their trust in public institutions is higher. In other words there is 'better compliance to national health policies in regions that demonstrated higher levels of trust in policy makers prior to the crisis. The effect is especially strong for non-necessary activities (recreation, work and transport) compared to going to the grocery or to the drugstore, i.e. essential activities allowed by most of the national shelter-in-place policies' (Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020:3).

Our citizenship during the pandemic has also become enacted everyday through the digital. We've all been called upon to do our civic duty, to stay home, to work from home, to home-school our children at home. This appeals to good citizenship have been possible through digital tools which have campaigned to ask us to #WashYourHands, #BendTheCurve, and #IStayHomeFor (Bucholz, DeHart, Moorman, 2020). This move to the digital had several implications for democratic citizenship and solidarity in the EU. While some could think it increases our ways to participate democratically, there is always the issue of unequal access to the digital and the problem of identifying who does not get access to high-speed broadband and digital devices to continue their lives in times of pandemic. Digital literacy is also a big challenge in times of fake news, including on the pandemic that have been spreading very fast.

**Digital citizenship** has also meant some control of our mobility, the emergence of QR codes and digital passports and impact on our everyday lives and mobility. 'The post-COVID-19 era, on the one hand, has dramatically slowed down several mundane routines for citizens, such as mobility patterns, while, on the other hand, new demanding professional pressures, emotional fears, life uncertainties, algorithmic exposure, data privacy concerns, health-related direct risks, and socio-economic vulnerabilities (depending eminently on the material and living conditions shared by a wide range of citizens, regardless of their specific localization in Europe) have exponentially emerged' (Calzada, 2020).

### **3. Mobility, Freedom and Citizenship in Europe**

How has the pandemic impacted the everyday in Europe? And how did the above-mentioned developments impacting citizens and citizenship in Europe? This section shows that one of the first immediate measure was the suspension on the freedom of movement which initially was not very much debated within public opinion. There has been however examples of transnational solidarity. Then, we see that in the second phase of Covid, a form of coordinated Europeanization has emerged (Ladi and Wolff, 2021) defined as 'bottom-up process where the member states are actively involved in the policy-making process early on in order to guarantee the highest level of implementation possible' (Ibid). During this second phase EU citizens have been 'responsibilised' and been mobilised to act responsibly in crossing borders.

From a governance perspective, the first phase of the Covid (March-September 2020) was marked by distrust amongst EU member states who had decided to reintroduce internal border controls in a unilateral fashion and resorted to a nationalist reflex that has been typical of Schengen governance when confronted to crisis (Wolff and al. 2020). The uncoordinated reintroduction of borders led the EU institutions to mobilise a functional-solidarity frame and to recall to EU member states the principles of non-discrimination and organised some 'green lanes' in order to enable free movement for cross-border workers, medical equipment and professionals and goods. What is surprising is that we then heard very little about the restriction of freedom of movement, as legislatures throughout Europe were possibly themselves relatively marginalized in the first instance to respond to exceptional measures taken by strengthened executives (Griglio, 2021)

Interestingly during that time, debate on the closure of borders in Europe has been astonishingly absent from the public sphere. Except for health experts who have raised the issue that closing down borders was a nationalist reflex and was not necessarily going to stop the spread of the virus, it seems that public opinion in Europe has supported increased border security. Not very surprisingly and in relation with findings in other migration studies, Lindholt et al. found in their comparative European survey of public opinion that there is a match between support for right-wing candidates and for the tightening of border security (2021: 12). Furthermore they found that there is a correlation between 'respondents who blame China or the WHO for the severity of the crisis' and those who are 'more supportive of border security'. (Ibid, 12). One of the key findings though is that 'egotropic concerns for oneself and one's family are the key corona-related concern for understanding support for border security' (Ibid, 12)

These governance transformations have considerably impacted everyday citizenship as states have been able to gain control over who is allowed to get in or not, and therefore 'as a result of the pandemic, the state is regaining its absolute claim over citizenship and enacting exclusive allocations through the recreation of national citizenship, whereby only legal members are entitled to rights' (Ramsari, 2020). This is the paradox of the pandemic which has been felt as a universal crisis for all individuals but has led to reintroduce exclusionary practices, and in particular to reintroduce border controls. Which had a huge impact on stranded migrants, has split families across the globe, increased disparities between citizens and non-citizens (Ramsari, 2020: 100) and given prominence to the state to decide upon to whom to give rights or not in times of pandemic.

In the second phase of the Covid-19 more coordination was achieved but through the involvement of more health experts in the decision and by shifting the responsibility to limit the freedom of movement from states to individuals. States have called upon the 'civic duty', the 'sense of responsibility' or the 'resilience' of individuals to make sure that the responsibility to travel to different colour zones would fall within the remit of their own behaviour. The European Commission in particular, in response to national uncoordinated responses of the first few months, stressed the need to provide certainty to citizens and to coordinate responses to restrictions to freedom of movement. A recommendation was adopted by the Council on 13 October 2020 under Germany presidency to improve transparency and predictability for EU citizens and businesses. Direct consultations took place between national and EU level and this has led to a new approach where instead of stopping people to move, citizens have

been asked to act responsibly. The aim was to dissuade 'people from travelling on account of the consequences' (Bigo and al. 2021: 14). This had the effect to shift the control and the restrictions to move from government enacted measures to a process that induce a reluctance to move amongst citizens.

Yet within these difficult times, and looking at the everyday there has been several examples of contestation of the pandemic, of **everyday resistance** and in particular experiments of European **solidarity**. At the local level neighbourhoods have proven to be a very efficient level to develop 'mutual aid groups' which have flourished in various European countries, (Pleyers, 2020). There has been examples also of European solidarity across governments and with more or less support from public opinions. Research has shown that there was 'a higher degree of support for solidarity when it comes to medical assistance compared to fiscal or border support. Support for medical solidarity drops over time, fiscal solidarity remains stable, and border solidarity increases' (Goldberg and al, 2021). Surprisingly the authors show that solidarity is not heavily dependent on media information and framing.

To conclude, this paper has explored the relevance of mobilising the study of the everyday to revisit the concept of civic duty, citizenship and solidarity in times of crisis. It has suggested that there is room to study more fully how the study of the everyday can enlighten us about civism, citizenship and solidarity in times of pandemic. In particular future research could continue to research to what extent the shift to individual responsibility during the pandemic has impacted solidarity across Europe but also trust in public institutions.

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