

Does the ‘Monitorial Citizen’ Exist? An Empirical Investigation into the Occurrence of Postmodern Forms of Citizenship in the Nordic Countries.

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Abstract

Various authors have claimed that in contemporary Western societies postmodern concepts of citizenship are becoming more prevalent. A new generation of ‘critical citizens’ are said to be more critical of the political system, less likely to participate in conventional politics, but they remain strongly interested in politics and social life (Norris, Inglehart, Dalton). Michael Schudson has developed the concept of a ‘monitorial citizen’, who is interested in politics, has high levels of political efficacy and turns to political action if needed, but stays outside the traditional political organizations. Based on the European Social Survey (2004) we investigate whether this type of citizenship actually occurs in Scandinavia (n=7796). While we find that this form of citizenship is present in the Nordic countries, the characteristics of this group do not fit the theoretical expectations. In Scandinavia, ‘monitorial citizens’ do not have exceptionally high education levels and their trust in traditional political institutions remains quite elevated. We discuss the reasons why the concept of monitorial citizens does not seem to flourish that well in the Nordic countries, and what this implies for the theoretical debate about the political consequences of this postmodernization process.

Key words: postmodern citizenship, Nordic countries, European Social Survey, Michael Schudson, political participation