The (de)politicisation of knowledge mediation for eco-citizenship by young people

Kelly Céleste Vossen

engage
Research Center for Publicness
in Contemporary Communication

UNIVERSITÉ
SAINT-LOUIS
BRUXELLES

SCAN ME

Agenda

Context 1

Theoretical framework 2
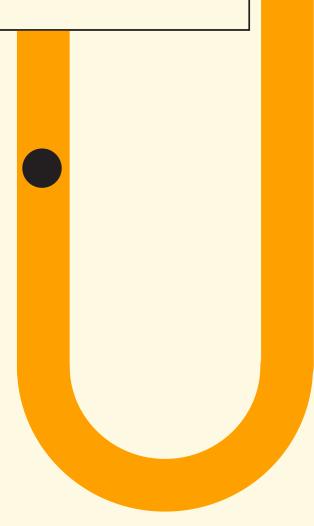
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- Since 2018: young people at the centre of environmental participation.

- PhD research question:

"How do young people (de)politicise eco-citizenship?"

→ The **processes and mechanisms** for constructing **divisions and continuities** regarding **eco-citizenship**, **within two contexts** of participation, from a communicational point of view, by analysing **politicisation and depoliticisation** through the **interactions of young people**.
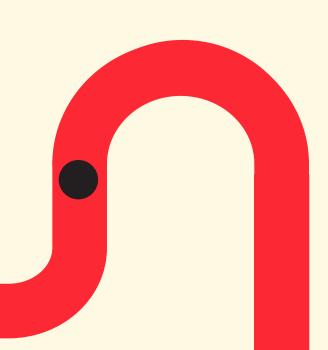
→ Analysis of the **internal political landscape**.

- **Sociology of social movement** (context)

  o Altermondialist activist culture (Pleyers, 2014: virtual and social change/self-construction)

  o Do-It-Ourselves activism (Pickard, 2021)

  o Young people and the environment (Boulianne, Lalancette, & Ilkiw, 2020)

- **Discourse theory** (ontologically)

  o A representational conception of politics (Foucault, 1981; Mouffe, 2010 & 2019)

  o (De)politicisation analysis (Pepermans & Maeseele, 2014; Carvalho, van Wessel & Maeseele, 2016)

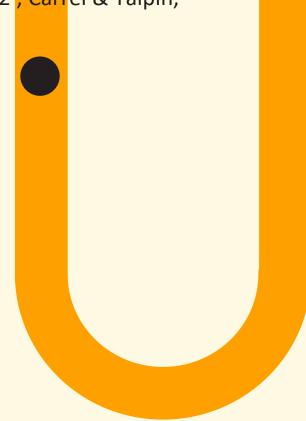 o Role of knowledge and power for ecocitizenship (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012)

- **Political sociology** (epistemologically)

  - ○ (De)politicisation of discourses (Comby, 2009, 2015, 2019)

  - ○ (De)politicisation of interactions (Eliasoph, 1998; Beurois, 2022; Duchesne & Haegel, 2001 & 2004; Hamidi, 2006)

- **Media literacy** (epistemologically)

  - ○ Environemental knowledge mediation (Kocacs, 2012)

- **Environmental education** (epistemologically)

  - ○ Eco-citizenship (De Bouver, 2018, 2019, 2020; De Bouver & Luyckx, 2019)

- **Political ethnography** (Talpin, 2006 ; Berger, 2011 ; Cefaï 2011 ; Cefaï & al., 2012 ; Carrel & Talpin, 2012)

- **Grounded Theory Method** (Lejeune, 2019)

- **Multi-sited ethnography in Belgium**, rather than comparative study

  - Young **activists**

  - *Jeunesses Vertes* (JV = I am going…)

    - ✓ **Institutionalised participatory mechanism**

    - ✓ 150 young people for two years

    - ✓ Socio-culturally diverse youth associations

    - ✓ Civic environmental training and projects building through participatory budget

    - ✓ *Ad hoc* context for 30 youngsters

- **Material**
  - ○ Activists:
    - ✓ Observation notes of actions;
    - ✓ Transcripts of discussions on Telegram;
    - ✓ Transcripts of long-format podcasts episodes with activists by activists (*entre-soi*).
  - ○ JV:
    - ✓ Observation notes of environmental training (evenings and week-ends);
    - ✓ Transcripts of discussions/sharing circles during the trainings;
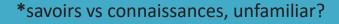   - ❖ Interviews with young participants.

↖ ④ Research question

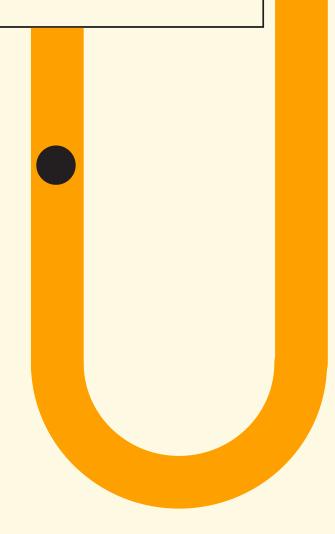- Emergence of "**knowledge mediation**"* in both fields

  → **"How do young people (de)politicise knowledge mediation for eco-citizenship?"**

- **Scientisation** of media and activist' environmental discourse (Comby, 2009 ; Carvalho, van Wes..., & Maeseele, 2016 ; Pepermans & Maeseele, 2018).

- Mythification of the **western** conception of (scientific) **knowledge** (Mauger-Parat and Peliz, 2013 ; Santos, 2014).

- **Selection** of a limited material but relevant because of its **density** regarding the politicisation of knowledge mediation.

  → Overall, the analysis is **informed by more than 250 hours of participant** (offline/online) **ethnography**, online and offline, both fields combined.

*savoirs vs connaissances, unfamiliar?

- 3 main dividing lines highlighting markers of (de)politicisation regarding knowledge mediation for eco-citizenship:

  - The **immersion into an ecosystem**;

  - The **access to the information loop** (parental, school, citizen, autonomy);

  - The **strategy for mediating** environmental knowledge to their ecosystem.

- The availability of sober lifestyles via societal **energy infrastructures**;

- Consumption norms and patterns of success in the **symbolic ecosystem**;

- The **politicisation** of lifestyles in one's family ecosystem;

- **Experiencing a 'shock' to bypass the hold of symbolic norms** or the prevailing depoliticisation; break in the "normal order of things" (e.g., travel, crisis such as covid-19, exchange with people outside one's social ecosystem).

→ Importance of **socio-cultural norms** in the journey towards eco-citizenship: the **opaquer** the bubble of one's ecosystem, the more difficult it will be to **challenge** it towards eco-citizenship.

> *"But you're in your own bubble, you're in your own culture, you're evolving, you're following the movement a bit. You need a house with 4 facades; you need your car; look at the people, they're going on holiday so far away, it's great; you've seen my phone; you've seen my Jordans, etc." (Igor, activist, 2022)*

*Relating to the availability of energetic infrastructures

- **Education tempers the effects of belonging** to a specific ecosystem in the journey towards ecocitizenship and **its access is politicised in 3 spheres**:

  o **Familial** ecosystem (through their parents, but also, retroactively, through their children);

  o **School** ecosystem (via a focus on critical thinking, 'in-depth' and politicising learning and closeness to nature, following the example of teaching through active pedagogy and *a contrario* to general education);

  o **Citizen** ecosystem (e.g., via associations or participative schemes such as JV) via politicising citizen training courses such as *la Fresque du Climat*).

  "I'm shocked that we've never seen this at school, because we talk about ecology all the time at school, it's true. But we've never done this kind of in-depth activity. We're usually told all the time: "Yeah, nature, blah blah blah; you have to sort your rubbish; be careful about heating, etc.", but we don't understand why. And I think we need to do this kind of exercise to make young people aware of the 'why' of environmental actions and the impact on humanity [...] I find it strange". (Elsje, JV, 2022)

- **Autonomous education through information** is also **politicised to question its ecosystem**, in **3 ways**:
  - The **initiative** to inform oneself;
  - The **source** of the information consumed;
  - The access to the inner circle/a **community** (*entre-soi*).

> *"Little by little, the more you learn, the more you can't go back, and the more you realise that everything is linked. You learn something like deforestation, you learn that it's linked to the climate, that it's linked to the soil, to biodiversity, but that it's also linked to small farmers, that it's linked to the big companies that go to the countries of the South to make a profit, to deforest without any local social or ecological impact. And in the end, it's like pulling on a ball of wool or a spider's web and you realise that everything is connected". (Henri, activist, 2022)*

- **3 sublines of divisions regarding the mediation strategy:**

  - The **mastery of knowledge precedes** mediation (e.g., relevant actions; legitimacy; media relations)

    "Regarding the subject you bring to the table, it's very interesting, thank you for that. I personally need to learn a bit about the subject before proposing any action. If you have an idea, don't hesitate to contact me. (Ava, activist, 2022)

    "For half of the youngster of JV, being a driving force in raising environmental awareness is the source of their participation in training days" (Notes from youngsters of JV, 2022)

→ Lack of legitimacy, coherent with the literature findings about the deligitisation of young people discourse in the media (Wagener, 2020; Ryalls & Mazzarella, 2021; von Zabern & Tulloch, 2021).

→ a first discourse advocating a gradual process in which education (for example, reading books on decolonial ecology, see point 4.2.) acts as a prerequisite for action (for example, participation in activist campaigns, see point 4.3.a.), while the second discourse is based more on an individualistic 'à la carte' eco-citizen path rooted in an interest in environmental issues and a voluntarism towards a common goal. In other words, the former sees the exercise of raising awareness and assimilating knowledge as a universal prerequisite for action, while the latter promotes a more individual eco-citizen path, based on the means available to the eco-citizen.

o While the need for environmental mediation appears to be depoliticised, there's a conflict about its form, purpose, motivations and objectives among activists:

✓ **Motives**: "intention activism" **vs.** "impact activism"

"The fact that we have different points of view on what activism is and that we have different possibilities in terms of actions (hello young parents) is a normal thing since we're all different individuals, but to start attacking specific people when we're REALLY all doing our best, I don't agree!" (Lola, activist, 2023)

"But either you do it [activism] to ease your conscience and say to yourself 'at least I've done something', so with 'a good intention', or you do it to have a real impact, because in the end that's what counts." (Raymond, activist, 2022)

✓ **Proximity**: "survival activism" **vs.** "distant/privileged activism"

"You can't even imagine what it's like to risk your life just to be able to demonstrate. The stress for you and your family. Comrades die here all the time [...] Activism may be a hobby for some, or a very lucrative profession. But for us, the people involved, it's a matter of life and death [...]". (Rena, 2023)

○ While the need for environmental mediation appears to be depoliticised, there's a conflict about its form, purpose, motivations and objectives among activists:

✓ ***The cost of entry***: *"à la carte activism" vs. "puritanism activist"*

> *"We all act as we can, with the methods we choose, you're really barking up the wrong tree. It's necessary to talk about the different ways of doing things, to discuss them, etc., but it's a pity to create hierarchies and criticise as you're doing." (Ugo, activist, 2023)*

> *"Bad activism is worse than doing nothing [...] And if I've discouraged some people, it is for the best. White saviourism is harmful, so let's all stop being activists 🤷" (Rena, activist, 2023)*

✓ **The nature of the impact**: *"discursive activism"* **vs.** *"positivist activism"*

> *"I'd say that individual actions have more impact in terms of 'I refuse this system', but in terms of carbon footprint and CO2, individual actions don't have much impact [...] I'd rather that 100% of the population asked themselves questions and reduced their consumption by 50% than that 10% became vegan. Because that would be universal, and in terms of mentalities, because if everyone asked themselves questions, we'd make much more progress than if 10% became perfect [...]" (Aude, activist, 2022)*

> *"No action in Europe has succeeded in rolling back the project. We, in 1 action with a few dozen people, changed the programme of the presidential visit [...] It's no use being on the RTBF news [...]" (Raymond, activist, 2023)*

Any questions?

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Kelly.Vossen@usaintlouis.be

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