

# Global citizenship – towards a definition

Government



Global Citizenship – Towards a Definition Taso G. Lagos Copyright protected under Taso G. Lagos. Permission to cite should be directed to the author.

Abstract: Global protest activity is on the rise. Demonstrations in Seattle in 1999, Genoa in 2001 and in dozens of other sites brought activists together from around the world and localized global issues in unprecedented ways. These and other activities suggest the possibility of an emerging global citizenry. Individuals from a wide variety of nations, both in the North and South, move across boundaries for different activities and reasons.

This transnational activity is facilitated by the growing ease of travel and by communication fostered by the Internet and telephony. While it is hard to quantify these numbers, or to give global citizens a legally defined political status, these qualifications do not obviate the existence and influence of transnational activists seeking new institutional forms in an interdependent world. We examine global citizens as active political, social, environmental or economic agents in an interdependent world in which new institutional forms beyond nations are beginning to emerge.

Introduction: By itself, citizenship has certain legal and democratic overtones. Conceptually, it is wrapped up in rights and obligations, and in owing allegiance to a sovereign state whose power is retained by the citizenry but with rights that are shared by all members of that state. We distinguish “citizen” from “national” or “subject,” the latter two implying protection of a state. Citizenship, as it has come down to us via the ancient Greeks and Romans, via the Enlightenment, and the American and French Revolutions, is tied into the emergence of members of a polity with specified privileges and duties.

To speak of a “ citizen” is thus to speak of individuals with distinct relationships to the state, along with the social status and power these relationships imply. The lift the citizen concept into the global sphere presents difficulties, not least of which is that global citizens are not legal members in good standing with a sovereign state. More importantly, there are no recognizable privileges and duties associated with the concept that would envelop global citizenship with the status and power (in an ideal world) currently associated with national citizenship.

Since modern nation-states are the repositories and main expression of citizenship, discussion of global citizenship necessarily dictates an existence outside the body politic as we know it. If we follow Preston’s (1997) model of citizenship (“ who belongs to the polity, how the members of the polity in general are regarded and how they exercise power”), then global citizenship cannot be expressed in any legal sense. It is, however, expressed in other ways that may have a significant and profound impact on the development of civic engagement and citizen-state relations.

Three examples are worth mentioning. Since January 1, 2000, negotiations amongst WTO member states regarding the movement of professionals to and from member countries has taken place, under the General Agreement on Trade in Services, Article XIX. While this does not signal de facto recognition of trans-national citizens, it may indicate halting steps toward it. This is all the more significant given that around the globe there is greater and easier movement of goods than human beings.

The European Community has taken halting steps to change this: it allows the free movement of its peoples to live, work, pay taxes and, significantly,

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to vote in other member states. Habermas (1994) notes this as a utilitarian model that may have greater implications than merely for Europeans; it is possible the model may be expanded in other regions of the world, or to the entire world itself. The ability of a Spaniard to pick up and move to Germany and be a “ citizen” there indicates that notions of ties a country of origin may weaken.

The Spaniard may be quite happy living in Germany and not wish to go back to Spain. Is she still a Spaniard, a German, or now a global citizen? Finally, there is the rising tide of individuals with more than one passport. Where once the U. S. State Department frowned on its citizens carrying more than one passport, the reality is that today that it is turning a blind eye. (In war, this may change). Many immigrants to the U. S. in the 1990s, a decade that saw the largest influx of newcomers to the state, came to work but still retained their old passports.

While many immigrants permanently stay in the U. S. , many others either go back to the old country, or travel back and forth. If not global citizens, what label do we give them? T. H. Marshall (1949), in his classic study on citizenship, noted that citizenship as it arose in Western liberal democracies has both positive and negative connotations. In the positive sense, citizenship is an expression of activism on the part of citizens; in its negative quality, it is the freedom from bureaucratic control and intervention.

If his theory is true, where does global citizenship fit into it? Very nicely it would seem. A visible expression of global citizenship is the many global activists who debuted spectacularly at the Battle in Seattle. These protestors continue to carry on in other venues, such as at meetings for the World Bank

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and the IMF, and most recently at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. Other activists fight for environmental protection, human rights to the impoverished and the unrepresented, and for restrictions on the use of nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Freedom from bureaucratic intervention seems to be a hallmark of global citizenship; the lack of a world body to sanction and protect these citizens also means to a certain degree freedom from bureaucratic control. To return to our Spaniard, how much control does Spain exercise over her when she lives in Germany? Towards a Definition: Since global citizens are not recognized legally, their existence may be best represented as “associatively.” 1. Global citizenship is less defined by legal sanction than by “associational” status that is different from national citizenship.

Since there is no global bureaucracy to give sanction and protect global citizens, and despite intriguing models suggested by the EU, global citizenship remains the purview of individuals to live, work and play within trans-national norms and status that defy national boundaries and sovereignty. Associational status in this realm does double duty. It serves to explain a unique characteristic of global citizenship while it also expresses that particular lighthouse of post-modernity known as “lifestyle politics.” (Giddens, 1991, Bennett, 2000, et al) Steenbergen (1994) so far comes closest to explaining this relationship between global citizenry and lifestyle politics as more “sociological” in composition. Rather than a technical definition of a citizen “on his or her relationship to the state (p. 2), Steenbergen suggests that the global citizen represents a more wholistic version: you choose where you work, live or play, and therefore are not tied

down to your land of birth. The greater number of choices offered by modern life (from consumer products to politics) lies at the root of lifestyle politics. (Franck, 1999) As Falk (1994) put it, in global citizenship there is the rudimentary institutional construction of arenas and allegiance -- what many persons are really identifying with-- as no longer bounded by or centred upon the formal relationship that an individual has to his or her own territorial society as embodied in the form of a state. Traditional citizenship is being challenged and remoulded by the important activism associated with this trans-national political and social evolution. 1994: 138) Traditional ties between citizen and the state are withering, and are replaced by more fragmented loyalties that explain lifestyle politics. Notions of ties between citizen and state that arose in the aftermath of the American and French Revolution, and the creation of the modern state after the 18th century no longer hold sway. It is not by coincidence, for example, that the first to receive the enfranchisement were adult males who also happened to serve in American and French armies. (Kaspersen, 1998) The citizen army today is replaced by the professional army, and a central cog in the bonds between state and citizen removed.

Voting turnout decreases, and the public has low regard for politicians. With such loose ties between citizen and state, does the emergence of global citizenship seem farfetched? Many of newly emerging global citizens are actively engaged in global efforts – whether in business ventures, environmentalism, concern for nuclear weapons, health or immigration problems. Rather than citizenship, being the result of rights and obligations granted by a central authority, the lack of such

authority gives primacy to the global citizens themselves: not a top-down but a down-up scenario. . While various types of global citizens exist, a common thread to their emergence is their base in grassroots activism. We may identify different types of global citizens, yet many of these categories are best summarized by their emergence despite a lack of any global governing body. It is as if they have spontaneously erupted of their own volition. Falk (1994) identified five categories of global citizens which he named as, • • • •

- global reformers
- elite global business people
- global environmental managers
- politically conscious regionalists
- trans-national activists

With the exception of global business people, the other categories have grassroots activism at their core. i If the Battle in Seattle is an applicable demonstration, these activists are responsible for their own activism rather than “ granted” by an institution. This earmarks global citizenship as qualitatively different from the national variety, where rights and obligations came (even when fought and protested for) at the behest and generosity of the state. With global citizenship, individuals exercise communicational and organizational tools such as the Internet to make themselves global citizens.

No government sanctioned this development. None, it seems, could. Jacobson (1996) noted this fracture of the state as dispenser of citizen rights and obligations, although he sees the decline of overall citizenship as a result. Keck and Sikkink (1998) on the other hand, regard such global activism as a possible new engine of civic engagement. These global activists, or “ cosmopolitan community of individuals” (p. 213) as they call them, transcend national borders and skillfully use pressure tactics against both government and private corporations that make them viable actors on

the merging global public sphere. A striking example of this pressure is the well-publicized anti-sweatshop campaign against Nike. Literally dozens of websites are devoted to exposing Nike's labor practices in manufacturing shoes in overseas factories. In 1996, with the aid of Global Exchange, a humanitarian organization that later helped to organize the Battle in Seattle, Nike's labor practices became the subject of increasing mainstream media attention. In the process, Nike was linked to sweatshop labor, a label it has tried to shed ever since.

Is the Internet central in the development of these emerging global activists? The Internet and other technologies such as the cell phone play an instrumental role in the development of global activists, as do easy and cheap air travel and the wide use and acceptance of credit cards. But there are other forces at work: decline in civic engagement, rise of lifestyle politics, homogenization of products, conglomeration in media systems and communicational tools that let us know more about each other than ever before.

Add to the mix the rising concern for universal human rights and for trans-global problems such as environmental degradation and global warming, the result is a landscape that tends to be more global than national. This is not the first time in the history of our civilization that society has been "internationalized," but never has it been easier for average citizen to express herself in this globalized fashion – by the clothes she wears, soda she drinks, music she listens to (e. g. "world music") and vacation land she visits.

It is increasingly obvious that our identities, as Lie and Servaes (2000) and Scammell (2001) suggest, are tied to our roles as citizens. Scammell's "<https://assignbuster.com/global-citizenship-towards-a-definition/>



citizen-consumers” vote with their purchases and are engaged in their communities to the extent they have the freedom to shop. Engagement, in this modern sense, is as audience members at a play clapping at the high points of drama. Can we say this is true of global citizenship? The evidence is scanty to make such judgment; if global activists are replaced by global citizens-consumers the sea change will be complete. 3. Global citizens may redefine ties between civic engagement and geography.

The town hall meetings of New England and other regions of the U. S. seem increasingly supplanted by “ electronic spheres” not limited by space and time. This heralds a potentially startling new mechanism in participatory democracy. If we return to the Spaniard living in Germany, what can we say about the geography of community? An output of modernity is greater and greater choice placed upon the individual; the social networks and systems that suited hundreds if not thousands of generations are breaking down in favor of personal choice and individual responsibility.

No longer do we entirely rely on the social bulwarks of the past: the family, the community, the nation. Life is continually being “ personalized. ” Can the Spaniard still be called one while living in Germany? Absentee ballots opened up the way for expatriates to vote while living in another country. The Internet may carry this several steps further. Voting is not limited by time or space: you can be anywhere in the world and still make voting decisions back home. Most of our nation’s history has been bound up in equating geography with sovereignty. It did matter where you lived, worked, played.

Since travel was expensive and cumbersome, our lives were tied to geography. No longer can we entirely make this claim. Thompson (1996), <https://assignbuster.com/global-citizenship-towards-a-definition/>

writing in the Stanford Law Review, suggests that we can do away with residency and voting in local elections. Frug (1996) even suggests that alienation in the way we regard our geography already creates a disconnect between it and sovereignty. If we are not entirely “home” at home, do boundaries make any difference anymore? This is not just an academic question, but one rife with rich and disheartening social and political possibilities. Global citizens float within, outside and through these boundaries.

The implications seem significant. Many elements seem to spawn global citizenship, but one is noteworthy in this discussion: the continuous tension that globalization has unleashed between various forces local, national and global. An interesting paradox of globalization is while the world is being internationalized at the same time it's also being localized. The world shrinks as the local community (village, town, city) takes on greater and greater importance. Mosco (1999) noted this feature and saw the growing importance of “technopoles,” or high-technologized city-states that hark back to classical Greece.

If this trend is true, and I believe it is, then it seems global citizens are the glue that may hold these separate entities together. Put another way, global citizens are people that can travel within these various layers or boundaries and somehow still make sense of the world. 4. Any rights and obligations accorded to the global citizen come from the citizens themselves, growing public favor for “universal rights,” the rise of people migrating around the world, and an increasing tendency to standardize citizenship.

Difference may exist on the cultural level, but in bureaucracies, increasing favor is placed on uniformity. Efficiency and utilitarianism lie at the core of capitalism; naturally a world that lives under its aegis replicates these tendencies. Postal agreements, civil air travel and other inter-governmental agreements are but one small example of standardization that is increasingly moving into the arena of citizenship. The concern is raised that global citizenship may be closer to a "consumer" model than a legal one. The lack of a world body puts the initiative upon global citizens themselves to create rights and obligations. Rights and obligations as they arose at the formation of nation-states (e. g. the right to vote and obligation to serve in time of war) are at the verge of being expanded. So new concepts that accord certain "human rights" which arose in the 20th century are increasingly being universalized across nations and governments. This is the result of many factors, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948, the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust and growing sentiments towards legitimizing marginalized peoples (e. . pre-industrialized peoples found in the jungles of Brazil and Borneo). Couple this with growing awareness of our species' impact on the environment, and there is the rising feeling that citizen rights may extend to include the right to dignity and self-determination. If national citizenship does not foster these new rights, then global citizenship seems more accessible to them. One cannot overestimate the importance of the rise of human rights discourse within the radar of public opinion. What are the rights and obligations of human beings trapped in conflicts?

Or, incarcerated as part of “ ethnic cleansing? ” Equally striking, are the pre-industrialized tribes newly discovered by scientists living in the depths of dense jungle? Leary (1999), Heater (1999) and Babcock (1994) tend to equate these rights with the rise of global citizenship as normative associations, indicating a national citizenship model that is more closed and a global citizenship one that is more flexible and inclusive. If true, this places a strain in the relationship between national and global citizenship.

Boli (1998) tends to see this strain as mutually beneficial, whereas Leary (1999) and McNeely (1998) regard the rupture between the two systems as merely evolutionary rather than combative. Like much of social change, changing scopes of modern citizenship tend to be played out in both large and minute spheres. Habermas (1994) tends to place global citizenship in a larger, social context, arguing that nation-states can be central engines of citizenship but culture can also be a powerful spurt.

He regards the formation of the “ European citizen ” as a kind of natural epiphany of governmental conglomeration within the forces of globalization, only remotely alluding to the corporate conglomeration that has been both the recipient and cause of worldwide economic expansion. Others, including Iyer (2000) see globalization and global citizens as direct descendents of global standardization, which he notes, for instance, in the growing homogeneity of airports. Standardization and modernity have worked together for the past few centuries.

Ellul (1964), Mumford (1963) and other scholars attack this as a form of oppression, in the same vein that Barber (1996) saw the proliferation of carbon-copy fast-food chains around the globe. Why not a set of basic citizen

rights followed the world over? 5. Global citizenship may be the indirect result of Pax Americana. The 20th century, as well as the 21st, may be a time dominated by the United States. America's domination of the WTO, IMF, World Bank and other global institutions creates feelings of imperialism among lesser nations.

Cross national cooperation to counter American dominance may result in more global citizens. If economic, environmental, political and social factors push towards more global citizenry, we must also within this camp consider the ramifications of the postcold warworld, or realpolitik. Modifying Marshall's metaphor, we may ask if global citizenship is not a response to the changing factors and response against American domination? In the corporate world, conglomeration leads to larger and larger companies who merge to effectively work against other mega corporations. The evolution of the " United

States of Europe" (in theory if not in practice) is in a similar vein; a reaction to the dominating power of the U. S. Other regional alliances may yet emerge. Within such trans-national ties may emerge greater acceptance of one another's citizens, emulating the European model which Habermas, Bellamy (2000), and others so favor. These alliances may provide the bureaucratic backbone to make global citizenry about more than just lifestyles or personal politics. This development would also change the definition of national citizenry; global citizens may come to favor their status over those who have no such designation.

Worse, there may emerge two tracks of citizenship: national and global, with the latter being more prestigious. Along with greater separation between rich

and poor, educated and not, there would also be those relegated to living out their entire lives in one land, compared to those who freely travel to many. The darker aspects of this are not hard to miss. Clarke's (1996) contention that citizenship tends to be more exclusive than inclusive would be borne out. Rather than McNeely's (1998) flexible citizenship, or Preston's (1997) multipleloyalty model, we get two separate tracks of citizenship that respond to prestige, wealth and power.

Global citizens may be so favored that nations fight to attract them to their land, similar to today's fight for corporate sites. Conclusion: To concretize what appears an amorphous concept – global citizenship – presents dangers, not least of which is the tendency towards speculation. Spending some time at an airport, especially one of the many airline frequent flyer lounges, reveals that global citizens exist and are a growing number. Within my own Greek immigrant community in Seattle, for example, there are several Greeks who split the year living between Greece and the U.

S. I am hard pressed to call them either Greeks or Americans, since they do not fit neatly into either category (not that most ever do). Higher living standards than ever before in civilization's history allow these dualities to exist. Increasingly, we put them into the camp of global citizenship. Capitalism, and the consumeristic child it has spawned, is particularly good at offering choices, and global citizenship may simply be another facet of this tendency, or what Bennett (unpublished, 2001) and other allude to as lifestyle politics.

Any discussion on global citizenship thus must take into account the changing political climate of a globalized world. Scholars have already noted <https://assignbuster.com/global-citizenship-towards-a-definition/>

the emerging power struggle between corporations and global activists who increasingly see the nexus of de facto governance taking place more and more within the corporate world (and as mediated by communication technologies like the Internet) and not in the halls of representative government. Hence, the tendency on the part of activists to promote rallies and events like the protests at WTO, as more effective means of citizen participation and democratic accountability.

The rise of security concerns as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11 have curiously both grown the importance of national states as well fostered more internationalism. U. S. President George W. Bush who during his election had difficulty remembering the names of heads of states has suddenly transformed into an internationalist with deep concerns for the affairs of other states. While this may be a temporary event with political overtones, the events of 9/11 suggest that the world has become more international than ever before.

Whether global citizenship will follow in its wake is problematical. It is simply too early to tell. The role that global citizenship plays in this changing political landscape is a murky one. Yet the fact that there is a growing body of global citizens and their influence is increasingly felt on the world's political stage indicates the need to observe and study these individuals in earnest. The attempt to begin developing a definition of global citizenship is a small step towards understanding their presence and influence better. i

A case can be made to add academics, sports and artists in categories, but I shy away from this since their overall numbers tend to be small, if not limited. The world it seems can only support so many traveling artists and  
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sport stars, and so a ceiling may be placed on their populations. Also, some concern is raised here regarding other globalists, such as those working for the UN, for example, but again, I tend to shy away from their categorization since their numbers can never expand beyond a limited population (given the resources of the organization, etc. . But with Falk's categories, in theory, their numbers are limitless and therefore more tenable to categorize.

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