

INTRODUCTION

Worlds of Citizenship

Frankfurt-am-Main, nowadays a financial powerhouse and home to the European Central Bank, was elevated to the rank of imperial city in 1245. Being an imperial city implied that the inhabitants of Frankfurt could acquire citizenship. For some this happened automatically: the sons and daughters of citizen families became citizens too; marrying a citizen gave the immigrant husband or wife citizen status. Citizenship was also available to other immigrants, provided they could demonstrate legitimate birth and that they could make an economic contribution. Immigrants, in fact, made up 56 per cent of all new citizens between 1600 and 1735. Citizens had access to guilds, but were also required to participate in the civic militias and watches, and to perform fire service. Female citizens could not participate in politics, but they could own urban real estate and continue their husbands' businesses after their husbands had died. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, legislation was introduced to prevent Calvinists and then Catholics from becoming citizens, but they could bypass such rules by marrying local citizen girls. Jews, however, were completely excluded from citizenship. In 1823, more than half of all Frankfurt households had formal citizen status.¹

From the fifteenth century, Frankfurt's constitution allowed major citizen participation in all levels of local government; one of the city council's three members was a representative of the guilds. Despite this civic participation, tensions between the patrician elite and broad sections of the population at times erupted into open rebellion – in 1355–68, and again in 1525. Another such rebellion, in 1612–16, led

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to the complete exclusion of the guilds from politics. Still another uprising, begun in 1705, would ultimately undo this exclusion. The 1732 constitution, the culmination of a series of reforms in previous decades, restored to the citizens of Frankfurt their former broad role in local politics and administration.²

The nineteenth century would witness changes of a different order. On 18 January 1806, the imperial city of Frankfurt was occupied by French revolutionary forces determined to bring the benefits of the French Revolution to German citizens. Later that same year the imperial city was converted into the Principality of Frankfurt and a former chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, Karl Theodor von Dalberg, became Frankfurt's sovereign. The so-called third member of the council, representing the guilds, was soon reduced to a supervisory board for the local economy. In other areas too, citizen participation in local politics and administration was significantly reduced. In 1810 Frankfurt became a territorial Grand-Duchy, the city itself part of a *département* (province). Frankfurt was now a *municipalité* (municipality), subject to the department and the Grand-Duke, and governed by a council that met only twice a year. In 1810 it was stated that from now on, 'all inhabitants of the Grand-Duchy enjoy the same rights'. Among those who benefitted were the local Jews, who in 1812 were at last allowed to acquire formal citizenship.

In 1815, after Napoleon's defeat, Frankfurt's status as an imperial city was restored and as such the city acceded to the *Deutsche Bund*. The third member of the council was restored in its eighteenth-century role. During the years of political shake-up, the percentage of patrician members steadily declined. The same happened to the share of artisan members in the city's political institutions, which went from more than 30 per cent in the years 1727–1806, to more than 40 per cent in the French period (1806–10), to as little as 10 per cent in the Senate of 1866. In Frankfurt – and many other places – the great winners were the professionals.³ In one sentence, the revolutionary upheavals and subsequent restoration led to more equality in rights, but less equality in representation. And Frankfurt was perhaps lucky with the restoration of its former autonomy.⁴

The story of Frankfurt's citizenship exemplifies two core arguments of this book. On one hand it underlines how, during the premodern era, citizens could be prominent participants in public life. Frankfurt's history shows that citizen participation was not self-evident; the struggle

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over the role of citizens was not settled permanently, but subject to constant changes, and sometimes dramatic shifts. In this sense, Frankfurt was typical of premodern cities and towns all over Europe, and indeed the rest of the world. Still, citizenship was there, and it was worth fighting over. Frankfurt's history, on the other hand, also demonstrates that the French Revolution and its aftermath did not automatically improve citizens' rights and participation. In very general terms, the French Revolution strengthened the hand of national governments vis-à-vis local authorities. In France itself, and subsequently in territories conquered by the French, local citizenship and such civic organisations as the guilds were abolished. Despite Napoleon's defeat, his programme stuck in many countries where national governments were unwilling to turn back the clock. Instead, they embarked on a programme of political and cultural unification that by 1900 had succeeded in achieving most of its aims. By 2000, however, the downside of this project was becoming increasingly clear. National states had also become bloated bureaucracies, struggling to deliver on their initial promises of political freedom and social equality, and alienating their citizens in the process.

In this book I try to explain why urban autonomy was still popular in 1800, and suggest that it may even offer a (partial) solution to some of the woes of modern societies. This is not an entirely original idea; political scientists have already been toying with similar proposals. They have even invoked the past to underscore their point.⁵ These political scientists are, however, poorly served by a historiography that tends to highlight the problems of urban governance and citizenship before the French Revolution and idealises what came after 1789. In the following pages I hope to demonstrate that, compared to the practices of nineteenth-century national citizenship, premodern urban citizenship actually has quite an impressive track record when it comes to political freedom, social equality and inclusiveness; or, to phrase it in the terms of 1789, of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

Citizenship remains a key feature of our own societies. Debates about immigration policies, the future of democracy, or how to reform the welfare state immediately touch on issues of citizenship: who is affected by these changes and how? Or, to put it more bluntly: who is 'in' and who is 'out'? Understanding the historical trajectory of citizenship before it morphed into its modern form can help us shape the future, not only through a long-term perspective, but equally by expanding the range of historical possibilities. Citizenship was a crucial

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element in the modernisation of societies across much of the globe during the centuries referred to in Europe as ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’. Max Weber made the point almost a century ago when he claimed that self-organisation by urban citizens, as it emerged in medieval Europe, gave them a head start over Asian towns where emperors and clans constrained society. This, he claimed, also helped to explain why Europe has managed to dominate the world over the past half millennium.⁶

Since Weber launched his thesis, however, we have learnt a great deal more about the historical roots and development of citizenship, and the societies in which it emerged. Conceptually, much has changed as well since Weber’s time. This book takes a fresh look at the development of citizenship in the premodern era, i.e. before the French Revolution introduced democracy and ‘modern’ forms of citizenship.⁷ Weber’s claim, and the accompanying claim that Europe’s success on the world stage was predicated on its unique citizenship arrangements, are challenged in this book in two significant ways. First of all, I hope to demonstrate that a remarkable amount of what Weber saw as unique features of European cities can also be found in the cities of the Middle East and China. Secondly, and contrary to Weber’s argument, in substantial parts of Europe itself these supposedly unique features of European cities and citizenship failed to deliver the economic dynamism and social well-being promised by his model.

Clearly, another factor was in play. This factor, I argue, was the particular relationship between local, i.e. urban, and national governance. Only where states were organised in such a way that urban institutions could significantly impact state policies did the effects that Weber predicted in fact materialise. To put it the other way around: only those regions where towns were supported by states responsive to their needs did citizenship produce the effect that Weber predicted. Three distinct stages can be distinguished, this book claims, in the emergence of that dynamic state–city interaction. First, in the city-states of Italy during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, in many ways, city and state were identical. Due to their small sizes, however, city-states were vulnerable to outside pressures. The second stage was the urban federation, as it triumphed in the Low Countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the long run this model too suffered from problems of scale, combined with internal sclerosis. The third stage was parliamentary rule as it evolved in post-Reformation England and

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ultimately triumphed during the Glorious Revolution of 1689. In all three systems, state policies were to an important extent shaped by urban interests and urban representatives.

In the process of outlining this story of European citizenship, I want to set another record straight. Recent research on premodern towns, within and outside Europe, has been dominated by the social history of elites. Historians of these urban elites have time and again made the point that small oligarchies monopolised urban politics. In the following pages it is argued, however, that the role of ordinary people in urban politics has been systematically underestimated, and that civic institutions directly or indirectly helped shape local politics in most premodern towns. There was, in other words, more ‘democracy’ before the French Revolution than historians have usually acknowledged, fixated as they have been on national politics. Popular influence was, moreover, greatest where it mattered most: in local institutions, where public services were designed and delivered. By destroying this local form of citizenship, the French Revolution initially made Europe less, rather than more democratic.

Definitions of Citizenship

Before we can explore the historical trajectories of citizenship, we need to know what it is that we are talking about. Like so many concepts that we seem to understand intuitively, citizenship is complex and many-sided. The *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* (2002) provides no fewer than four different definitions of citizenship.⁸ The first, and probably most commonly used, focuses on ‘political rights to participate in processes of popular self-governance’. This first definition goes back to classical antiquity and its political philosophy. The second concentrates on the legal status of individuals ‘as members of a particular, officially sovereign political community’. This definition became predominant in nineteenth-century Europe, after the French Revolution had introduced the modern constitution. A third, which became more popular in the twentieth century, uses a much broader canvas and sees citizens as ‘those who belong to any human association’. The final one is broader still, and defines citizenship as ‘certain standards of proper conduct’.

The common theme in all four is that citizenship is about the membership of human associations and the standards of behaviour

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appropriate to that membership. Two out of the four definitions focus on the political domain as distinguishing citizenship from the membership of, say, a sports club or mandolin orchestra. This aspect would therefore seem to be essential to any satisfactory definition. It is also implied in the simple and straightforward definition provided by the world's leading expert in citizenship studies, Engin Isin. Citizenship, he writes, is 'the right to claim rights'.⁹ Those rights, one assumes, including the right to claim them, are ultimately provided by the state or some other public authority.

Rights, however, are not homogeneous. In one of the most celebrated discussions of citizenship, the British sociologist T. H. Marshall distinguished three types of rights: civil rights, political rights and social rights. The emergence of these rights in England, according to Marshall, was sequential. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries civil rights, the rights to justice and the ownership of property, together with the freedoms of the person, speech and faith, were gradually established. In the nineteenth century political rights were given to many more people with the expansion of the franchise. In the twentieth century, the creation of the welfare state gave people a right to a decent living, through access to education and social services.¹⁰

Marshall's ideas have been very influential.¹¹ In at least one area, however, they are no longer accepted. For Marshall, citizenship was self-evidently a national institution and the rights that he talked about were provided by national governments. In the light of developments in the past half-century, this has become much less obvious. Globalisation and the mass migration that is an integral part of it have undermined the nineteenth-century idea of an exclusive relationship with a single national polity. Many people now have dual nationality, or descend from parents of different nationalities, and as a result have strong attachments to more than one state.¹² In Europe, this issue has become more urgent due to the creation of the European Union (EU) and the transfer of sovereign powers from the member states to EU institutions.¹³ The EU itself is thinking aloud about the development of an EU citizenship, not as a replacement, of course, but alongside national citizenship.¹⁴

The identification of citizenship with national states has also left its mark on the historiography of citizenship, which has concentrated very much on two distinct periods: antiquity and the modern age. Greek and Roman antiquity is seen as the cradle of European citizenship, the

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period starting with the French Revolution as its phase of maturity.¹⁵ The Middle Ages and the early modern period are a problem, because states as we know them either did not exist or failed to provide proper citizenship regulations. Andreas Fahrmeir's textbook on citizenship typically calls this the stage 'before citizenship', and portrays the French Revolution as 'the invention of citizenship'.¹⁶ This gap in the history of citizenship can be bridged by shifting the focus away from states and towards the urban environments where citizenship did exist, both as a formal status and as a set of practices.¹⁷

This then brings us to a second area where Marshall's definition has been amended: its legal dimension. Underlying Marshall's definition was the assumption that citizens gained rights that would be legally enforceable, because they were established in the constitution or in other laws. Increasingly, students of citizenship have been forced to acknowledge that laws on citizenship can be contradictory and that citizenship practices can exist outside the rules covering formal citizenship, as the product of certain types of behaviour. For example, migrants without formal citizenship can nonetheless participate in local elections after a certain number of years' residence. In these and similar ways, inhabitants become *de facto* citizens through practices technically reserved for citizens only.¹⁸ This practice-oriented approach, which is used throughout this book, widens the community of 'citizens' far beyond those having formal citizen status. Citizenship therefore is not so much concerned with distinctions between categories of people, but rather with the roles people play in society.¹⁹ Nonetheless, important questions need to be answered about, for example, the gender, cultural or racial distinctions related to formal citizenship. In those areas citizenship status did indeed distinguish between people.

Ruling out the idea of citizenship as an exclusively legal category and abandoning the national perspective on citizenship may add to the problem of definition, but both must be discarded if we wish to compare the development of citizenship across time and space. Therefore I prefer a definition proposed by Charles Tilly. He defined citizenship as²⁰

a continuing series of transactions between persons [i.e. citizens] and agents of a given [polity]²¹ in which each has enforceable rights and obligations uniquely by virtue of 1. the person's membership in an exclusive category, the native-born plus the

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naturalized, and 2. the agent's relation to the [polity] rather than any other authority the agent may enjoy.

This definition is practice-oriented because it focuses on 'transactions', rather than on the rights and obligations as such, and allows for the possibility that other authorities than the state, for example local institutions, can create citizenship.²² 'Authority' in this definition should probably be further specified as 'authorities in charge of spatial units', to distinguish them from prison wardens or museum directors. A shorter version, proposed by Richard Bellamy, makes essentially the same point. Bellamy defines citizenship as 'a particular set of political practices involving specific public rights and duties with respect to a given political community'. I agree with the 'political' in community, but think that the practices are broader than merely political. Bellamy too acknowledges that to function properly, political citizenship requires 'social and moral dispositions': in other words, more than politics.²³ Tilly himself proposed a simplified version, defining citizenship as 'a tie entailing mutual obligations between categorically defined persons and agents of a government'.²⁴ What is lost in this admittedly more elegant formulation, is the interactivity implied in the 'transactions' of his earlier definition. The 'tie' instead foregrounds the legalistic definition that has been a source of so much confusion over this topic in the past.

Citizenship and the 'Quality' of Society

Because it is multifaceted, to some extent voluntary, and touches on several of the crucial dimensions of society – politics, the economy, social arrangements, perhaps also culture – citizenship is clearly an important element of what determines the quality of a society. In recent years, three influential books have strongly suggested a more specific connection between citizenship and economic prosperity. Interestingly, all three have made extensive use of historical data. Only one uses citizenship as such as a key variable, but in a broader sense the other two also touch on the issues discussed in this book.

The most influential of these authors has no doubt been Douglass North, the 1993 Nobel laureate in economics. In a nutshell, North has argued that for market exchanges to proceed smoothly, transaction costs need to be low. Transaction costs include the expenses related to transportation and information gathering, but crucially also

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the rules and regulations ensuring property rights and contract enforcement. When institutions perform poorly, transaction costs will increase and the economy will be poorer as a result. On the basis of this simple observation, North, together with John Wallis and Barry Weingast, developed a theory of socio-economic development.²⁵ North, Wallis and Weingast distinguish two basic types of societies; the first they call natural-order societies, the second open-access societies. Natural-order societies are, historically speaking, the commonest type by far. In these societies, elites compete for the largest share of the economic pie. Although this competition is about economic gains, the weapons are political. With the aid of privileges and, if necessary, real weapons, elites help themselves (and their supporters) to whatever they can lay their hands on. In advanced versions of such natural-order societies, elites accept limitations on this sort of rent-seeking, but reluctantly and never permanently. As a result, natural-order societies and their economies are subject to short-term cycles of political upheaval.

North, Wallis and Weingast think that this unholy war of the elites against their subjects first came to an end around 1800 in three countries, through a series of related events.²⁶ In the British colonies in North America the American Revolution that erupted in 1776 installed a government that was accountable to its citizens. French involvement in this war and its financial consequences then led to the French Revolution of 1789 that toppled the elites in that country. The series of wars against revolutionary France subsequently forced the English elites to follow a path that had already been cleared a century earlier by the Glorious Revolution, which gave power to Parliament. During these three related revolutions, elites were forced to acknowledge the role of citizens in their polities by introducing democratic rule. This finally stopped the endless rounds of rent-seeking and started investments in long-term improvements that would ultimately prove beneficial to all, i.e. citizens and elites alike. The ‘open access order’ had arrived.

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson tell a roughly similar story. For them too, the distinction between rich and poor countries is all about ‘institutions, institutions, institutions’.²⁷ They see the Glorious Revolution as the turning point. Parliamentary constraints on the monarch (or the executive) helped secure property rights, changed the fiscal regime and led to improved infrastructure and to a much more aggressive protection of international trade by the British state.²⁸ This, Acemoglu and Robinson argue, created the foundations to launch the

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Industrial Revolution. Institutional reforms, or their absence, then determined which countries were able to follow the British example. Outside Europe, however, the Europeans imposed the sort of institutional regimes that prevented non-European regions from imitating that example. To this day, the distinctions between prosperous and poverty-stricken economies are very much determined by institutional structures and the incentives they generate.

Political scientist Robert Putnam came to the same conclusion in two influential works on civic institutions in Italy and the United States.²⁹ Of these two, the Italian study is the more interesting for our purposes, because it is historically oriented. In a study of the quality of local government in modern Italy, Putnam and his collaborators found strong evidence of two distinct cultures. In the north, local citizens were very involved in civic organisations; in the south, people were suspicious of public institutions and instead relied on family relations and patronage to get things done. For Italy, Putnam explains this situation as the outcome of long-term historical processes. In the north, city-states created civic institutions and citizenship and promoted general welfare, while in the south, feudal lords excluded their subjects from political participation in order to exploit them. The result, Putnam claimed, was not just poor-quality institutions in southern Italy and better ones in the north but also a serious gap in prosperity between the two regions.³⁰

Putnam's claims have not been universally accepted. Scholars of Renaissance Italy have pointed out that he idealised the faction-ridden and often violent political conflicts of the communes and completely ignored the rise of strong-man solutions that saved the city-states from imploding.³¹ That, however, is not the point here. Like North, Wallis and Weingast, and like Acemoglu and Robinson, Putnam is convinced that civic involvement in the way society is ruled has long-term beneficial effects.³²

Putnam explains the impact of civic organisations using the concept of 'social capital'. Membership brought skills and networks that helped people to make their way through life. Amartya Sen has identified 'freedom' as the key factor. Freedom, Sen argues, contributes in itself to people's sense of well-being, but is also positively connected to the improvement of material well-being. The reason is that freedom gives people the opportunities to shape their own lives, and those opportunities will encourage them to work harder and more efficiently. 'Agency', therefore, is both desirable in its own right, and for the