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Book Review

La cittadinanza digitale. Competenze, diritti e regole per vivere in rete

Giovanni Pascuzzi

[Digital citizenship. Competences, rights and rules to live on the net]

Bologna: Il Mulino, 2021. 232 pp., ISBN 8815294279

This book of Giovanni Pascuzzi, State Councilor in Italy, former professor of ‘Private Comparative Law’ at the University of Trento (I) (<https://www.giovannipascuzzi.eu>), is a well-documented and critical analysis of the development of the ICT in the contemporary life of people, especially linked to the role of active citizenship.


The readers will find definitions, contents and processes of the digital citizenship, cultural, legal, educational aspects. The present review will focus on the contribution of this book for citizenship education.

The author deals firstly with the question: ‘What does it mean being a citizen?’, under an identity, juridical and political point of view, considering the sense of belonging, the rights and duties and the participation (p.9). The concept of citizenship is old and its meaning has been evolving during the centuries. As a first approximation, citizenship is the connection that binds an individual to an established order, by focusing on its main articulations: expectations and claims, rights and duties, strategies of inclusion and exclusion. Citizenship guarantees cohesion, and the development of political communities.

A COMPETENT DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

In recent times new forms of citizenship have emerged, among them the digital citizenship.

Several definitions of digital citizenship have been reported, starting from the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/REC(2019)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on developing digital citizenship education, where digital citizenship “is the capacity to participate actively, continuously and responsibly in communities (local, national, global, online and offline) at all levels (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural)” (<https://www.coe.int>).

 Open Access



According to the Council of Europe, “digital citizen” is a “person who masters the competences for democratic culture in order to be able to competently and positively engage with evolving digital technologies; participate actively, continuously and responsibly in social and civic activities; be involved in a process of lifelong learning (in formal, informal and non-formal settings) and be committed to defending continuously human rights and dignity.” (Council of Europe, Developing and Promoting Digital Citizenship Education. Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)10, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 21 November 2020).

The concept of digital citizenship has to do with the existence of tools, concrete access to them, the possession of the skills necessary to use them, not only with the technical competences (example European Digital Competence Framework DigComp 2.1 JRC), the ownership of rights and duties, participation in political life and collective choices, and more.

The digital competence “involves the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society. It includes information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), safety (including digital well-being and competences related to cybersecurity), intellectual property related questions, problem solving and critical thinking” (Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning ST/9009/2018/INIT).

Skills related to the collection, management and evaluation of information are described, they are needed in order to know how to navigate, search, evaluate, filter and manage data, information and digital contents (example, against fake news).

Special attention is paid to rethinking the educational and working field with a proper introduction of the ICT, underlining the importance of digital alphabetization, information management, problem solving and technical competences.

EDUCATION FOR DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

The concept of citizenship is studied by several disciplines, not only in juridical studies, even in sociology, psychology, pedagogy, technology, communication and other ones too. The author is experienced in educational questions, area in which he published valuable contributions: becoming a jurist (*Becoming jurists*, 2019), didactic innovations and distance teaching (*Distance teaching and teaching innovation*, 2020).

He considers in this book the use of the ICT for teaching and educational aims (p. 30 ss.), as ‘digital education comprises two different, but complementary perspectives: the pedagogical use of digital technologies to support and enhance teaching, learning and assessment and the development of digital competences by learners and educational and training staff’ (Council conclusions on digital education in Europe knowledge societies 2020/C 415/10).

The digital revolution involves education in several contexts, not only because young people have to develop high ICT competences, even because teachers can improve their

teaching strategies through the innovative use of digital tools (p.31), going over frontal teaching and introducing innovative teaching/learning strategies, to improve the learning results, according to the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (Text with EEA relevance) ([2018/C 189/01](#)).

The teaching tools are changing, and the traditional schoolbook is not the only learning help at school. The distance teaching / learning has to be carefully organised, according to the Italian Law: “The planning of teaching in digital mode must take into account the context and ensure the sustainability of the proposed activities and a general level of inclusiveness, avoiding that the contents and methodologies are the mere transposition of what is usually done in the presence.” ([D.M. 89, August 7 2020](#)). Advantages are possible in the evaluation process too, as a good use of the ‘educational data mining’ can gather detailed information of the learning process of the students, allowing personalization of teaching.

Citizenship includes rights and duties, and they are evolving in the world of bits and the Web, a place in which civil, political, social, human rights are recognized and implemented in a way that it is not exactly the same as in the real world.

Digital citizenship education is the empowerment of learners of all ages through education or the acquisition of competences for learning and active participation in digital society to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities online, and to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law in cyberspace ([Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on developing and promoting digital citizenship education](#), and continuing with the [definitions in the Council conclusions on digital education in Europe knowledge societies 2020/C 415/10](#)).

The Italian Law on teaching civic education at school (Law 92/2019 *Introduzione dell’insegnamento scolastico dell’educazione civica*-Introduction of the school civic education) prescribes education to digital citizenship and (page 31) Teachers digital competences. Article 5 of that Law 92/2019 prescribes that digital citizenship education is part of the transversal teaching of civic education. The contents of digital citizenship education appear clear if we look at the digital skills and knowledge that must be developed gradually taking into account the age of pupils and students.

THE RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL CITIZEN

Being a citizen in the digital age means facing many challenges. The first one is inclusion. The more technologies are present in our lives, to the point of making the distinction between offline and online disappear, the more the refusal to compete with them will have exclusion as the only consequence. Instead, not only must we fight this new and more subtle possibility of marginalization, but every effort must be made to fully inhabit the digital space.

The second challenge is linked to the competences; to be able to master the opportunities and risks that this technological discovery opens up, we need to learn

technical, cognitive, meta cognitive, emotional, social, legal skills to enable us to accept the challenge. It is necessary to continue learning throughout life as technologies become more and more advanced and sophisticated.

The most important challenge (the third one) is that of values, directly linked to responsibility. According to Pascuzzi, the digital citizenship has to be synonymous of active citizenship. The digital citizen has a responsibility, for example, to defend the pluralism of ideas, is responsible for overseeing the policies relating to personal data. Building digital citizenship is a work in progress. It is a citizens' responsibility to participate to the construction of the digital citizenship operating in order that the transition to digital does not entail a regression in terms of the protection of rights. Digital citizens are expected to create, use and control technology with a clear aim: to improve humanity.

The political participation on line includes dealing with the e-governance and the e-democracy, with the digital political parties, and the electronic vote, with the risk of manipulation. Being a digital citizen includes competences, awareness and values.

CONCLUDING

This book is a mine of valuable information and ideas; it can be seen as a kind of guide for the digital citizenship.

The information technology is appreciated as long as it is not separated from values, from rules and long-life education. The construction of digital citizenship is an open site; citizens are asked to take care that the transition to digital does not entail a regression in terms of rights (p. 212) and democracy. The technological evolution implies reinterpreting the existing rules or establishing new rights, and at the same time developing new educational strategies, especially in citizenship education; to support the development of good digital citizens.

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