



Promoting Ecological Citizenship: Rights, Duties and Political Agency

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Abstract

Citizenship has been a hot topic of debate within the green literature since the 1990s. Concepts like ecological and environmental citizenship capture the linkage between green politics and theories of citizenship. Although a significant number of contributions to the meaning of ecological/environmental citizenship have been made, their practical implications remain under-theorized. With the purpose of addressing this gap, my paper explores the conditions necessary for ecological citizenship to flourish. Two main trends are highlighted and analyzed, namely, the rights approach and the personal duty approach. I explain why I find these two tendencies problematic, and contend that a third approach is needed, one that transcends the individual. Finally, I turn to the issue of political agency. After considering the role of the state and the green state in transforming citizenship, I conclude by claiming that a civil society perspective must be introduced when thinking about the promotion of ecological citizenship.

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Introduction

The language of ecological or environmental citizenship has been spoken since the 1990s in policy documents, academia and institutional campaigns.² Despite the widespread use of these terms, the relationship between green political thought and citizenship remains under-explored, and the concepts of ecological and environmental citizenship under-theorized (Valencia Sáiz, 2005, 170; 2004; Dobson, 2003, 85; MacGregor, 2006a, 85; Dean, 2001, 490). Most approaches to sustainability consist in regulatory and economic reforms (e.g., ‘sticks-and-carrots’ measures, which assume that rationality for human beings amounts to acting according to self-interest). But making sustainable societies arguably requires more than changes in behaviour triggered by fiscal incentives. Deeper shifts in people’s attitudes to the environment might be needed, and that is what the “citizenship approach to sustainability” seeks to achieve (Dobson and Valencia Sáiz, 2005, 157-158; Dobson and Bell, 2006, 1-4).

The meaning of the term ecological citizenship is not univocal, since it is still an infant concept. There have been several suggestions regarding different ways that citizenship and the environment might be related, for instance “ecological citizenship” (Christoff, 1996a; Dobson, 2005, 2003; Smith, 1998; Curtin, 2002, 1999), “green citizenship” (Dean, 2001; Smith, 2005), “environmental citizenship” (Dobson and Bell, 2006; Luque, 2005), “sustainability citizenship” (Barry, 2006), “environmentally reasonable citizenship” (Hailwood, 2005) or “ecological stewardship” (Barry, 2002, 1999). This conceptual diversity, far from being a mere terminological issue, reflects the complexity of the citizenship and environment issue. Indeed, there are specific situations in which a particular notion of ecological citizenship, or one of its features, directly conflicts with another. For instance, for some authors activities such as recycling or sustainable consumption fall into the category of ecological citizens’ duties (Dobson, 2003; Barry, 1999), whereas others regard them as private choices, involving the right to live a green life (Bell, 2005).

Academic theorising has primarily converged on whether there is a distinctive type of green citizenship, or whether ecological citizenship can be accommodated within models of citizenship advanced by existing schools of

² Most literature treats environmental, ecological and green citizenship synonymously. Assuming that there is a distinction between environmental and ecological citizenship – to which I will return – I deliberately regard the term “ecological citizenship” as the topic of this paper. However, since I am presenting a critical literature review on the question of how to foment ecological citizenship, I will use both terms to reflect the diverse terminology displayed in the literature.

thought.³ Little attention has been given to the practical implications of ecological citizenship. However, especially since 2005, there has been some interest in the obstacles and opportunities that neo-liberal democracies and capitalist economies present for ecological citizenship. It has been argued that ecological citizenship could be instantiated in the economic sphere, through practices such as ecological modernization (Christoff, 1996b), the social economy (Smith, 2005), sustainable consumption (Seyfang, 2005) or ethical investment (Carter and Huby, 2005). Environmental education (Carlsson and Jensen, 2006; Gough and Scott, 2006; Hailwood, 2005; Dobson, 2003) and activism (Horton, 2006; Latta, 2007) might also lead to green understandings of citizenship. None of these initiatives to foster ecological/environmental citizenship through the economy, the education system and activism has been systematically studied. The emphasis has been placed on rights, democratic processes and personal duties.

In the following sections I explore two of the main trends regarding the promotion of ecological citizenship: the participatory rights approach and the personal duty approach. However ecological citizenship is conceived, its definition and practical implications are typically related to some combination of the claiming of rights and the fulfilling of duties. Here I explain this conceptual dichotomy that forms a key part of the concept.⁴ The limitations in both approaches are highlighted; the main problem is, I argue, that they foment an individualistic conception of citizenship. In the final section, I turn to the issue of political agency to consider the role of the state and the green state as agents for the transformation of citizenship. I show that ecological citizenship can also be instantiated outside the state realm, although the non-statist view has received little attention by green theorists of citizenship. My conclusion is that a civil society perspective can help overcome the individualism of participatory rights and duty-based models by allowing a collective understanding of ecological citizenship and the practices it involves.

³ Dobson (2005, 2003) and Valencia Sáiz (2005, 2004) claim that ecological citizenship is a genuinely new type of citizenship. In contrast, Bell (2005) and Hailwood (2005) believe that the notion of liberal citizenship can be modified so as to accommodate a green liberal account of citizenship. Other theorists, like Barry (2006; 1999) and Light (2002), advance a republican type of citizenship in which the notions of virtue and common good allow for a strong connection between republicanism and environmental concerns, as ecological republicanism stresses (Curry, 2000).

⁴ I do not imply that rights and duties are the only dimensions involved. Ecological/environmental citizenship refers to the place where citizenship activity is carried on: the local community, the nation-state, the world (MacGregor, 2006a, 85-96). It is also related to the development of ecological and political identities (Tomashow, 1996; Hilson, 2001). In addition, green models of citizenship imply discussions about which spheres of life become domains for citizens' activity: the public, the private, or both? Finally, ecological citizenship also involves the concept of virtue: do virtues play a key role and, if so, which virtues count as the virtues of ecological citizens?

Rights, Democracy and the Environment: Ecological Citizenship as a Status

Achieving the aims of political ecology demands a process of democratization. Greens argue that economic reforms, scientific-technological advances and lifestyle changes will not be enough. Citizens' involvement in environmental decision-making is seen as crucial, and therein lies the necessary revision of liberal institutions. The participatory rights approach to the promotion of environmental/ecological citizenship must be read in this context.

Central to this project has been the attempt to bring liberalism and green politics together, usually by means of an immanent critique of liberalism. Situated within this debate, ecological citizenship can be institutionalized by reforming legislations and political processes. The aims of such reform are the extension of citizenship rights, so as to add an environmental dimension to existing civil, political and social rights (Bell, 2005; Hailwood, 2005; van Steenberg, 1994; Twine, 1994), and the design of more participatory democratic institutions (Christoff, 1996a; Barry, 2002, 1999). This redefinition of the liberal notions of citizenship and democracy is part of a broader project aimed at showing the compatibility between the supposed neutrality of the liberal state and the promotion of both ecological citizenship and sustainability. Green theorists of liberalism show that liberal thought can and should be less property and market orientated. They claim that liberal democracies are capable of respecting nature without breaking their commitment to state neutrality (Hailwood, 2004; Stephens, 2001).

Derek Bell (2005) notes that the main problem for a liberal approach to environmental citizenship is its conception of nature as property. His alternative is that liberal citizens should view nature as a provider of basic needs and as "a subject about which there is disagreement" (Bell, 2005, 185). He claims that it is possible to deduce two types of rights from a conception of the environment as provider of basic needs. On the one hand he refers to substantial environmental rights such as the right to clean water, and on the other hand to procedural environmental rights to defend existing substantive rights and to campaign for establishing new rights. According to Bell, both types of rights can be regulated and enshrined in constitutions.

Following from his second conception of the environment – as a subject about which there is disagreement – Bell suggests that environmental liberal citizens should have the right to take part in environmental policy-making, as well as personal rights to be greens and to join environmental organizations – that is to protect and promote the environment. But in his view environmental citizens also have the right *not* to be greens, because being an environmental citizen does not require individuals to participate in activities seeking to protect the environment. Despite his emphasis on rights, Bell's "liberal environmental citizens" have duties

correlative to rights. Their main duty is to obey just laws which are democratically made directly by voters or indirectly via the parliament. Bell acknowledges that, insofar as environmental citizens are conceived as citizens of planet Earth, their first duty should be to promote environmental global justice, but according to him this would be too demanding a task, as citizens could spend every hour of their lives fighting injustice without eradicating it.⁵ For Bell, citizens are not obliged to promote justice unless there is a law telling them to do so.

Other examples of the participatory rights approach are provided by theorists like John Barry and Peter Christoff.⁶ Barry (2002, 1999) argues that reforming liberal political institutions is not enough. He proposes a deliberative democracy that would involve re-organization of the whole economic system and the state machinery. Deliberative democracy has been described as “the practice of public reasoning,” in which “participants make proposals, attempt to persuade others, and determine the best outcomes and policies based on the arguments and reasons fleshed out in public discourse” (Scholsberg *et al.*, 2006, 216). The distinctive feature of deliberation is open discussion in which participants are given equal treatment, respect and opportunities (Saward, 2001, 564).⁷ Given that deliberative politics takes into account citizens’ preferences, and focuses on the education and formation of such preferences, it has been argued that deliberative institutions provide a good framework for ecological citizenship to be cultivated.⁸

Christoff (1996a) rejects the deliberative democratic solution and offers several alternative models. He conceives ecological citizenship as an institution for all those affected by ecological problems to participate in environmental decision-making, regardless of their nationality. This includes representing the interests of future generations and of the environment itself. The options he suggests entail the creation of regional parliaments, referenda on specific environmental issues across

⁵ This is Bell’s specific environmental instantiation of the liberal principle that liberal citizens have the duty to further just arrangements not yet established when that can be done without too much cost, as enunciated by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

⁶ Both Barry and Christoff argue for notions of ecological citizenship centred on duties; therefore, their work also qualifies as an example of the individual duty approach that will be illustrated in the next section. For them, ecological citizenship refers to the acceptance of responsibility for fellow citizens and for the environment but, in their view, the best way to assume such responsibility is active involvement in environmental decision-making.

⁷ There is considerable variation among conceptions of deliberative democracy. See Saward (2001) for an overview.

⁸ Much work has explored the relationship between deliberative democracy and political ecology. See, for instance, Barry (1999, 1996), Dryzek (2000, 1992), Eckersley (2004, 2002, 2000), Dobson (1996), Smith (2003).

nation-states, and the constitution of a flexible electorate with a composition that changes according to the problem (Christoff, 1996a, 156).

In most of these proposals, ecological/environmental citizenship is seen as a mechanism of inclusion and political participation. Stress is placed on rights of access to information and participation, as well as on democratic models that are more inclusive than representative democracy (e.g., deliberative democracy). Thus, ecological citizenship is articulated as a status that would be guaranteed by virtue of enshrining environmental substantive and procedural rights in constitutions and laws. In this respect, the 1998 Aarhus Convention is an example of how a rights-based conception of environmental citizenship could be instantiated.⁹ The Convention establishes three different groups of rights: information rights about environmental concerns, rights of participation in policy-making and rights of access to justice. Attempts to increase citizens' participation in decisions concerning the environment, and projects to strengthen existing democratic institutions are, undoubtedly, part of what ecological citizenship should be about. Nevertheless, promoting a green type of citizenship as a mechanism for political participation has several problems. First, there are issues of motivation and citizens' material possibilities to exercise their rights of participation. It is difficult to imagine all citizens being interested in environmental issues and in designing environmental policies. Some people might not have the time to get involved in democratic processes, due, for example, to gender inequality, an unbalanced distribution of socially necessary labour (Philips, 1993; Voet, 1998; MacGregor, 2006a, 2006b), or the lack of basic material resources. In other words, citizenship may exclude some people who do not even have the wherewithal to live as citizens, because of material inequalities disguised under the formal equality that citizenship status grants. To the extent that injustice and social inequalities are obstacles to the exercise of citizenship rights, it may be that a minority of citizens are able to take decisions to act sustainably.

Greens usually argue that if citizens have better access to information, and if they enjoy various opportunities to take part in decision-making processes, their participation in the common governance of public issues will increase. This is seen as crucial in the environmental context, where the key idea is that sustainability will only be achieved through increased cooperation by citizens and by people from different societies working together. The central problem with green demands for more political participation is that such participation cannot guarantee that ecological objectives will be achieved (Smith 2005, 2003). This contingency

⁹ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, adopted in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe framework on 25 June 1998 in Aarhus, Denmark. See www.unece.org/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf for the full text in English.

relates to the relationship between political ecology and democracy; insofar as green politics strives to create sustainable societies, outcomes are privileged over processes. There is a potential conflict between adherence to democratic procedures and ecological ends. Having overcome the authoritarian trend of early environmentalism, political ecology has embraced democratic politics – and the paradox is that citizens might democratically decide to keep on sustaining the unsustainable.

It can be further objected that the rights of information, participation and access to justice – granted, for example, by the Aarhus Convention – are procedural, not substantive.¹⁰ The key point is that even justice is regarded as a procedural right. This is a feature of liberal democratic theory: justice applies to procedures, not to outcomes. As Agyeman and Evans (2006, 196) argue, such an approach “do[es] not necessarily imply any real changes in levels of social inclusion or social justice,” a criticism that applies to Bell’s conception of liberal environmental citizenship.¹¹

In order to participate in environmental decision-making processes, citizens need access to reliable information about ecological problems, their causes and consequences. There is a controversy in political ecology relating to how environmental information, including the concept of “nature” itself, is produced. Is it an exclusive concern of science, technology and bureaucracy, or do citizens and non-governmental organizations have any role to play? Should the relevant environmental knowledge be informed by facts, or values, or both? Do scientists have power over politicians or do politicians dominate scientists? (Latour, 2004; Forsyth, 2002). John Dryzek (1993) observes a shift from “scientism” to a more discursive system, which allows participation by a plurality of actors. Examples of more deliberative and participatory environmental science and the production of green knowledge comprise mechanisms in which citizens and experts are brought together to exchange information, evaluate projects and advise legislators (Torgerson, 1986; Fischer, 2000, 1993). Such mechanisms are more attentive to “citizen science,” that is to knowledge and expertise acquired through direct experience (Fischer, 2000). But there is disagreement regarding whether citizen science and social or locally based knowledge are more effective than expert knowledge, in terms of facing environmental problems. This uncertainty

¹⁰ Procedural rights are those used to defend existing substantive rights, such as the right to a healthy environment (Bell, 2005, 186-187). On environmental rights, see Hayward (2004, 2002, 2001, 2000).

¹¹ Agyeman and Evans (2006) are critical of the concept of ecological citizenship. They believe that the language of “environmental justice” is more adequate to capture the sort of demands related to ecological citizenship. However, as Latta suggests, “environmental justice can be read *in terms of a politics of citizenship*” (2007, 386, emphasis in the original).

compromises citizens' meaningful participation in environmental policy-making based on rights of access to information.

In concluding this section, I should also note that this rights-based trend gives great importance to the individual, while neglecting the collective aspect that green notions of citizenship might embody. As citizens could encounter difficulties (e.g., time, resources, motivation) that prevent them from exercising their rights of participation, it is necessary to introduce a focus on social issues and a collective perspective.

Ecological Citizenship and Personal Duty: The Privatization of Environmental Responsibility

In this section I will examine the personal duty or lifestyle-change approach to ecological citizenship (Dobson, 2005, 2003; Christoff, 1996a; Barry, 1999; Light, 2002; Newby, 1996; Curtin, 2002, 1999; Dean, 2001; Smith, 1998). The central feature of this approach is the definition of ecological citizenship as the assumption of responsibility for one's acts and the fulfilment of personal duties to protect the environment. Andrew Dobson is perhaps the most representative theorist of this trend, especially since the publication of *Citizenship and the Environment* (2003). Dobson (2003, 88-90) develops an interesting distinction between environmental and ecological citizenship.¹² He uses the term environmental citizenship to deal with the connection between citizenship and sustainability from a liberal point of view. Thus, environmental citizenship is conceived as an extension of liberal citizenship. By enshrining human environmental rights and rights of participation in the constitutional context, an environmental dimension to citizenship status would be introduced. Environmental citizenship is tied to the state territory and it is practised exclusively in the public sphere. Alternatively, ecological citizenship is a virtue-based account of citizenship. It is centred on the assumption of non-contractual and non-reciprocal duties grounded in relationships of injustice and triggered by the socio-environmental impact of one's acts. Ecological citizenship goes beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation-state and embraces both the private and public spheres.¹³ While ecological citizenship aims to promote global and environmental

¹² Barry (2006) makes a similar distinction between environmental citizenship and sustainability citizenship. See Dobson (2000, 2-12); Bookchin (1980, 77-78) and Eckersley (1996, 234) on the distinction between ecologism and environmentalism.

¹³ Dobson (2003) develops "post-cosmopolitanism" as the new framework needed to capture a conception of ecological citizenship that cannot be spoken in the language of dominant

justice, environmental citizenship focuses solely on the environment, without accounting for socio-political and economic aspects of the ecological crisis (but see Hailwood, 2005). Ecological citizenship differs from environmental citizenship in that the former envisages an alternative society that is not only sustainable but also just, and aims at fulfilling citizenship political duties in order to secure justice. If one follows Dobson's characterisation, the proposals presented in the previous section of this paper would be theories of environmental, rather than ecological, citizenship.

The duty-based approach to citizenship and the environment acknowledges the existence of citizens' environmental rights, especially human environmental rights, but stresses citizens' personal duties. These duties are global and arise from citizens' moral and political responsibility to non-human nature, fellow citizens and future generations. A distinctive feature of this conception of ecological citizenship is that the private sphere is considered as a site for citizen activity (e.g., recycling and boycotting unethical and unsustainable products).

This way to promote ecological citizenship based on the voluntary assumption of personal duty can be criticised on a number of grounds. MacGregor (2006a, 2006b) highlights the "gender blindness" of these theories of ecological citizenship, insofar as they wrongly assume citizens' equality and a fair division of labour that would allow all citizens the necessary time to fulfil their personal duties. Furthermore, green political thought and most notions of ecological citizenship are inherently instrumental, in that citizens are regarded as means to achieve the ends of ecologism, while the intrinsic value of citizenship (MacGregor and Szerzynski, 2004), as well as its democratic dimension (Latta, 2007), are often neglected. I believe that ecological citizenship has to transcend the individual, so I will focus here on a different kind of objection to notions of ecological citizenship based on personal duty: that they foment an individualistic understanding of citizenship and politics, and that they encourage the privatization of environmental responsibility.

Theories of ecological citizenship as personal duty presuppose that sustainability can be achieved through the aggregation of individual acts. Citizens are therefore regarded as the main actors for social and environmental change; they are asked to do their bit for the environment by abandoning certain commodities and bringing about changes in personal lifestyles to reduce their impact on the environment. The danger that over-consumption represents for nature is emphasized and self-discipline becomes a public virtue. As MacGregor (2006a, 2006b) argues, in such articulations of ecological citizenship, selfish and

irresponsible citizens are understood to be at the root of environmental problems. Latta (2007, 380) has called this “ecological citizenship as self-restraint”, where sustainability is perceived as emerging through an “inner revolution.”

Too singular a focus on individuals might lead to the conclusion that citizens can satisfy the responsibilities of ecological citizenship simply by fulfilling personal duties. Such a focus also suggests that citizens’ lifestyles, especially those whose everyday activities have large environmental and social impacts, are the *main* cause of environmental problems. As Iris Young (2003, 40) argues, the stress on individual responsibility rather than on collective responsibility is misleading, as it draws attention to citizens instead of to “complex structural processes that [do] connect persons and institutions in very different social and geographic positions.” This results in the risky tendency to depoliticise and privatise green issues. The fact that some people are agents of injustice because they are part of a system with unjust structural features cannot be ignored if ecological citizenship is to be something more than a variety of personal duties aimed at changing lifestyles.

The idea of personal change must be linked to a further analysis of relations of power in order to provide a social context for ecological citizenship activity. Citizens might not be able to choose freely according to their preferences and values because choices are shaped and controlled. Questions of the affordability, availability or convenience of green goods, which do depend on economic, social and political institutions, might be an obstacle to the expression and enactment of citizens’ will and preferences. The systemic structures are themselves causes of unsustainability and injustice, and represent an obstacle that can only be challenged through collective action (Seyfang, 2005, 295-297). It follows, then, that ecological citizenship cannot be just a matter of personal behaviour, but must also entail collective action aimed at producing social, political and economic conditions where citizens choose to act in a sustainable and just way (Dobson, 2003, 103). However, a focus on collective responsibility and on systemic change, together with a conception of ecological citizenship as a potential agent for such a structural transformation, does not mean rejecting the importance of personal duties and obligations. Lifestyle changes and collective action can be mutually reinforcing (Luque, 2005, 216). In fact, citizens’ participation and motivation are as necessary to protect the environment as is collective action. Accepting personal responsibility and acting accordingly can help raise citizens’ awareness that their behaviours and attitudes can make a difference (Light, 2001, 28). Although ecological citizenship should transcend the individual, its promotion will always embrace lifestyle practices, since it seeks to include the private sphere in the realm of politics by considering the private domain as a site for citizen activity. But it is dangerous to emphasize individual duties over the social context, ignoring socio-economic structures in which human beings are integrated and avoiding debates about relationships of injustice. The main peril is that an individualist conception of ecological citizenship can easily be co-opted by governments and state agencies

because it is widely accepted and not seen as a challenge to the current capitalist system (especially in the neo-liberal context of attempts to withdraw the state from many dimensions of social provision). Precisely due to this lack of threat to the state and to powerful interest groups in society, ecological citizenship can be supported by economic and political institutions, undermining its potential for questioning the *status quo* and bringing about social change (Seyfang, 2005, 297-298).

States, Green States and Civil Societies

So far I have discussed participatory rights and duty approaches to the promotion of ecological citizenship. Sometimes explicitly acknowledged, sometimes implied in the literature, there is a further issue to be considered: the question of political agency. The remainder of this article will consider which is the agent, or agents, responsible for the transformation of citizenship into ecological citizenship, and for reducing unjust and unsustainable aspects of contemporary societies.

The dominant position in the field of green politics is that the transition toward environmental citizenship requires governmental policies to create the conditions and spaces for its exercise (MacGregor and Pardoe, 2005, 3; Dobson and Valencia Sáiz, 2005, 162). Partly because most ecological/environmental citizenship theorists live in liberal democratic states, and partly because it is thought that any transformation of liberal democracy has to depart from existing liberal institutions (Eckersley, 1996, 213), attempts have been made to demonstrate that current neo-liberal states can and should encourage more sustainable forms of citizenship (Dobson, 2003; Bell, 2005; Hailwood, 2005; Valencia Sáiz, 2005).

The term “environmental citizenship” was first used in 1990 by Environment Canada, the Canadian Ministry of the Environment (Szerszynski, 2006, 75). According to Environment Canada, “as citizens of the world, we do not have a good history of managing our environment well – we have taken our resources for granted and have often abused the resources which we inherited”.¹⁴ We are therefore encouraged to be environmental citizens, as a “personal commitment to learning more about the environment and to taking responsible environmental action”.¹⁵ This notion of environmental citizenship – in which

¹⁴ Environment Canada web site http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/info/pubs/mountain/-e_intro.htm.

¹⁵ Environment Canada web site http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/info/pubs/mountain/-e_intro.htm.

individual duty is stressed over collective responsibility as a path to a more sustainable society – mirrors the personal duty approach and thus encounters similar problems.¹⁶

Governments know that they cannot deliver sustainability on their own. Despite environmental legislation, green targets will not be met without citizens' cooperation. Citizens are therefore asked to be environmental citizens, to reduce their environmental impact by means of recycling, riding a bicycle or saving water. As Barry (2006) points out, state-based campaigns to promote environmental citizenship ignore the socio-economic and political dimensions of sustainability. It seems there is no will to place environmental issues in a broader context, to foster debates about sustainability, or to change unjust situations that contribute to environmental degradation and social inequality. Citizens are just encouraged to be "good citizens" and to do their best for the environment, even to "sacrifice" for the environment. But the structures of power and the capitalist economy that reproduce ecological and social problems remain untouchable. As Luque (2005) notes, citizens need the type of information that contextualizes the ecological crisis within a system encompassing social, economic and political issues, and that helps citizens to identify injustice – and not only environmental threats – and relate it to the way industrial societies are organized.

In addition, governmental initiatives to promote green citizenship can be regarded as a way for the state to unload the burden of achieving the targets set by international agreements (such as the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions) onto individual citizens. Public campaigns encourage citizens to use more public transport and to drive fewer cars, but in most cases, industries that are also responsible for carbon dioxide emissions are not targeted. Rather than going to the roots of the problem, institutional campaigns appeal to citizens' ecological sensibility with messages related to health issues and welfare. This could be seen as an example of how the state is constrained, especially by the need to secure economic development without compromising investment. If industry is targeted, there might be consequences that undermine economic growth. In this respect, citizens are an easier and less dangerous target than corporations.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Darier (1996) for a study of ecological citizenship as promoted by Environment Canada.

¹⁷ There are, however, examples in which businesses are the target of governmental campaigns, like the Climate Change Levy introduced in the United Kingdom in 2001. The levy applies to the use of energy in industry, commerce and the public sector. It seeks to encourage business – a sector that contributes the most to overall UK emissions – to be more efficient in their energy use. Although industries are being targeted here, this initiative is not aimed at promoting environmental citizenship but ecological modernization, which seeks to "greenwash" the economy

In view of these obstacles, some theorists claim that deep transformations of state institutions are needed, and advocate a green state which would “create the conditions for green citizenship” (Barry, 2006, 28) and for an “ecologically guided democracy” (Christoff, 1996a). Raising citizens’ environmental awareness by providing them with more information has not been as effective as was expected when the idea of ecological consciousness and green social movements first appeared in the 1970s. So, for Barry and Christoff, some regulation and imposition of ecological behaviours by the state is needed.

There are existing states with features that could be seen as an indication of a move toward an ecological democracy (Dryzek *et al.*, 2003), but proper green states do not exist at present. From a normative point of view, Robyn Eckersley (2004) has examined how a green state could be produced, taking existing state structures as a starting point. Her green state is a democratic state informed by ecological democracy. This does not simply require the greening of liberal democracy, but, rather, new institutions and principles: new procedures, decision rules, and forms of representation and participation.¹⁸ Christoff contends that a green state should integrate participatory democratic processes with the rights to oppose actions that violate the ecological principles established in constitutions. A green state, he claims, “needs to apply powerful sanctions against those who step outside the bounds of the ecologically guided democracy” (Christoff, 1996a, 166). The question remains whether a green state, if it is to be a democratic state, will be capable of pursuing green outcomes, changing people’s ecological attitudes and addressing the justice-related dimension that ecological citizenship also deals with.

Green statist argue that, in order to come about, a green state needs citizens’ action to force the necessary changes in existing institutions. Ecological citizens are thought of as the agents for the creation of green states. John Dryzek and his colleagues, through their research on the problems green social movements had/have to encounter in dealing with different types of states, show that greens working collectively as movements in civil society can impose new demands upon the state. Among these demands, the authors refer in particular to the establishment of a new state imperative, the environmental conservation imperative,¹⁹ “which would democratize the state still further by including environmentalists in the core, creating the green state” (Dryzek *et al.*, 2003, 165).

and the unsustainable consequences of capitalism by assuming the compatibility between economic growth and sustainability.

¹⁸ See also Barry and Eckersley (2005).

¹⁹ Dryzek *et al.* (2003, 12) define state imperatives as “the functions that governmental structures have to carry out to ensure their own longevity and stability,” and identify them as the domestic order, survival, revenue, economic and legitimation imperatives.

In his latest work on ecological citizenship, Barry argues for a critical sustainability citizenship that challenges dominant economic and political actors, as “without such resistance and pressure, it is unlikely that anything approximating a sustainable development path will be realized” (2006, 33). He places ecological citizenship in the realm of civil society, but his idea is that working towards this type of citizenship has to be linked with working towards new theories of the state. Barry even suggests that citizens could devote part of their time to being ecological citizens through a Compulsory Sustainability Service enforced by the state in order to achieve sustainability (2006, 28-32).

Contrary to what green statist favour, a focus on civil society does not have to be instrumentalist in order to pursue a green state. Civil society is a place of political action itself, and changing society – as well as the structures of power within it – is a legitimate political goal. Insofar as it is not bound to imperatives, civil society is not as compelled as the state (Dryzek *et al.*, 2003, 103); this makes ecological citizenship in civil society less likely to be co-opted and neutralized by governments. While there is no guarantee that civil society will be green, without a critical civil society there is little chance that the current non-ecological state structures can be eliminated.

Even though civil society has not received enough attention from green theorists of citizenship, ecological citizenship practised in civil society can help overcome some of the problems of the institutional approach (e.g., the risk of co-option and privatization of environmental responsibility, and excessive individualism), while promoting a concept of ecological citizenship that is more attentive to social, economic and justice related issues.²⁰ An example of ecological citizenship in civil society would be what Seyfang (2005, 301-302) calls “alternative sustainable consumption.” This includes non-market exchange tools such as “community currencies” (e.g., time banks) that favour economic models alternative to capitalism, while building social capital and contributing to environmental protection, community cohesion and mutual aid.

Nevertheless, the civil society approach is susceptible to some criticisms. In the first place, there is the peril that ecological citizenship suffers the same limitations as the personal duty approach. Ecological citizens’ activity in civil society might transcend the individualism inherent in duty-based theories and state campaigns, but at the same time, if it is not properly placed within a collective

²⁰ In relation to the personal duty approach, there is a further reason for suggesting the introduction of the civil society perspective. Since ecological citizens have duties to future generations, non-human nature and other human beings (both members of one’s society and other societies), horizontal relationships among citizens are privileged over vertical relationships between citizens and the state (Dobson, 2003). This non-state centred perspective points at civil society as a terrain for the exercise of ecological citizenship.

project, it risks being about isolated individuals “doing their bit.” The civil society approach can also end up favouring those with more time and resources, and excluding those who cannot actively participate in public life. These issues suggest that attempts to relate ecological citizenship to civil society have to emphasize its location within a collective structure (e.g., an NGO, the community), while being aware of the limitations to active involvement in civil society that are confronted by some citizens.

In addition, following the work of theorists like Khilnani (2001) and Keane (1998a, 1998b, 1998c), who identify civil society with non-governmental organisations, some will argue that questions of lack of representation and legitimisation of civil society arise. It can be further objected that stronger links between civil society, the state and law have to be established if ecological citizenship is to be articulated. If Khilnani (2001, 30) is right when claiming that civil society cannot exist without a set of given institutions, like a “legal structure of property rights,” a “system of markets where such rights can be exchanged,” and “a legal recognition of political associations and voluntary agencies,” research on ecological citizenship in civil society will have to be connected to research on neo-liberal states systems and markets. This approach would be favoured by those seeking to conceive ecological citizenship as environmental citizenship or as an extension of citizens’ formal rights and duties, or by those who believe ecological citizenship is best nurtured through partnerships between state institutions and groups in civil society (e.g., recycling schemes run in collaboration with city councils, where ecological citizens complement the state). In opposition to Khilnani and Keane, Terrier and Wagner (2006) argue that civil society should not be subordinated to any institutional setting, and warn about the perils of making strong linkages between civil society and the state. The alternative consumption schemes referred to above illustrate a form of ecological citizenship in civil society conceived outside the market and the state.

Conclusion

Despite the increasing attention given to the idea of ecological citizenship since the 1990s, some aspects of this concept remain under-researched. Definitions of ecological citizenship, as well as the normative issues involved, are well documented. In this article I have tried to pay attention to the more neglected issue of how to move from theory to practice. Two main approaches, based respectively on participatory rights and private duties, have been analyzed as ways to foster green notions of citizenship. It has been argued that these initiatives involve an overly-individualistic understanding of citizenship. I have claimed, in contrast, that ecological citizenship should entail collective engagement in the creation of just and sustainable societies.

Thinking about the practical implications of ecological citizenship requires not only discussion about the means and activities that will precede the environmental enlightening of citizens (e.g., rights of participation, democratic deliberation or duties toward the non-human world). Ecological citizens will not emerge spontaneously; they have to be created. This leads to the question of political agency, which involves an inquiry into the possible agents for the transformation of citizenship into ecological citizenship. Research on the role of the state has dominated this debate. The key question is, are contemporary states ready to encourage ecological citizenship or do state institutions need to be transformed, resulting in a green state? As an attempt to go beyond mainstream approaches, I argue that civil society must be considered – together with the state and the green state – as an agent for the transformation of citizenship. State-based accounts of citizenship and environmental policy are addressed to individuals, ignoring the socio-economic conditions in which citizens are caught. Although civil society can also be individualistic and non-ecological, it is an unexplored space where more community-oriented, oppositional and just practices of ecological citizenship can be tried and tested.

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