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Recent transformations in modern societies place on individuals a new set of responsibilities for the sustenance of democratic regimes that are associated with the exercise of an active citizenship characterized by high levels of political participation. Citizens' participation, particularly, in the deliberative process in formal political structures and in civil society, has been associated with the sustentation of democracy in modern societies (Putnam, 1995; 1996; Benahbib, 1999; Sullivan & Transue, 1999). It is through the participation in formal political structures, either by representative or by direct participation, that citizens support and take part in the process of democratic decision-making. Thus, political participation implies access to resources and the mobilization of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills. From an individual perspective, the development of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills, is influenced by the contexts in which the individual lives, as is stated by the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). The context in which political action may occur determines a set of resources and stimulations, therefore individual action results from the interaction of several internal and external variables and elapses from the psychological development of the individual (Sprinthall & Collins, 1994; Bandura, 1997; Menezes, 1999).

Citizenship implies the adhesion to norms and values, being particularly relevant the acceptance and identification with the democratic system as a form of socio-political regulation. Among these norms and values, Sullivan and Transue (1999), in a revision of literature on the psychological underpinnings of democracy, demonstrated the importance of attitudes of tolerance and of dispositions for civic participation and that these depend on contextual and historical variables as well as on the individual past experiences of participation. For example, tolerance is related to lived social experience (e.g., news in the media) that generates a threat perception of certain social groups (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). In what regards disposition for civic engagement, Putnam (1993, 1995, 1996) has advocated that participation generates participation, that is to say that the development of political participation is related to previous participation experiences, particularly in organizations within the civil society. These organizations have deliberative dynamics, similar to the ones of formal political structures, that allows individuals to exercise and develop competencies of active participation. Additionally, participation in these organizations enables the individual to access resources, through the establishment of informal nets of information and influence (Putnam, 1993). Therefore, active

participation in the formal political domain (i.e., State) and informal (i.e., civil society) is extremely determined by the diverse social contexts in which the individual lives and the experiences they provide.

Some authors (Putnam, 1996; Inglehart, 2000) have evidenced the decline in levels of participation in civil society. There is evidence in Portugal that the availability for participation in formal organizations of associativism as well as trust in political institutions within youth is diminishing (Teixeira, 2001; Pais & Cabral, 1998). Teixeira (2001), not only find decreased rates of active participation in associations, but also a lack of trust in students associations within educational institutions (66% of the students declare to have little or no confidence): from those involved in a list for the students council, 53.6% entered for exogenous reasons (invitation, influenced by a group of friends, etc.), with only a minority (8,9%) assuming an active participation. The majority seems not to trust formal organizations, privileging the informal ones, and the identification with the traditional instances of political participation (e.g., political parties) seems to be diminishing (Pais & Cabral, 1998).

The verified decrease in levels of political participation, particularly among young people, raised the need for research in the political participation domain. The possibility to, as an individual, take part in political decisions is associated, not only with the sustaining of democracy, but also with the gain and exercise of higher control on one's own life (Putnam, 1995; 1996; Benahbib, 1999; Sullivan & Transue, 1999). The current level of disinterest and apathy in political processes, in most democratic countries has also raised the question of the role of social institutions in the promotion of the so-called active citizenship (Torney-Purta, Schwiller & Amadeo, 1999). It is important to understand what is the responsibility that social institutions have had in the decline of the participation levels (Putnam, 1996), and also to know the dynamics that are associated with the development of an active citizenship and what role do social institutions play in this process (Yates & Youniss, 1996).

Social institutions and citizenship

The relation between social institutions and citizenship is evident through the norms, values and attitudes that they promote and reproduce. As a nation-state, social institutions define a set of norms that can generate, from a citizenship point of view, exclusion or inclusion processes. Social institutions stipulate a set of norms that regulate action and assume a citizenship ideal. These norms regulate individual and collective action in the institution, but also they emit a representation of citizenship (e.g., values, attitudes). Thus, the intentional transmission of norms and access to information concerning them are an explicit aspect of citizenship promotion by social institutions. In the context of a higher education institution, for example, the possibility for

students, employees and professors to choose representatives for the decision-making bodies constitutes, from the practical point of view, a way to involve and to make responsible all the members of the community.

The role of social institutions, particularly educational institutions, is therefore one of enormous responsibility in the social reproduction of norms, values and attitudes, and also in the replication of inclusion or exclusion processes. This responsibility is not limited to the promotion of knowledge and understanding about citizenship processes, but also includes the provision of opportunities to exercise rights and duties, i.e. the qualification of citizens for action, including the development of motivation and of personal and social competencies (Torney-Purta, 1999). Qualifying individuals for the exercise of citizenship implies going beyond knowledge about the law and emphasizing active participation in the continuous process of re-signification and reconstruction of citizenship as a social practice (Gentili, 2000). Consequently, this process cannot be limited to direct instruction, to "a mechanism of diffusion, socialization and recognition of the rights that define the field of the citizenship" (Gentili, 2000), but must take into account actual current opportunities for getting involved in the institutional life, solving real problems, expressing one's point of view, ... which are highly related to the psychosocial quality of human interactions with peers and other significant members of the institution.

Citizenship and higher education

The role of higher education institutions in this process is of particular relevance. Students face a complex world where they have to adapt themselves to circumstances that are in constant change (Loeb, 1994; Tierney, 1993). It is expected from citizens of modern democratic societies to be informed about the normativity that rules them and to be, simultaneously, aware of the socio-political changes that occur in order to be able to participate in the political sphere. Today, more than ever, the understanding of the global order and the associated socio-political and economical processes is crucial to comprehend changes at the local level (Albrow, 1998). This complexity is not restricted to the domain of employability (vd. Declaration of Bologna, 1998), it places new and diverse requirements in the field of citizenship. The challenges that modern societies place on citizens emphasize the importance of considering citizenship education at higher education level (Ichilov, 1998). In Portugal, experiences of intentional citizenship education have only been implemented at basic and secondary education (Roldão, 1999). 175

Several studies on higher education demonstrate the relevance of experiences that take place in and out of the classroom for individual development to occur (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1999). The identified effect of experiences in the classroom, particularly, the ones that make possible the exercise of significant roles and promote

opportunities for reflection and debate, brought about specific programs of learning and promotion of human development in higher education (Santagatti, 2001; Yates, Youniss, & McLellan, 1997).

The mere access of students to higher levels of education has revealed low effect in personal development of dimensions associated to an active citizenship. Effects are, essentially, in terms of lower levels of intolerance and other undesirable attitudes (i.e. social prejudice) and values of non-repression and non-discrimination (Emler & Frazer, 1999). Experiences of citizenship education that have only taken in account curricular programs based on the transmission of norms, values and knowledge about the democratic political system, have revealed poor results (Roldão, 1999; Emler & Frazer, 1999; Menezes, 1999). However, the study of educational practices in terms of the classroom climate has demonstrated promising results with implications for the development of citizenship education programs.

Research in basic and secondary education reveals an association between an open discussion classroom climate and some dimensions of political development (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald & Schultz, 2001; Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehman, Husfeld & Nikolova, 2002). Hahn (1999), in a cross-national study, reveals the impact of classroom climate on political interest and trust and perceptions of political self-efficacy. The analysis of classroom climate showed that the opportunity to discuss citizenship themes resulted in higher levels of trust in institutions and higher levels of political self-efficacy. Torney-Purta et al. (2001) in an international study of civic education with secondary school students found similar results: students' perceptions of teacher support and participation in the classroom predict students' knowledge and support for democratic values.

In fact, research on classroom climate has long evidenced the association between students' perceptions and learning results in the affective and cognitive domain (e.g. Fraser, 1993, 1994, 1998; Fraser & Walberg, 1991; Graham & Gisi, 2000; Menezes, 1999). In the specific case of higher education, research suggests that students' satisfaction with classroom climate has a positive impact in the evaluation of the institution (Graham & Gisi, 2000) and that the quality of the relation with professors is very relevant for students (Myers, 1995; Quay & Quaglia, 2004; Romine, 2001; Wierstra, Kanselaar, Van der Linden & Lodewijks, 1999; Wierstra, Kanselaar, Van der Linden, Lodewijks & Vermunt, 2003). The opportunity for involvement in the classroom and autonomy are also much valued by European students (Wierstra, Kanselaar, Van der Linden & Lodewijks, 1999; Wierstra, Kanselaar, Van der Linden, Lodewijks & Vermunt, 2003). Additionally, perceptions of classroom climate constitute an important predictor of academic achievement and satisfaction and also have a significant impact on students' learning strategies and competencies (Lizzio, Wilson & Simons, 2002).

Furthermore, the importance of higher education institutions in preparing students for life has also led various authors to advocate the provision of significant out-of-class experiences for students' personal and social development (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2001; Ehrlich, 2000). In order to attend to these needs some higher education institutions have introduced community service into their educational programs (Ehrlich, 2000). With community service programs it is expected that students not only develop a higher sense of civic responsibility, but also that they can exercise and develop competencies for an active participation. Yates and Youniss (1996) made a revision of 44 studies on students' participation in community service programs from 1952 to 1994, presenting strong evidence that this is a significant predictor of involvement in civic activities and politics in adulthood. The impact of community service programs is also evident in terms of higher self-esteem, personal confidence, sense of efficacy and of moral reasoning. Participants in community service activities also present a pro-social orientation, in terms of attitudes and behaviours, with a higher sense of responsibility and understanding of political processes.

These positive results made some authors advocate the implementation of community service programs in higher education institutions given their responsibility in preparing and qualifying students for citizenship (Santagati, 2001; Yates, Youniss, & McLellan, 1997). However, research casts some doubts on the existence of a direct relationship of community service to political action. Walker (2000) reviews the results of some studies on community service programs and concludes that despite the impacts being positive with regard to the pro-social orientation and higher understanding of the political system, they seem to have significant imperfections in what concerns the development of the capacity to act in political terms, in order to generate social change. Angelique, Reischl and Davidson II's (2002) findings suggest the same idea: students involved in a community service program reveal, at the end of the experience, a higher level of understanding of the political system, along with a higher sense of and orientation to social problems; however, their levels of political self-efficacy are lower than the control group. These results suggest the importance of not only analysing participation in a citizenship education program, but also of considering the quality of the experiences provided during intervention.

On the whole, research on higher education has documented the positive impact of in- (e.g., classroom climate) and out-of-class (e.g., community service programs) in students' civic 177 development including the promotion of attitudes, perceptions and behaviours relevant for active citizenship. However, results show that this positive impact does not necessarily imply similar changes in engagement in the political sphere, and therefore it is of major significance to consider in detail the quality of these in- and out-of-class experiences in order to understand possible mediating processes which can explain these results.

A study on the effects of classroom climate in higher education

The purpose of this study was to analyse the effect of higher education students' experiences in the classroom on political participation, attitudes and perceptions. If citizenship education cannot be limited to the transmission of knowledge but implies the development of competencies and dispositions for action, it is important to understand the relationship between students' perceptions of higher education contexts (classroom climate) and dimensions of personal development in the domain of political participation.

Sample

The study involved 296 higher education students, both from university (53,4%) and polytechnic (46,6%) subsystems, in the following subject areas: human and social sciences, engineering, teacher education and health. 196 students (66,2%) were females and 100 (33,8%) males. The mean age was 26 years ($sd=3,9$), ranging from 21 to 46. The socio-cultural level was analysed by an index of family literacy, the number of books at home, which proved to be a good predictor of academic achievement and civic knowledge (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Questionnaire

An adaptation of the College and University Classroom Environment Inventory (CUCEI, Fraser, 1994) with a 7 point Likert type scale was used to evaluate students' perceptions of various dimensions of classroom climate: teacher support, student participation, affiliation, satisfaction, organization, innovation and autonomy. We also included six items from the Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES, Fraser, 1991b) regarding perceptions of knowledge diversity in the classroom. For political self-efficacy and dispositions for future political activities we used items adapted from Ribeiro (2001). Political self-efficacy was related to both individual and collective actions and dispositions to future political activity included: passive political activities (e.g. voting), and civic political activities (e.g. advocating for others). Trust in social and political institutions included a list of organizations covering media, education, political and judicial institutions. Table 3 shows the confirmatory factorial analyses indexes for the scales used.

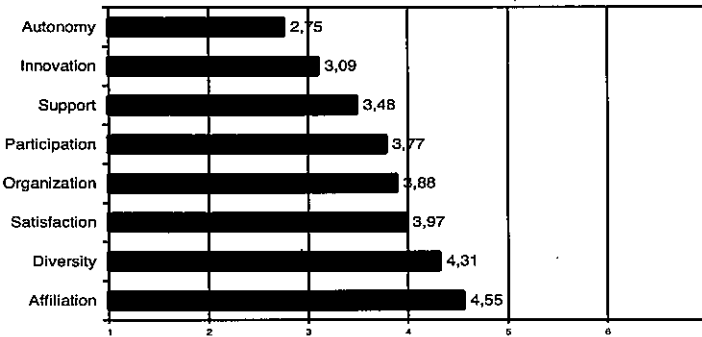
Table 1
Confirmatory factorial analyses indexes

Subscale	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	CFI
Teacher support	0,986	0,964	0,044	0,986
Student participation	0,982	0,952	0,060	0,954
Affiliation	0,975	0,946	0,059	0,982
Satisfaction	0,952	0,897	0,092	0,937
Organization	0,983	0,936	0,089	0,923
Innovation	0,966	0,920	0,094	0,938
Autonomy	0,991	0,972	0,037	0,988

Subscale	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	CFI
Diversity	0,981	0,943	0,078	0,913
Political self-efficacy	0,967	0,938	0,061	0,960
Disposition for future political activities	0,921	0,871	0,083	0,902

Results

Students have clearly negative perceptions of autonomy and innovation in the classroom. In the 7-point Likert type scale the means for perceptions of autonomy and innovation are 2,75 and 3,09 respectively. The means for perceptions of support from the teacher is 3,48. The most valued dimensions (but still below 5) are: affiliation with peers, diversity in knowledge presentation and satisfaction with class.



Graphic 1
Means of classroom climate perceptions

The sample was divided into two groups based on the median of perceptions of classroom climate; ANOVA was performed to analyse differences between these “low” and “high” levels of classroom climate perception groups, with gender, age and number of books as co-variants.

Teacher support

Students with positive perception levels of teacher support display more trust in the media, 179 political parties and courts, and higher levels of political self- efficacy.

Table 2
Results of ANOVA on teacher support perceptions and trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
Newspapers	25,67	3	8,56	6,24	0,00
TV news	35,31	3	11,77	5,56	0,00
Political parties	16,04	3	5,35	3,97	0,01

Courts	26,67	3	8,89	3,52	0,02
Political self-efficacy	18,19	3	6,06	6,17	0,00

Student participation in the classroom

Students who perceive their classrooms as having more opportunities for participation reveal more trust in the media, courts, schools, political parties and the government and higher levels and self- and collective political efficacy.

Table 3
Results of ANOVA on student participation perceptions, trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
Newspapers	35,93	4	8,98	6,71	0,00
TV news	48,55	4	12,14	5,85	0,00
Schools	17,38	4	4,34	3,04	0,02
Political parties	20,33	4	5,08	3,80	0,01
Courts	45,06	4	11,27	4,57	0,00
Government	31,94	4	7,98	3,83	0,00
Political self-efficacy	17,58	3	5,86	5,95	0,00
Political collective efficacy	13,13	3	4,38	2,61	0,05

Affiliation with other students

Students with more positive perceptions levels of affiliation attain higher levels of political self-efficacy.

Table 4
Results of ANOVA on affiliation perceptions, trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
Political self-efficacy	21,10	3	7,03	7,24	0,00

Satisfaction with class

The group with higher satisfaction also showed more trust in the media, courts, schools, political parties and the government.

Table 5
Results of ANOVA on satisfaction perceptions, trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
Newspapers	26,10	4	6,53	4,75	0,00
TV news	28,87	4	7,22	3,36	0,01
Schools	28,20	4	7,05	5,07	0,00
Political parties	20,86	4	5,22	3,91	0,00
Courts	45,13	4	11,28	4,58	0,00
Government	21,66	4	5,42	2,55	0,04
United Nations	35,81	4	8,95	4,68	0,00

Innovation

Students with more positive perception levels of innovation show more trust in the media, courts, political parties and the government.

Table 6
Results of ANOVA on innovation perceptions, trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
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Newspapers	25,91	4	6,48	4,71	0,00
TV news	32,72	4	8,18	3,83	0,00
Political parties	15,34	4	3,83	2,83	0,03
Courts	42,51	4	10,63	4,30	0,00
Government	24,09	4	6,02	2,85	0,02

Autonomy

Students who perceive their classrooms as more autonomy-oriented have more trust in the media, schools, courts, political parties and the government, and have higher levels of political self- and collective efficacy.

Table 7
Results of ANOVA on autonomy perceptions, trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
Newspapers	30,19	4	7,55	5,56	0,00
TV news	44,37	4	11,09	5,30	0,00
Schools	20,31	4	5,08	3,58	0,01
Political parties	21,82	4	5,46	4,10	0,00
Courts	45,97	4	11,49	4,67	0,00
Government	34,17	4	8,54	4,12	0,00
Political self-efficacy	16,88	3	5,63	5,70	0,00
Political collective efficacy	18,23	3	6,08	3,67	0,01

Diversity in knowledge

Students who perceive their classrooms as more diverse in terms of knowledge diversity reveal more trust in the media, schools, political parties and courts; attain higher levels of police efficacy (both self- and collective) and are more disposed to become politically active in the future.

Table 8
Results of ANOVA on diversity perceptions, trust in institutions and political self-efficacy

Dependent Variable	Sum of squares	Ld	Mean square	F	Sig.
Newspapers	28,99	4	7,25	5,32	0,00
TV news	36,52	4	9,13	4,31	0,00
Schools	16,73	4	4,18	2,92	0,02
Political parties	15,47	4	3,87	2,85	0,02
Courts	33,22	4	8,30	3,31	0,01
Political self-efficacy	25,72	3	8,57	8,97	0,00
Political collective efficacy	14,43	3	4,81	2,88	0,04
Disposition for future passive political activities	8,51	2	4,26	3,73	0,03
Disposition for future civic political activities	50,43	2	25,22	15,80	0,00

Table 9 synthesises the statistically significant associations encountered between classroom climate perceptions and citizenship attitudes and dispositions. ANOVA shows significant differences in terms of attitudes and dispositions for political activities between students who have "low" and "high" levels of classroom climate perceptions. It is relevant to note that a variety of classroom climate dimensions appear to make a difference in political attitudes and dispositions, even if we cannot argue for a causality effect. In particular, teacher support, opportunities for student involvement and action, innovation and knowledge diversity – the first clearly being a relational dimension, the second appealing to involvement in learning and the last two suggesting the relevance of teaching strategies.

Table 9
 Association between classroom climate perceptions and citizenship attitudes and dispositions

	Trust in institutions	Individual political efficacy	Collective political efficacy	Disposition for passive political activities	Disposition for civic political activities
Support	✓	✓			
Participation	✓	✓	✓		
Affiliation		✓			
Satisfaction	✓				
Innovation	✓				
Autonomy	✓	✓	✓		
Diversity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Conclusion

Although this is an exploratory study, results suggest that classroom climate perceptions at higher education are related to citizenship attitudes and dispositions for action. The quality of perceived experiences in the classroom therefore appear to be relevant to citizenship education, particularly in terms of teacher support, participation in the classroom, innovation, and knowledge diversity.

Perceptions of teacher support, participation and autonomy, which relay to engagement in the class, are associated with higher levels of trust and political self-efficacy. Therefore, opportunities for real engagement activities in class, with students having a more active role – rather than being passive receptors of knowledge –, may be relevant for the development of attitudes and perceptions associated with a more active citizenship. Perceptions of knowledge diversity, which may be related to more opportunities to confront, accept and deal with pluralism, also appear to be a particularly salient variable associated with higher levels of trust in institutions, political self-efficacy and disposition for future political engagement.

Such results suggest that classroom climate in higher education is an important variable for student development. This carries implications not only for citizenship education programs, but also for higher education policies. There seems to be some evidence that exposure to a 'pluralistic' and innovative teaching climate in the classroom promotes higher levels of active citizenship. The same could be said regarding the need to give students opportunities to have a say in their own learning and to be more actively involved in this process. Finally, the significance of teacher support suggests that attention to a relational dimension may have other consequences than making teachers and students "feel good". Even if more research is necessary for a better understanding of the impact of higher education classroom climate on students' citizenship development, these results challenge us to think about the role of higher education besides a knowledge-base approach to "civics" instruction or the provision of out-of-

class extracurricular activities – and basically to think of classrooms as places where citizenship is, whether we acknowledge it or not, in motion.

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