

Education for an Age of Interdependence

A series of provocation papers

Reviewing Global Citizenship

Dr. Hans Schattle



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Hans Schattle is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Roger Williams University.

Edited by Moira Faul, Adrian Prandle and Adam Short, Oxfam GB.

We live in an exciting period of expansion in the political and moral horizons of citizenship. No longer is the idea of global citizenship confined to a small cadre of philosophers and visionaries; no longer is global citizenship abstract or distant; no longer is global citizenship associated mainly with calls for world government. In the present day, more and more everyday people are beginning to think and live as global citizens actively engaged in the world.

One could make the case that everyone living in today's interdependent world is a global citizen from birth. These days, however, self-identifying global citizens tend to view global citizenship as acquired through life experiences that shape and transform attitudes, beliefs and outlooks whilst impacting upon how people make important decisions. The sorts of experiences that inspire individuals to begin thinking about global citizenship are manifold – ranging from educational programmes, activism in political and social causes, professional opportunities abroad, immigration, and personal ties with individuals from different backgrounds. And yet, such formative experiences are not necessarily decisive in determining whether everyday people will begin to consider themselves as global citizens.

Far more pivotal is the extent that prospective global citizens begin to embrace one or more specific concepts that, taken together, seem to provide the essence of what global citizenship really means for most of its adherents in the present day. As illustrated at length in my recent book, *The Practices of Global Citizenship*, these concepts are awareness, responsibility, participation, cross-cultural empathy, personal achievement and international mobility.

Awareness of self and world

Plain as it might seem, awareness serves as the crucial starting point for global citizenship. This is one key finding from my recent study into the many practices of global citizenship. As I interviewed more than 150 self-described global citizens and advocates of global citizenship, time and again it was evident how so many individuals believe that global citizenship depends, more than anything, upon awareness of oneself as well as the outside world. As noted by a French-language teacher who has led her students on immersion experiences in Africa: "I say to my students that becoming a global citizen is not something that happens overnight; it's a process of self-awareness – and

as you become self-aware, you become more aware of others."

Indeed, many people who think of themselves as global citizens define this idea with a related word: consciousness. For example, a Californian political activist, when asked how the term 'global citizenship' had entered into her thinking, replied: "I think it's a word that we have tried to put to a growing consciousness" in pursuit of greater democratic empowerment in the global economy. A former representative in the United States Congress stressed that global citizenship is "part of my consciousness," particularly with regard to the use of natural resources: "What I waste is someone else's survival." A university dean explained how his institution tries to raise global citizenship "in the consciousness of our students and say, look, when you leave here, you have some obligations not just in a local way of thinking but in a global way of thinking." The chairman of a huge multinational corporation told me he aims for his employees to "develop a consciousness that they are also citizens of the world, and that while we're implanted and living in one place, what we do and don't do may impact much larger areas."

"No SUV": responsibility and participation

Such comments illustrate the centrality of awareness as a key concept of global citizenship as well as how awareness extends into responsibility and participation. When reflecting on what responsible global citizenship requires, self-identifying global citizens often focus on two themes: principled decision making and solidarity across humanity. Quite simply, many individuals believe that global citizenship requires being aware of moral obligations beyond one's immediate communities and then making sound decisions accordingly. For example, an information technology consultant from San Francisco defined a global citizen as "someone who makes decisions based on an awareness of the impact of those decisions on the planet." She immediately added that based on her view of global citizenship, she never would buy a sport utility vehicle.

Many of today's global citizens also call for more responsible policies from national governments. A medical student from Oregon who has argued publicly for better global citizenship from the United States linked her point of view with environmental interdependence. In her words: "We're the most powerful country and the richest

country, and so it's our responsibility to lead the way and be responsible global citizens, because if we're not going to do it, why would anybody else?" Others choose to frame global citizenship as the fusion of rights and responsibilities in an emerging global public space. As a leader of the United Nations Global Compact told me, the idea of global citizenship "offers all the strength of trying to come to grips with a broad definition of our rights and responsibilities in a space that is not yet defined."

Empathy and engagement

Those who think about global citizenship in terms of solidarity across humanity echo an enduring principle of cosmopolitanism: the dignity and well-being of each human person, warrants equal respect and concern from all. Some think of global citizenship as having a sense of proximity to global problems – no matter how remote those problems might seem from one's immediate surroundings. As a prominent human rights activist from Paris told me: "I feel [like] a planetary citizen in the sense that I feel concerned about what's happening everywhere. I feel planetary in the sense that I don't feel closer to the problems of France than I do to the problems of Burma . . . proximity is not defined by geography."

Having a personal sense of moral accountability to present and future generations prompts many self-described global citizens to participate more actively in politics and society, echoing classical ideals of democratic citizenship as self-government. Many global citizens act locally as well as globally. In fact, many activists who now think of themselves as global citizens first became involved in local political campaigns and then followed their respective issues of concern – women's rights, environmental protection, poverty reduction – into the international arena through involvement with civil society organisations.

In addition, many individuals who have lived overseas for extended periods of time – corporate executives, community volunteers, students and teachers – typically begin to think of themselves as global citizens as they become active contributors to social and political life in their newly adopted communities. Others who anchor global citizenship in political participation work for the continued evolution of democratically accountable public spaces to shape international policy, especially within powerful economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

While some pursue global citizenship through international political engagement, others put global citizenship into practice through human relationships and social interaction, especially in fostering cross-cultural empathy and engagement at home or abroad. Many everyday people first find meaning in the idea of global citizenship while living far from home and cultivating a strong sense of belonging within a different culture – or while building bridges at home across different ethnic, cultural and religious groups.

For example, an Australian journalist who spoke to me just one day after participating in a rally in Melbourne calling for reconciliation with Australia's aboriginal population had this cross-cultural view of global citizenship: "We are a migrant culture, and there are enormous numbers of people with different faces and different coloured skins and different accents. I don't feel that they're a threat. That's my concept if you talk about a global citizen. It's someone who doesn't feel threatened by other cultures and who sort of feels his own culture is robust enough to stand up amongst them, that that culture itself is a product of diversity."

Achievement

Likewise, many recent global citizenship initiatives across the educational arena place a high emphasis on cross-cultural empathy – from 'pen-pal' exchanges and overseas 'sister school' relationships at the elementary school level to study abroad programmes and efforts on university campuses to strengthen international course content and multicultural dialogue. Increasingly schools and universities are invoking the term 'global citizen' as a desired goal for their graduates.

This leads into the concept of global citizenship as personal achievement, and the envisioned competencies of highly achieving global citizens vary from school to school. Some educational institutions dedicated to global citizenship focus primarily on conveying certain moral values, while other programmes focus mainly on teaching skills. Common areas of emphasis include encouraging students to become more culturally perceptive and respectful; increasing student knowledge of world history, literature and key political and economic issues; and helping students build technological, literacy and quantitative skills to compete effectively for professional advancement in the global economy. The extent to which the specific emphasis on 'global citizenship' in the educational

arena has made a difference might take us a generation to determine.

Mobility?

Finally, the concept of mobility offers yet another lens to understand how ideas of global citizenship are emerging today in practice. However, global citizenship as mobility often appears detached from the ethical moorings commonly associated with other strains of thinking about global citizenship. For many of the world's most wealthy and mobile individuals, global citizenship carries little, if any political or social content and instead amounts simply to the freedom to live abroad comfortably. Many businesses marketing services and products to the world's wealthiest individuals frame global citizenship in terms of moving money across borders, maintaining residences in multiple continents, or having sophisticated tastes in clothing and cosmetics. While many understandings of global citizenship today express growing recognition of collective responsibility for humanity and the planet, global citizenship as mobility often amounts to assertions of individual privilege.

Conclusion

Taken together, the concepts of awareness, responsibility, participation, cross-cultural empathy, personal achievement and mobility reveal to us multiple strains of thinking that now compete and co-exist under the umbrella of global citizenship. At the same time, contemporary understandings of global citizenship share two important common elements. First, the kinds of people now choosing to think and live as global citizens generally consider global citizenship as complementary to national citizenship. They resolutely believe good global citizenship can go hand-in-hand with vibrant national patriotism. Second, today's global citizens tend to be agnostic on the question of world government. They do not consider global citizenship as something to be conferred by any government authority. Rather, global citizenship is cultivated through education and experience and is contingent upon the thoughts and activities of individuals and their respective organisations.

Global citizenship, then, is now conceived as a state of mind, a way of life, a series of outlooks and practices, and not a statement of allegiance to government institutions of any kind. Rarely is global citizenship defined these days as an end state that would require extraordinary

developments such as worldwide political unification or the resolution of the world's most daunting problems. Instead, global citizenship now emerges in our world gradually and progressively in the lives and endeavors of everyday people. What we now need is vigorous public debate – especially in national political arenas, where the idea of global citizenship remains largely on the sidelines – about what global citizenship really means and exactly what sorts of policies should extend from the principles articulated within this discourse.

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