

BOOK REVIEWS

Review 1

Title: 'Advances in political socialization theory and research'

A review of Abendschön, Simone (ed.) (2013), *Growing into politics; Contexts and timing of political socialization*, Colchester: ECPR Press., 280 p. ISBN: 978-1-907301-42-1.

Reviewed by: Prof. Dr. Henk Dekker.

This is an important book for anyone who would like to know more about how people acquire their political orientations and develop their political behaviours. It provides important theory, fascinating data, thorough analyses, and inspiration for new research. The book starts with a brief overview of the history and the key questions of political socialization theory and research. The political socialisation effects that are examined in the book are political thinking, knowledge about elections, images of the EU, political interest, national attitude, left-right self-placement, values, and political participation. The political socialisation structures or agents that are studied are the family (two chapters), school (three chapters), media (one chapter), and politics (one chapter). The relative importance of the agents and the effects of a foreign context are also examined. Theory driven research forms the core of this book. I heartily recommend it to you.

Is the family still an effective agent of political socialization? Simone Abendschön assessed parental influence on their child's values, i.e. conceptions of the desirable. She analysed data of the German 'Learning to live democracy' study, which was initiated and directed by Jan W. van Deth. More than 800 young children aged 6 to 7 filled out a standardized children's questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of their first school year 2004/05. Both parents of the children involved were also asked to fill out a questionnaire. For 345 children at least one parental completed questionnaire was received. A principal component analysis revealed a latent structure underlying fourteen items in both waves. Four value orientations were identified: civic virtues (helping others, working hard, and always obeying the law), rules and norms (supportive of keeping promises and of following rules and norms in school and in social life), prestige (being popular and wealthy), and gender equality (attitude towards gender roles). The analysis confirms the expectation that value orientations are formed early in life by the fact that by six to eight years of age children's notions of what is desirable already display a latent structure. The analysis also shows bivariate relationships, though weak ones, between the levels of support for the four sets of values in parents and their children. Two sets of possible parental influences on their child's value orientations are distinguished: the social milieu pathway (i.e. via shared socio-economic characteristics such as social class and

ethnicity, and gender) and the attitudinal pathway (i.e. by value transmission from parents to child). Both pathways account for some of the variance in the children's value orientations and also do not appear to be competing with each other. No systematic differences were found between the results of the first and second waves. Because of this absence of difference the conclusion is that parental value orientations, the social integration of the child and the socio-economic situation of the family still have considerable influence even after children begin school. My comment is that I miss an explanation of the reasons for and consequences of the differences in measurement of the dependent variable for children and parents. The weak correlation coefficients may be due to these differences in measurement.

Piergiorgio Corbetta, Dario Tuorto and Nicoletta Cavazza compared the levels of similarity/dissimilarity in left-right self-placement between parents and youngsters aged 16-20 in Italy. They calculated for each dyad - 227 dyads in 1975 and 411 dyads in 2010 - an index of left-right dissimilarity which indicates how many points on the scale are between parents and their children, regardless of their individual positions on the scale or the direction of the differences. The data show minimal discrepancy between the positions of parents and children, and substantial stability over time, despite a thirty-five year gap and a new political context. There are however important differences between 1975 and 2010. The direction has reversed; in 1975, dissimilarity is relatively higher when a parent is right wing and/or a child is left wing, while in 2010 dissimilarity is relatively higher when the child is right wing. Parent's political involvement - a combination of interest in politics and frequency of political discussion - has no effect on dissimilarity, while children's political involvement has an effect in 2010 only. Higher dissimilarity appears to occur in 2010 when the children are right wing and not politically involved. Closeness with regard to material expectations of the future and similarity in the evaluation of the importance of five social issues - jobs for all, good education, adequate medical care, fighting pollution and fighting criminality - do not correlate with the left-right closeness. Similarity in attitudes towards forms of protest has an effect on left-right closeness but only in 1975. Similarity in party preference does correlate with similarity in left-right self-placement in both years but the relationship is weaker in 2010. The explained variance, including socio-demographics and all political orientations in the study, was much lower in 2010 than in 1975. Moreover, family climate - a combination of talking and agreeing with parents - correlates with left-right dissimilarity in 1975 but not in 2010. The conclusion is that the family is still an effective agency of political socialization though the dynamics of family socialization in the field of politics are different in 2010 than in 1975. My comment is that an explanation is missing of the causes and consequences of the low N's in the various analyses, for example the N in the 1975 regression model of 89.

Is the school still an effective agent of political socialization? Gema M. García-Albacete examines in one of my favourite chapters the effect of civic education at schools on political interest. Political interest or curiosity for politics has been shown in many studies to be a strong predictor of political participation. Three questions are asked: do schools promote political interest? What type of education is more effective for this purpose? And, if civic education indeed influences political interest, is it equally capable of promoting curiosity about political issues among pupils with different backgrounds?

Data about twenty-two EU member states from the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009 are used to answer these questions. Political interest is measured as the mean value of interest in local, national and international issues, resulting in an index with values from 0 ('not interested at all') to 3 ('very interested'). Civic education is measured by three variables. The first variable is how civic education is taught according to head teachers (as a separate subject by teachers of civic and citizenship related subjects, a subject taught by teachers of subjects related to human and social sciences, not a separate subject but integrated into all subjects taught at school, an extra-curricular activity, or is it considered the outcome of school experience as a whole, or is it not considered part of the school curriculum). Classroom climate – the second civic education variable - is measured by seven items for pupils about openness with respect to classroom discussions of political and social issues. The third variable is the emphasis placed by the school on active engagement within civic education and is measured by a question about the key aims of civic and citizenship education at school. Other variables included in the analyses are pupil's characteristics, including age and gender, parents' characteristics, including the highest level of education achieved by parents, the parents' level of political interest (measured by the frequency with which political and social issues are talked about with parents), school characteristics, including the socio-economic status, calculated as the mean score for the highest level of parental education, the head teacher's perception of social tension in the local community, and whether the school was in a post-communist country or not. The multilevel regression analysis is performed by adding students', parents', civic education and school characteristics in a series of steps and including fixed effects. A perceived open classroom climate, the existence of extra-curricular activities related to civic education, and explicit school aims to promote student political participation have a positive effect on students' political interest. Surprisingly, having civic education as a separate subject has a negative effect on political interest. To examine the existence of different effects according to students' socio-economic background, a series of cross-level interaction effects were included in the analyses. The effect of perceived openness in class discussions on students' political interest is stronger for those pupils whose parents have either the highest or the lowest level of education and for those pupils that discuss politics monthly or weekly but not for those that discuss politics with a higher or lower frequency. The effect of schools with explicit participatory aims is also stronger for those pupils whose parents have either the highest or the lowest level of education and for those pupils who hardly ever or never spent time discussing political issues at home. Extra-curricular activities in schools have a positive impact on political interest in all groups except for those whose parents have the lowest level of education and for those pupils who rarely, hardly ever or never discuss political issues at home. These findings about the interaction of civic education at school and the socio-economic background of the family point, according to the researcher, to the importance of studying the diverse socialization agents from an interrelated perspective.

Steve Schwarzer and Eva Zeglovits studied how young Austrians experienced their first elections and whether they perceived that schools did make a contribution. Austria is the first of the EU member states and one of the first countries in the world to have a voting age of sixteen for all general elections. The electoral law reforms that lowered the

voting age to sixteen were accompanied by a package of awareness-raising and information measures. Citizenship education was introduced as a subject at schools besides civics as a horizontal teaching domain taught in all subjects. The researchers held interviews with 23 sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, organized 2 focus groups including in total 19 young voters aged sixteen to eighteen, and conducted post-elections surveys among more than 1.300 pupils and apprentices aged sixteen to seventeen. Almost all pupils and nine out of ten apprentices enrolled in colleges reported at least one activity in school preceding the federal elections of 2008. Nearly all survey respondents report that the school informed them about the lowering of the voting age, three quarters talked to a teacher about elections, four out of ten say that a teacher summoned them to participate in the election, while a small minority report that the school hosted a discussion with politicians. In the interviews the young eligible voters expressed a feeling of obligation to become informed before casting the ballot and simultaneously assigned the responsibility for providing this information to schools. Conclusion is that 16- and 17-year-old eligible voters in Austria perceive school as an important agent of political socialization. My comment is that I am wondering why a simple descriptive research question about pupils' perceptions of the role of school has been chosen and not a question about the effects of school activities on voting or non-voting.

Alexandre Blanc studied history textbooks for general upper secondary school levels in France, England, Baden-Württemberg in Germany and Catalonia in Spain. The focus is on images of the EU and its institutions. The first observation is that the EU as a topic was integrated very slowly and relatively late in the history textbooks. The 'qualitative hermeneutic analysis' shows that there are a few differences between textbooks in each country but 'huge' differences between countries. National interpretation of history remains predominant and socialization in schools continues to serve national interests is the conclusion. The last paragraph says that the study of history textbooks remains useful. I am inclined to agree with this belief but a couple of sentences about why that is so would not have been superfluous. Do differences in textbooks have different effects on educational outcomes?

Carol Galais assessed the extent to which digital media use makes people more likely to value personal autonomy. This value is considered as a pre-political value which precedes all other attitudes related to civic engagement. She also assessed to what extent the relationship is conditioned by contextual features such as a country's socio-economic development and the quality of democracy. Data about personal autonomy as a value orientation are derived from the fifth wave of the World Values Survey, conducted between 2005 and 2008. Contextual data regarding socio-economic development, democracy and media characteristics have been obtained from the 2011 version of the Quality of Government database. The merged database includes complete individual and contextual data values of forty countries. To measure personal autonomy the answers to the following question were used: 'Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five'. The list included ten values: independence; hard work; feeling of responsibility; imagination; tolerance and respect for other people; thrift, saving money and things; determination, perseverance; religious faith; unselfishness; and obedience. The personal autonomy index takes into account four of these dichotomous variables:

negative scores for obedience and religious faith, and positive scores for determination/perseverance and independence. Digital media is measured as a dummy variable, scoring 1 when the individual used the internet and email to search for information in the last week and 0 when not used. There is a fair amount of cross-national variation in the extent to which internet use is related to valuing personal autonomy. In seventeen countries internet use has a clearly positive effect on valuing personal autonomy. The overall effect of internet use on the perceived importance of personal autonomy remains positive after controlling for the relevant individual variables of age, gender, education level, income, and the use of newspaper, television and radio to get political information. Cross-national differences in the extent to which internet use matters for perceived importance of personal autonomy can be explained by differences in socio-economic development, the quality of democracy, the proportion of internet users and the level of press freedom. My comments are the following. I miss a clear definition of the value of personal autonomy, that is the dependent variable. It is also not made clear why the value of personal autonomy is important to study from a political socialization point of view (only one time in the contribution the concept of 'political' autonomy is mentioned). The dependent variable - value of personal autonomy - is measured in an indirect way rather than in a direct way. The main independent variable - internet use - is measured as a dichotomous variable. Finally, in general it is questionable to use cross-sectional survey data to test causality and in this contribution especially because there are many reasons to hypothesize the opposite direction of the relationship.

Bernard Fournier studied the effects of a political event on patterns of political thinking. Around 200 young French speaking Belgians gathered in 2009 for a whole day of political debate and discussion. The topic was whether or not the voting age should be lowered to sixteen. In the morning, a panel of four experts presented the issues for and against in a two-hour debate; in the afternoon there were a series of 90-minute discussions in small groups. The small group discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed. Participants also completed a survey at the beginning and end of the day. Small group discussions were analysed using a framework, based on previous studies, including three structures of reasoning: sequential thought, linear thought and systematic thought. Only a few young people changed their minds. Among them were not only the systematic thinkers but all three types of political reasoning were represented. This is just one of the many interesting findings of this fine study.

What is the relative influence of the various political socialization agents? Ellen Quintellier answers this question in my second favourite chapter in the book. She uses data from the Belgium Political Panel Study to follow a cohort longitudinally and to compare the effects of the same five agents on the participants at three different points in time, at the age of sixteen, eighteen and twenty-one. The dependent variable is political participation. The scale included nine items: being a member of a political party, wearing a badge, signing a petition, participating in a legal protest march, boycotting products, forwarding political e-mails, displaying a political message, attending a political meeting and contacting politicians. The overall score took into account the number of activities individuals participated in as well as the frequency. Political socialization by the family, school, media, peers and voluntary associations and gender are the independent variables. Each agent is represented by four or more items. For example, the family items ask about

political discussion at home, having a politically active parent, parental volunteering, the number of books at home, and the socio-economic status. The differences between the three subsamples are not large and in all three age groups girls are more active than boys. The models for the three age groups explain about a quarter of the variance in political participation. All five agents are effective at all three ages. Parents, peers and voluntary associations are most important, while media and school have only limited impact on political participation. The most important predictor of political participation at the ages sixteen and eighteen is having frequent political discussions with friends. Adding prior levels of political participation to the regression analysis not only improves the explanatory power of the model but makes also clear that this variable is the most important predictor of participation at the ages eighteen and twenty-one. My comments are: I miss an indication of the qualities of the political participation scale (the dependent variable) and I am sorry that politics as a socialization agent, for example the campaigns of governments and parties to promote political participation, is not included in the study.

Ruxandra Paul focusses on socialisation contexts and political socialization of migrants in particular. Important questions are: What do migrants learn about politics while abroad? Do mobile citizens become more cosmopolitan or more nationalistic as a result of leaving their homeland? The ambition is to develop a theory of 'political remittances' based on the geopolitical contexts in which migrants undergo partial resocialisation. The topic is political socialization dynamics that transcend nation-state borders. It is examined how non-permanent international mobilities (circular migration, commuting, seasonal flows, academic or professional exchanges) influence politics and policy making in their interaction with domestic forces, on multiple levels. A new typology of socialization experiences predicated on space and sequence – i.e. socialization contexts and order of exposure – is proposed. The contextual triad (spatial dimension) includes: homeland, host country and migratory system. The multi-phasic migrant socialization cycle (the chronological-sequential dimension) includes: exit (i.e. culture shedding), secondary socialization (i.e. culture learning or resocialisation in the receiving country), transnational reincorporation (i.e. re-establishing the connection with the country of origin), and tertiary socialization (or updating). It is argued that political socialization is a 'palimpsest', with political remittances emerging from the synthesis of learning experiences in three contexts, and a cycle which includes learning occurring within nation states and liminal phases happening in transnational spaces. A summary of the results of qualitative fieldwork in Romania – one of the main post-communist migrant-sending countries in Europe – and two destination countries of Romanian migrants (Italy and France), including interviews with government officials, local authorities, civil society leaders, diplomats and migrants, suggests that temporary migration indeed changes socialization landmarks and landscapes and can overwrite world views and behaviours acquired in the primary socialization phase. My comments to this interesting chapter are that the 'theory' that is proposed is a kind of descriptive framework rather than a set of propositions to explain a particular phenomenon, and that a methodological justification is missing.

Finally, Lena Haug gives relatively much attention to the methodology of using children's drawings. The main research questions are: Are children interested in politics? What are the objects of interest? What are the connections between political interest and

individual factors? Political interest is defined as a state of curiosity, concern about or attention to politics. The term political was restricted to content-related policy (excluding polity and politics). Data were collected at four primary schools and two preschool institutions in 2009 in Oldenburg, Germany. The 230 children, aged between four and ten, were tasked with drawing their vision of the future. The paintings were supplemented by the children's self-descriptions and titles to facilitate accurate interpretations of the drawings. Furthermore, in addition to the drawings, age, gender, and migration background were recorded and during the drawing process additional context information was logged. Raw data were qualitatively examined for the content of the drawings. A relatively high proportion of the drawings – a quarter - refer to political issues, showing that even young children are interested in politics. The main topics chosen by the children are war and peace, environment pollution and protection, and national symbols. Political aspects were drawn more by older children and by boys, suggesting that the gender gap in political interest already exists in early childhood and increases even more with age. This chapter offers a well written report of a well-designed explorative study. It clearly shows the benefits and challenges of the use of drawings as a research method.