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ICCS 2009 framework revisited*

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Abstract

The main idea of this paper is to discuss the ICCS 2009 framework (Schulz et al. 2008) in order to explore possible changes for the ICCS 2016 framework. The most important problem to consider is how to deal with the fact that civic and citizenship education (hereafter CCE) is both a contested matter and a contestable matter. The paper proposes to establish a meta-consensus accepting 'contestedness' as an essential part of CCE. Contestedness defines CCE and therefore it is important to compare students and countries by comparing contestable aspects of citizenship rather than by measuring degrees of well-defined latent traits within a pre-established international consensus. The paper proposes so called *political differential scales* as a possible operationalization of the essential contestedness of CCE.

Introduction

ICCS as consensus about contested concepts

The ICCS 2009 framework has proven to be very successful in the way it arranges and organizes CCE, thereby making international consensus possible.

This paper discusses the feasibility of another perspective where CCE is regarded as contested as well as contestable. The point of departure is that CCE is a contested matter (Davies 2001, Arnot & Dillabough 2000, Davies, Gregory, & Riley 1999, Gordon, Holland & Lahelma 2000, Osler 2000, Pearce & Hallgarten (Eds) 2000, Sears & Hughes 2006, Topolski & Leuven 2008 – and many others). CCE is contested because it relates to the contested nature of politics and democracy. Especially there are many different and competing views on basic concepts like "citizen" and "society".

From contested concepts to "essential contestedness"

CCE is not only a contested matter but characterized by "*essentially* contested concepts"¹. The essential "*contestedness*"² of a matter is something inherent in the matter making it impossible to establish a single proper view of a matter to settle a dispute about it. Due to the contestable nature of the matter it is by definition impossible to claim that one specific interpretation of an essentially contested concept is "the best". For the perspective of this paper however the most important thing about essentially contested concepts is that as a starting point they involve widespread agreement on a concept ("freedom" for example) but not an agreement on the best interpretation or realization of the concept.

The main point for this paper is the fact that political issues are always (and always already) politically contestable. The political nature of political concepts means that they are strategic, political, and ideological because they are in opposition to other uses of the same concepts. In other words there is no place "inside" politics where political concepts or phenomena may be given a universal meaning because

¹The term "essentially contested concepts" is inspired by Gallie 1956.

² The term "contestedness" is inspired by Swanson 1985.

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qua political they will always be contestable. Also there is no place “outside” politics (external to any political or moral perspective) from where a concept can be judged the “best” in a neutral or scientific manner. The same logic applies to CCE.

When dealing with contestedness it is always (and always already) contested in which way the matter is contested. *Basically politics is to make political decisions but any political decision could always have been another decision.* Politics is an endless process of decisions that could have been other decisions (for equally good reasons). It is this un-decidedness *within the decisions* that constitutes the ‘essential contestedness’.³

A possible order within contested contestedness

The contested contestedness does not result in a need to redefine CCE as some kind of disorder but rather to discuss whether or not some new ways of ordering may become relevant within the view on CCE as an essentially contested matter. As indicated the essential contestedness opens the possibility for many interpretations of CCE but rather than to delve into these the basic question is whether or not some ideal types⁴ or other systematic features may be identifiable as a kind of ordering principle.

To measure contestedness

It is evident that the re-definition of CCE as contestedness involves a discussion about measurement issues. This paper is based on the experience that the “traditional” international scales (in CIVED and ICCS) tend to eliminate both the contested nature of political concepts and the contestedness of the matter. A reappearing problem is that it is difficult to interpret relatively low scale scores as anything other than ‘relatively bad results’. Even though this is misleading and a misinterpretation the one-dimensional scales invite the reader to this misunderstanding when data is viewed as (used for) measuring quantities of a given latent trait (which in most cases is implicitly or explicitly defined as desirable – by consensus). Therefore the idea is to develop alternative or supplementary scales where this kind of problem might be avoided within a perspective of contestedness.

Contestedness as a perspective on CCE

The ‘Crick report’⁵ lists a number of so called “essential elements to be reached by the end of compulsory schooling”. It does so by listing a number of key concepts in pairs. Interesting enough all the concepts in these pairs are considered positive but nevertheless they are (for no apparent reason) set up pairwise (op. cit.). This is relevant for this paper because these pairs may be read as implicit (contra intentional that is) *examples* of contestedness. The most important ones are (some the left-right positions have been changed for this paper, JB):

<i>co-operation</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>conflict</i>
<i>equality</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>diversity</i>
<i>the rule of law</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>human rights</i>
<i>order</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>freedom</i>
<i>community</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>individual</i>
<i>rights</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>responsibilities</i>

³ This resembles the definition of politics as a never-ending process and of citizenship as political relationships (Frazer 2007).

⁴ Weber 1988.

⁵ Crick 1998 p. 44 and p. 45.

All these concepts may be defined as desirable phenomena involving a widespread agreement (the reason why they are seen as essential goals for education). For our purpose however the point is that they point to an inherent contestedness which may be located within (or rather in between) each pair of concepts. As an example, you needn't be against diversity if you are for equality but being for equality there must be some limits to diversity. As another example you needn't be against order if you are for freedom, but being for freedom there must be some limits to order. Also most political ideologies give more or less emphasis to either side of these pairs of concepts. Within the contestedness perspective these concepts are seen as endlessly being decided upon. At the same time as one might prefer one side or the other it is *impossible* to choose one side only, because each concept is the implicit precondition for the other in the pair. Equity and diversity may be articulated as opposites but still precondition each other. Many other similar pairs of concepts may be constructed.

<i>civil</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>civic</i>
<i>private</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>public</i>
<i>difference</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>similarity</i>
<i>moral</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>law</i>
<i>inclusion</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>exclusion</i>
<i>culture</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>politics</i>

It is evident that these contested concepts involve widespread agreement but at the same time involve a political contestedness as to what the best realization of the non-contested concept(s) might be. You should defend your private point of view but also respect the point of view of others in public. You should act on personal motivations (difference) but still consider the needs of the community (similarity). You should observe the law but act morally. In other words pairs of concepts like these may form an analytical ordering of contestedness.⁶

Contestedness and ICCS content domains

In the ICCS framework there are four content domains: 1: Civic society and systems, 2: Civic principles 3: Civic participation and 4: Civic identities. How does the framework deal with this type of contested concepts and contestedness? In the following this will briefly be discussed.

Domain1: Civic society and systems

This domain has three "sub-domains": "Citizens", "state institutions" and "civil institutions". It seems quite evident that an analytical distinction between the citizen as related to the state versus the citizen as related to civil society might be highlighted as an area of contestedness. This distinction is important because many conflicts and controversial issues of being a citizen relate to this analytical distinction. The state is based on the rule of law and universal principles whereas civil society is based on particular interests and values. Also the relationship between *demos* and *kratos* (people and power) remains the basic essential contestedness that no specific version of democracy can eliminate in total (if it did it would be a totalitarian regime of some sort).

⁶ Each side of the pair of concepts may be seen as an ideal type (a unified analytical construct), Weber 1988.

This contestedness relates to what ICCS measures in the area of citizens, namely so called conventional and social movement related citizenship. These two aspects of citizens are quite closely related to the distinction between state and civil society (social movement related activities take place in civil society as an articulation of conflict, while conventional citizenship is closer related to state institutions). Therefore this is an area where the essential contestedness is visible: There is a widespread agreement that both these types of citizens are desirable but there is no single and universal definition of the good citizen. The two types of citizens may be viewed as complementary (as the framework does) or as in latent conflict with each other (as the perspective of contestedness would do). However the problem remains that these two types of citizens are measured by the relative degree of support only. This is a problem because there is no reason to believe that ‘the best citizen’ is the citizen that supports both types the most.

Domain 2: Civic principles

The framework states that this domain focuses on “shared ethical foundations of civic societies” (Schulz et al. 2008, p. 19). In other words ‘civic societies’ are defined by an *ethical* foundation claimed to be mutual for both the state and civil society. This foundation is defined by three concepts: “Freedom”, “diversity” and “social cohesion”. Two simple questions may point to the essential contestedness: 1: Is it true that “*civic principles*” are the same for the state and for civil society? 2: Is it true that *civic principles* are ethical? The first answer is a no. In many ways civil society and state may be in conflict with each other. The second answer is that in a democratic system the perspective of contestedness would certainly claim that the basic *principles* of the state are *political*. Whether or not these political principles are in accordance with moral values (within civil society for example) is a contestable matter. Moral values cannot define politics from outside politics.⁷ As the framework mentions: “there may be tensions within societies between social cohesion and diversity of views” (Schulz et al 2008, p. 19). This phrase is important because it seems to recognize that different values may be in conflict with each other. This implies that it is uncertain in what way the three ‘principles’ establish an ethical foundation when they are in potential conflict with each other despite a widespread agreement that each of them is important. In other words the interesting issue at stake is the relative *value of values* as something quite different from supporting all values as much as possible. When the degree of acceptance of each of these principles is measured quantitatively the contested contestedness (that there are many legitimate attitudes and that no attitude is the best) vanishes.

In this domain it would seem appropriate to distinguish between *political principles* and *moral values*. This distinction is also relevant because it is parallel to the distinction between two types of citizens in domain 1 and thereby associated with the potential conflict between civil society and state. The “good” citizen might be the one who is able to apply different values and principles in different settings, i.e. able to cope with contestedness.

Domain 3: Participation

The framework defines the domain “Civic participation” by three levels of participation (“decision-making”, “influencing” and “community participation”). Also in this domain it might be appropriate to split civic participation into civil participation in civil society versus civic participation related to state institutions.⁸

⁷ At least not within the perspective of contestedness.

⁸ A third subdomain (or a new domain) might be “The Media”.

Again this relates to the idea that rather than measuring participation quantitatively as relative degrees of participation it might be more interesting to look at the attitudes towards different kinds of participation in different spheres of society. "Participation" is not defined as contested in the framework. This is probably due to the fact that "participation" is viewed as something good by definition because (so called) passive citizens are regarded as bad citizens. Nevertheless participation may be re-defined as contestedness: No kind of participation or level of participation is essentially good. Representative democracy is based on indirect participation rather than direct participation so in many situations direct participation may be considered a problem. It might be also argued that even though a low level of participation might be viewed as a problem it is also possible for a high level of participation to be viewed as "too much". All citizens need to be passive to some degree to avoid chaos. The problem is: To which degree? In other words the most important thing seems to be that citizens are able to balance their level and way of participation in differing contexts. This also fits into the concept of contestedness because any political participation relates to a potential conflict because the political action in itself is to articulate something as a conflict: Any participation is for something and against something else.

Domain 4: Civic identities

The domain "Civic Identities" is defined as "the individual's civic roles and perceptions of these roles" (Schulz et al., p. 21) with the additional remark, that the individual may have "multiple articulated identities" (op. cit.). Identity is both defined as a kind of personal identity and as a kind of membership of a community (communities). The framework states that these roles (and values) may be "in harmony or in conflict" (op. cit.). In other words there is a potential conflict of interests within the individual citizen. This is important as it points in the direction of the essential contestedness as an identity issue. An example may be given from the concepts stated as important in the framework. One such concept is "nationalism" and another is "multiplicity". Potentially "nationalism" could be in deep conflict with "multiplicity" however.

National identity, collective identities, supra-national identities and individual identities are all important identities that may coexist either in harmony or conflict. Also they are contested phenomena. It is quite common to define "national identity" as something important and positive, but national identity may also be seen as a delicate balance between "chauvinism" (too much) and "patriotism" (an appropriate level of positive identification). In any case the matter of identity is highly relevant for the perspective of contestedness because the relationship between assigned and/or desired identities (in different parts of society) more or less defines the citizen as someone within a conflict of interests. Especially the relationship between the individual (personal) identity and various civic community identities is an issue of much sociological debate. Individualization is often seen as a potential problem for maintaining social cohesion, tradition and mutual values but also viewed in an opposite manner⁹. Also different identities may support each other in new ways as it is known from "glocalization" (the mixing of global and local identities, globalization and localization). In other words the issue of identity is highly relevant for the perspective of contestedness because relationships between different identities are essentially contested and contestable matters.

⁹ Bauman (2000) and (versus) Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

Contestedness and questionnaire technique

The general method in the ICCS questionnaires is to use Likert scales with forced choices (at least when attitudes, values and intended behaviors are being measured). These Likert scales do not have any neutral midpoint or a “don’t know”, but in most cases two levels of acceptance (agreement) and two levels of non-acceptance (disagreement) only. Even though some students might have chosen a neutral answer or not to answer at all, if they were given the opportunity to do so, this method of forced choice is relevant both within the ICCS strategy and within the perspective of contestedness. This is due to the fact that making political choices is in fact about making a kind of forced choices. Also this method is quite consistent with the perspective of contestedness where choices are seen as being made in contrast to other equally possible choices.

Even though the respondents must make a choice (declare themselves for or against some attitude or issue) this information is primarily used in the construction of latent variables – measured on international scales as the relative degrees of acceptance of these latent traits (attitudes, principles or values). Even though these scales function very well as a way of reducing the vast amount of data it seems that the basic information vanishes. The problem is that from a qualitative point of view one might argue that a person being in favor of attitude A in a political sense is quite different from a person being against A. This information vanishes in the scale construction because even respondents who in general are negative towards a given phenomenon are defined as respondents who are in favor of the phenomenon (albeit only to a relatively small degree). In other words the latent scale hides the conflict that the manifest scale highlights. Naturally one might argue back and forth of the relevance of these scales but in the perspective of contestedness the main problem is not so much whether or not a latent trait is measured in a valid manner or not but rather that the “negative answers” are not taken serious enough when they only count as “low” scores compared to “high” scores. The contestedness of the matter implies that in most cases there is no way to define whether a high score is better than a low score or not. Therefore the problem remains that low scoring students are not necessarily ‘bad’ citizens and high scoring students not necessarily ‘good’ citizens. Therefore it would be better to apply the logic from the perspective of contestedness in a measurement of attitudinal choices between attitude A and attitude B, rather than measuring the level of positive attitudes towards attitude A only.

Semantic differential scales

A main question is whether or not alternative scale types are available (or might be developed). One possibility might be to use scales on the lines of the semantic differential scale (SDS). The SDS was created by psychologist Charles E. Osgood in the 1950s (Osgood et al. 1957). It is designed to identify and measure an individual's perceived meaning of (for example) a concept, an object, or an individual. Of special possible interest for ICCS is that such scales have been used for measuring social roles, attitude formation, attitudes towards organizations and minorities, and political concepts. The SDS scale is set up using polar adjectives (related to the matter in question) at each end of a scale with a number of positions in the space between the poles. It might be mentioned that the so called EPA dimensions (Heise 1970) in SDS scales, namely Evaluation (good-bad), potency (powerful-powerless), and activity (fast-slow) do have parallels within citizenship (as in good –bad citizens, powerful-powerless citizens, active-passive citizens). However the psychological perspective is not the main issue within an ICCS context and the basic limitation of this method is that the two poles are defined as strictly opposites, one being positive and the other negative.

Political differential scales

Nevertheless the basic idea of SDS as scales (that the answer is given as a relative position between two choices) might apply to the perspective of contestedness; especially if the two poles were both defined positively with a virtual political attitudinal space in between them. Such a scale might be defined as a *political differential scale* (PDS).

The advantage of such a scale is that the “negative” pole from the forced Likert scale or the SDS scale could be transformed into a second positive pole. The point being that in a conflict, a choice, a decision, or a political solution of a contested matter the task always is to decide between competing ideologies, values, or principles. The political choice is not per se between “good or “bad” or “right” and wrong” or “weak and strong” (as in SDS scales) but a choice between different principles. It is a matter of priority one might say. While the traditional ICCS scales measure intensity (the relative degree of a latent trait) a PDA measures ways of political thinking. What do students regard as the most important thing when judging political principles or other values: Freedom for the individual or social coherence and security? The rights or the obligations of citizens? Diversity and multitude or equity and homogeneity? And so forth.

Conclusion

The knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, participative behaviors and identities of citizens may all be regarded as interwoven elements of the ability of citizens (students) to exert discernment or judgment. An example from ICCS 2009 is the way students from all over the world pass judgment to different principles, – almost all showing very positive attitudes toward democratic values. As such an important result but the interpretation of the result would be more interesting if the measure of value beliefs as quantities was supplemented by the perspective of contestedness; the measure of choices between competing points of view on contestable matters and the ever present weighing of the pros and cons of different values. The implementation of PDS might highlight differences in attitudes at various levels (student, class, school, country) that traditional scales tend to conceal, thereby adding to a more complex understanding of political and democratic values among youth.

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