

# Green citizenship: towards spatial and lived perspectives

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Wood, B. E., & Kallio, K. P. (2019). Green Citizenship: Towards spatial and lived perspectives. In S. Divoudi, R. Cowell, I. White, & H. Blanco (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Environmental Planning*. London/NY: Routledge.

## Introduction

Few social issues have received greater attention in recent years than that of the environment. Most nations are aware of the challenges of environmental planning and sustainability in a context of heightened evidence suggesting that the world is experiencing rapid rates of climate change, environmental degradation and declining resources. Almost two decades ago, the United Nations Development Programme (1998, p. 2) laid out the case for growing environmental problems facing our planet:

The burning of fossil fuels has increased almost fivefold since the 1950, the world's marine catch fourfold, and the consumption of freshwater twofold since 1960. The result is a severe stress on the capacity of the planet to absorb all of the pollution and waste produced, as well as a rapid deterioration of fresh water reserves, soil, forests, fish and biodiversity.

Since this time, the attention to environmental change has been fuelled by large international conventions such as Agenda 21, formed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Copenhagen Accord resulting from the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Denmark in 2009, and the Paris Agreement in 2016. As countries have ratified and introduced policy reforms to address these conventions, it has become clear that a pool of active citizens is required to address these challenges and plan for sustainable environmental futures. This has in turn influenced the understandings and expectations societies hold toward citizens. Dean (2001, p. 491, our emphasis) refers to this as the “greening of citizenship”, outlining three ways of how this has occurred:

First, environmental concerns have entered our understanding of the *rights* we enjoy as citizens. Second, the enhanced level of global awareness associated with ecological thinking has helped to broaden our understanding of the potential *scope* of citizenship. Third, emergent ecological concerns have added fuel to a complex debate about the *responsibilities* that attach to citizenship.

In parallel with these societal changes, the field of environmental citizenship has expanded over the past 25 years. As early as the 1970s, work within environmental education in the 1970s had articulated for a type of a ‘green’ citizen (Schild, 2016), whilst not specifically

using those words, and indeed the Tbilisi Declaration in 1977 argued for the need to create an active and environmentally-aware citizenry. One of the earliest essays which specifically attempted to integrate citizenship and environmental planning and studies was by van Steenberg (1994, p. 142) who set out to bring together the two ‘cultures’ of citizenship problems and environmental concerns. Since this time, the field has diversified and deepened until such a time that some argue it has come of age (e.g. Latta 2007, p. 377), while others, such as Gabrielson (2008, p. 430), believe that the literature and theorising on green citizenship remains ‘unnecessarily narrow’ (see also Dobson, 2003; Dean, 2001).

This chapter maintains that the prevailing frameworks employed in green citizenship still involve limited, static and instrumental conceptions, somewhat failing to consider all pertinent spaces, scales and lived practices of citizenship. In response, drawing on feminist theorization and citizenship conceptions introduced by Engin Isin (2008, 2012), we turn to more dynamic, transnational and inclusive notions of lived green citizenship. We begin by outlining the contested nature of green citizenship (and its various expressions through terms such as ecological, sustainable and environmental citizenship) to illustrate the multiple interpretations of scholarly debate. Recognising this, the term ‘green citizenship’ is adopted in the chapter, in keeping with Dean (2001), as a broad term which seeks to encompass and explore in its greatest sense the ‘greening’ of citizenship. After describing the short-comings of traditional liberal and civic republican approaches, we argue for a widening and deepening of understandings, through a greater acknowledgement of space and the multiple scalar and practised dimensions of citizenship. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the future of green citizenship and environmental planning by examining the role of environmental education and the younger generation’s uptake of these ideas.

### **The contested nature of green citizenship**

Green citizenship is neither a neutral nor apolitical concept. Even the terms used to describe it are highly contested. While some use environmental, ecological, sustainable and green citizenship interchangeably, others underline and dispute the differences between them. For example, Dobson (2010) distinguishes between *environmental citizenship* which he argues is driven by liberal citizenship traditions focusing on individual and personal rights and duties, whereas *ecological citizenship* captures a more global conception which he defines as ‘the exercise of ecologically related responsibilities, nationally, internationally, and

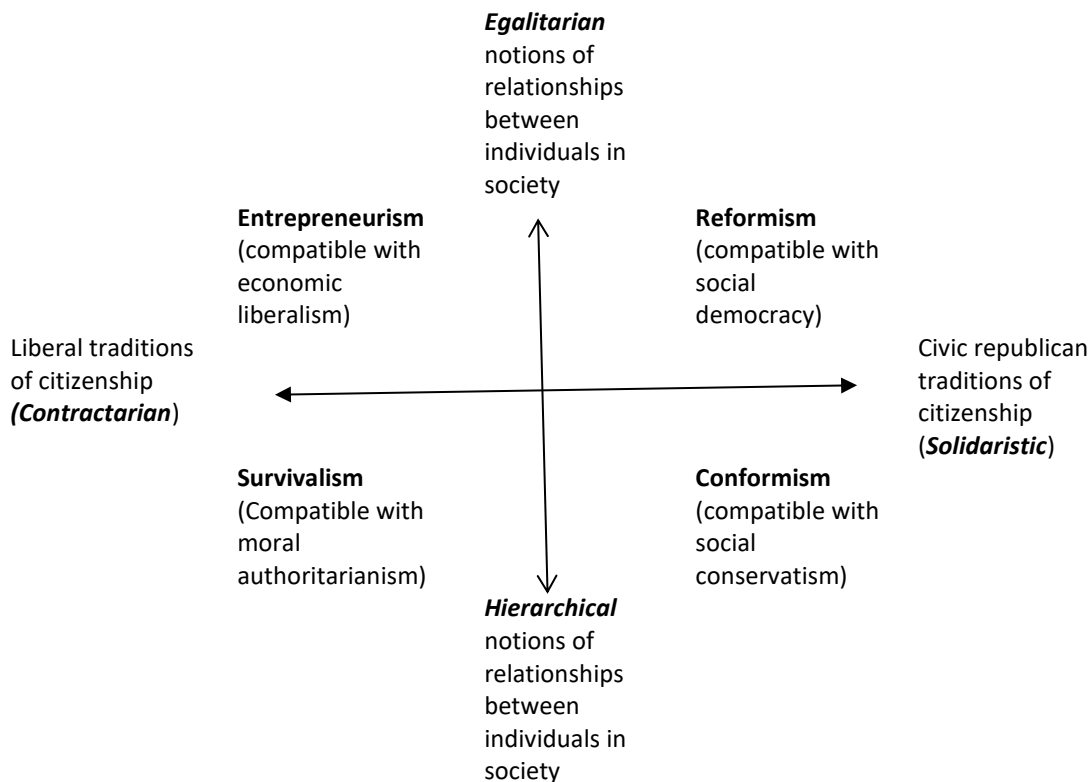
intergenerationally, rooted in justice, in both the public and private spheres' (Dobson, 2003, p. 206, also Latta 2007; Gabrielson, 2008; Scerri and Liam 2012; Schild, 2016). Such debates about terms also mirror the conflicting and competing conceptions inherent in the idea of green citizenship. Not only is the concept of *citizenship* hotly contested, meaning multiple things to different groups of people (Faulks, 2000), but the concept of *environmentalism* is also contentious (Dean, 2001). We will examine two broad positions which green citizenship can fall into – that based upon a *liberal* tradition and that of a *civic republican* position. Much of the discourse surrounding green citizenship parallels these two frameworks.

The first of these traditions – the liberal framework – acknowledges the existence of citizens' environmental rights but focuses on the personal duties and obligations of citizens. The emphasis is often on personal lifestyle attitudes, choices, and the management of environmental problems through actions such as recycling and boycotting unethical products (Dobson, 2003; Melo-Escrihuela, 2008). Latta (2007) argues that as a result of this prevailing approach, much of the focus has fallen on cultivating 'green' attitudes and practices of individuals, rather than more broadly on democracy or collective and societal action. As one concrete example, Dimick (2015) illustrates the prevalence of this (neo)liberal approach in education by examining how one teacher presents the idea of green citizenship to his class through a focus on their individual patterns of consumption. While this approach led his students to examine their own environmental consumer behaviour, Dimick cautions that this is a weakened form of green citizenship as it is 'disconnected from the contexts in which the decisions are made and from broader political activities' (p. 396) and thus fails to challenge the root causes of global environmental injustice or challenge established social structures reproducing these injustices over time.

The second prevailing framework in green citizenship is that of civic republicanism, emphasizing virtues, responsibilities and community concerns. The weight is on the common good, and in this way, the approach attempts to restrain excesses of self-interest in the liberal tradition (Gabrielson, 2008). The virtues and character traits of green citizens are highlighted with appeal to a stewardship model to remind us of our interdependence on nature and its dependence on humans. (Schild, 2016, Dobson, 2003). Education within this tradition assumes that individual actions alone are not adequate to address environmental concerns, and that participatory political involvement by citizens in environmental planning and decision-making is key. In terms of critique, Schild (2016) points out that such approaches

fail to explain why citizens would be motivated to take part in deliberative processes in the first place.

As a way to illustrate and advance upon how these competing conceptions map on to moral discourses which underpin or make possible competing conceptions of green citizenship, Dean (2001) suggests a possible heuristic model or taxonomy, shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Taxonomy of conventional moral discourses.** Adapted from Dean (2001, p. 494)

He suggests that the two axes in Figure 1 represent two normative conceptual continua. The horizontal axis relates to the liberal and civic republican traditions of citizenship, with more contractarian traditions at one end which highlight that to have freedom an individual must enter into a *contract* with society, and at the other end, more *solidaristic* traditions in which an individual develops close communal bonds to develop social cohesion. The vertical axis is a continuum between *equality* and *social traditions* in which there are more egalitarian notions about the relationships between individuals in society at one end and more hierarchical at the other. When intersected by environmental discourses, Dean suggests that four positions can be outlined:

- i. *Entrepreneurism*: compatible with economic liberalism and underpinned by economic rationale for environmental planning and decision-making
- ii. *Survivalism*: compatible with moral authoritarianism, fundamentally inegalitarian as does not question unequal distribution of social power and resources
- iii. *Conformism*: aspires to social integration and belonging but accepts inequalities in social power and resources
- iv. *Reformism*: solidaristic, embraces the goal of greater equality in distributions of power and resources

Dean acknowledges that this taxonomy is over-simplistic as many positions combine elements of all four. However, his model helps to confirm the existence of multiple political interpretations of green citizenship and how these overlay deeper moral and political positions (see also Dobson, 2003).

While such frameworks are useful for positioning different perspectives and for considering the extent to which people are active or passive citizens, and for critiquing powerful social structures or ideologies, they do have limitations. Latta (2007, p. 378), among others, suggests that ‘while there is a strong democratic tendency in both citizenship studies and ecological political thought, existing theories of ecological citizenship seem to blunt the radical democratic edge of both traditions’, and thus fail to account for existing structures of injustice and political agency. In addition, these traditional frameworks rely on narrow and normative conceptions of citizenship, overlooking the multiple ways in which people live and act as citizens and experience the environment. To address this, we turn our attention to an emerging body of work in citizenship and environmental studies which embraces more multiscalar, dynamic and performative conceptions of citizenship with aims to expand its democratic and radical potential. Specifically, we will present two ways of deepening and expanding green citizenship by drawing on emerging body of critical citizenship theory. Both stem from a dissatisfaction with the ways citizenship has been understood in the traditional approaches outlined above. They are also the outcome of the way in which environmental citizenship confronts traditional dichotomies between public and private and local and global.

## **Transnational and inclusive spaces of green citizenship**

Critical citizenship literature aligns largely with feminist traditions – including queer, transnational, and post-colonial perspectives – drawing attention to the exclusionary and problematic nature of traditional understanding of participation and citizenship (e.g. Lister, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2007; Gabrielson, 2008; Staeheli et al. 2012). Feminist critiques have underscored the public-private dichotomy in society in which public participation has been profiled as a given status over the private domains of domestic and unpaid participation (Mitchell et al., 2003). Despite claims to universalism, concepts of citizenship ‘have been drawn to a quintessentially male template so that women’s exclusion (and the chequered nature of their inclusion) was integral to both the theory and practice of citizenship’ (Lister, 2007, p. 52). The critique involves a shift from a focus on the status of citizenship that many people fail to achieve – due to their age, sex, resources, political positioning, and access to public space or institutions – to a focus on the experiences, acts and practices of being a citizen in both private and public spaces and with a range of scales.

Critiques also relate to the spatial dimensions and scale of citizenship. Spatially limited understandings of citizenship are seen to align problematically with territorially defined nation-states and the rights and duties of citizens that no longer match the global mobility of people and the border-crossing reach of environmental issues. Rethinking the scales of citizenship has provided some insights to this problematic (e.g. Hubbard 2013; Staeheli 2016). Among other critical citizenship scholars, we have developed in our own work transnational and relational understandings of citizenship, characterised by flexible and multiple notions of identity and connectedness beyond the nation-state (Kallio, Häkli and Bäcklund 2015; Kallio and Mitchell, 2016; Kallio 2018; Wood and Black, 2018).

Green studies, also, have played an important role in highlighting the global significance of citizenship issues, and the need for global actions. Evoking such ideas, Dobson (2003) argues for the necessity of *post-cosmopolitan* notions of green citizenship in which people see themselves as part of a wider, and indeed, global community, and are motivated by perceptions and actions which are based on virtue rather than self-interest (also Dean, 2001; Isin, 2012). In doing so, he extends the political space of citizenship to encompass not only other humans and societies known to an individual, but also to strangers who have not yet been met. The networks of environmental connections and impacts which connect the human and non-human planet together are evoked through his post-cosmopolitan notion of green

citizenship. Applying these ideas in research has significance for how we think about space, time, and citizenship, as it means we need to loosen our fixation on territories and their physical boundaries, and widen our analysis of interconnections, networks and relationships.

### **Beyond status and practices: noticing acts of environmental citizenship**

A further theoretical branch in critical citizenship literature draws from Engin Isin's (2012, 2008) influential work that distinguishes between three dimensions of citizenship. First, he identifies *citizenship as status* where the rights and responsibilities of people, as defined by the nation state or other established polities, hold the centre stage. Depending on their positions – be it birth right or gained – people hold different kinds of statuses and thus have more or less rights and responsibilities as members of the political communities where they live, including non-membership and very limited participation opportunities. Second, Isin defines *practices of citizenship* as formal or semi-formal activities that people can mobilise from their acquired positions in political communities, as collectives and individuals. These include various kinds of actions and customs, depending on the society and its political system, ranging from elections to demonstrations to public opinion statement. Third, a difference between practices and *acts of citizenship* is made by highlighting that not all politically influential activities are institutional, public, organised, broadly recognised, or generally accepted. By associating citizenship closely with justice and liberal democratic ideals, Isin proposes that by negotiating, challenging and reworking the prevailing order – and thus calling into question the seeming naturalness of people's differing positions in a polity and participation opportunities as members of a political community – we can act as citizens beyond our given statuses and established practices. For example, as Isin (2008) argues, stateless people such as refugees often perform acts of citizenship whilst still failing to hold the status of citizenship (see also Häkli 2017).

This theoretical approach has been picked up by some scholars in the context of environmental citizenship, yet not extensively. In his attempt to locate democratic politics in ecological citizenship, Latta (2007) has offered an Isinian perspective as a critique of the dominating approaches that, one on hand, tend to focus on narrow concerns for the environment, and secondly, have limited relevance to progressive change in practical terms. He argues that the critical literature engenders 'appreciation for the way that ecological citizenship does not *precede* a politics of nature, as a kind of framework for progressive

socio-environmental change, but instead is an emergent property of *existing* struggles for sustainability and political–ecological rights’ (p.388, emphasis in original). Based on this idea Latta suggests that, ‘democratic tendencies in green politics should direct far greater attention to the actual spaces in which ecological citizens are daily being born in individuals’ and communities’ efforts to *become political vis-à-vis* nature.’ (p.390, emphasis in original).

While in his recent work Latta has developed his ideas with reference to new materialist theorisation which does not fit unproblematically with Isinian thought that emphasises strongly human subjectivity (for a critique, see Häkli 2017), others have taken them forward in more pragmatist and humanist manners. In her recent article on environmentally friendly food initiatives in Iran, Fadaee (2017) engages specifically with people’s mundane acts of environmental citizenship. Drawing attention to how the everyday life of citizenship unfolds beyond the West and the North, she sets out to shed light on the pluralities of people’s environmental engagements and subjectivities. Her analysis emphasises emotional and social experiences, alongside with environmental awareness, as key elements of active environmentally oriented political agency. Writing from quite a different empirical context, Melbourne, Australia, Scerri and Magee (2012) have also used Isinian thinking to formulate critique on what they call “‘stakeholder’ citizen-centred policies associated with what state theorists see as ‘weak’ ecological modernisation’ (p. 388), proposing instead a theoretical approach that is informed by pragmatism. Their argument builds on the nexus between political, ideological and cultural citizenship, a distinction they argue is key to understanding what is currently happening in our societies regarding sustainability.

A shift away from a focus on the status and formal/public practices of citizenship which many people fail to achieve or enact, for various reasons, acknowledges a broader spectrum of environmental agency and makes space for encouraging its different forms. These studies show that the Isinian threepartite notion of citizenship can be fruitful in broadening the conception of green citizenship, especially towards noticing mundane acts of citizenship that take place in people’s everyday lives and where the growing awareness of environmental issues is influencing their political agency (Kallio 2018). This would do justice to the plurality of citizenship, as Latta (2007, p.328, emphasis in original) writes,

Existing *injustice* is in part the product of asymmetries in citizens’ abilities to exercise formal political rights, and also of the exclusive qualities of liberal universality embodied in



‘politically just’ democratic procedures relative to minority subject positions, dissenting visions of nature and divergent understandings of dialogue.

This is the direction which a large part of the critical environmental citizenship literature is also heading (e.g. Gilbert and Phillips, 2003; Kurtz, 2005; Agyeman and Evans, 2006; MacGregor 2006; Gabrielson, 2008; Harris, 2011; Repak 2011; Fadaee, 2017).

One critical social group who should be better recognised as environmental citizens are young people. In traditional approaches, they typically appear as being socialised, informed, influenced and educated on environmental, ecological and sustainable politics *by* adults and institutions, not as co-learners and co-actors with and in such politics. In the last section, we will elaborate the case of youth citizenship in more detail as we consider it an important area in which green citizenship research and environmental planning ought to expand. Before that, we focus on how citizens can be ‘greened’ given the increasingly complex and widespread nature of environmental issues, the changing nature of communities, and the dynamic processes of socialization that involve children and youth as active players. More specifically, we examine contemporary research with the younger generation to consider some of the specific challenges they face and the responses they may make.

### **Greening citizenship in a complex and transnational world**

The focus of attention for the ‘creation of green citizens’ has inevitably come to lie strongly on the youngest citizens in societies. Paradoxically, they hold the greatest hope of solving the complex environmental problems, while at the same time appear increasingly reluctant to do so through traditional political means (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Circle, 2002; Kallio 2017; Bartos and Wood, 2017). There is some evidence that the current generation have less interest in environmental issues than earlier generations. For example, using data from a national survey of high school students in the US since 1976, Wray-Lake and colleagues (2010) found that they showed declining levels of concern for the environment since the 1970s, although there were some increases in the 1990s. Individuals tended to place more responsibility on *governments* for pollution and environmental declines than on their *own* actions, and there were declining beliefs in the scarcity of *resources*. This led the research team to conclude that, ‘clearly, the average high school senior across the past three decades has not viewed him

or herself as the first line of defence in protecting the environment' (Wray-Lake et al., 2010, p. 82).

Amidst such fears, many western nations have responded with a plethora of public policy initiatives to enhance environmental citizenship in youth. However, opportunities for young people to participate in environmental action through schooling and public programmes tend to be more cerebral and less experiential. This is despite the evidence suggesting that exposure to the natural environment itself is key to enhancing green citizenship (Chawla, 1998, 2007). In particular, prior lived experiences of environment have been found to be a crucial link in encouraging environmental awareness and action (e.g. Bartos 2013). Reflecting on this, Dobson (2003, p. 206, emphasis in original) surmises that:

If this is right, then environmental and ecological citizenship will not be learned in the confines of the classroom—but given that these citizenships take us beyond environmental education, walks in the woods are not enough either. Ecological citizens are most likely to be created through what the French call *le vécu*, or 'lived experience'.

There are also concerns that students are more likely to receive narrow (neo)liberal experiences of citizenship through their schooling and less likely to receive civic republican or post-cosmopolitan approaches to environmental education (Schild, 2016). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) suggest that most schools do well in creating such 'personally responsible' or 'participatory' citizens, but these are rarely 'justice oriented'. Therefore, they create self-managing civic agents, neoliberal consumers and citizen-workers (Wong and Stimpson, 2003, Hayward, 2012, Dimick, 2015). These narrow experiences of environmental citizenship are compounded by conceptions of political and citizenship participation that are conveyed within many citizenship curricula as a delayed act, thus reinforcing a view that the role of schools is to provide people for their *future* participation as citizens. Researchers also question whether children and young people in such forums can express 'dissident' perspectives from those of involved adults (Mathews, 2001; Matthews and Limb, 2003; Kallio and Häkli, 2011), thus reinforcing a view of children and young people as citizens/subjects-in-waiting (Skelton, 2010).

Youth citizens therefore are likely to experience a 'thin environmentalism' in which they learn to address some of the symptoms of the current sustainability crisis but leave the drivers of sociological and social injustice unchallenged (Hayward, 2012). However, this critique on schools is only partially fitting as it does not adequately acknowledge the active roles that children and youth play in the processes of socialization and social learning, and how their

relational living environments form a part of these learning process (for socialization and learned citizenship, see Kallio 2018).

In contrast to the findings above, several studies confirm that children and young people remain interested in and concerned with environmental issues. Studies in Australia (e.g. Sargeant, 2008; Harris and Wyn, 2010), England (Holden et al., 2008), and across the OECD (Schulz et al., 2010) confirm that climate change and environmental degradation are perceived by young people as some of the most significant issues they face today. There is also some international evidence that young people are increasingly taking part in community-based action and in some internet campaigns concerning issues such as the environment and ethical consumption (Sherrod et al., 2010). When examining young people's everyday and lived citizenship in New Zealand, Finland and England, we have also found that young people had a significant interest and concern for environmental issues. In an open-ended interview about 'important issues in our place', in Wood's (2011) study ( $n=122$ , 14–18 years), the young participants most frequently nominated *environmental sustainability* and *climate change* issues. Similarly, in Kallio's (forthcoming, also Kolehmainen 2017) study (England  $n=134$ , Finland  $n=128$ , 10–12 and 14–17 year-olds), youth narratives about their lived realities brought up various connections with nature and environmental issues. **Notably, both studies employed a specific focus on young people's lived and spatial experiences of being young citizens, as witnessed and experienced through their own lives and in this way developed a complex and inter-related understanding of green citizenship at the intersection of daily practices, relationships and global connections.** Such evidence presents a complex picture of green citizenship in the current and future generation. It also speaks of the need for more in-depth research and flexible frameworks to account for the multiple expressions and spatial dimensions of green citizenship.

### **Greening citizenship in a complex and transnational world**

This chapter has established the inherently contested, political and debatable nature of green citizenship. It has argued for an approach to green citizenship which rests on deeper understandings of the spatial dimensions of environmental issues and environmental planning responses, and a greater recognition of the diversity of citizens represented in society, and their experiences and practices. Furthermore, the focus we have taken to spatial and lived expressions of green citizenship advocates for the importance of green studies to

environmental planning, citizenship and political theory and the importance of translocal and networked thinking when it comes to understanding the responsibilities, rights, activities, and lived experiences of citizenship. In turn, citizenship and political studies continue to shed light on the contested nature of green citizenship and have helped to highlight the importance of recognising the potential for wider political interpretations of this concept.

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