

## Thematic Issue: Guest Editorial

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# The Development of Civic Engagement: Results from Longitudinal Studies

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Civic engagement has been defined broadly as “Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern” (APA, 2014) and can take different forms such as individual volunteerism and political participation. Despite relevant publications that summarize the state of the art, such as the “Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth” (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010), until recently only few longitudinal studies investigated the development of civic engagement. This was especially true for longitudinal studies spanning from childhood to adulthood, which are crucial for an investigation of developmental origins, life-course correlates, and long-term consequences of civic engagement.

The present thematic issue of the International Journal of Developmental Science (IJDS) focuses on studies with a developmental focus on civic engagement in children, adolescents, and/or adults. It includes seven articles, a commentary, and a workshop report - six articles were a result of a call for papers that was published in February of 2014. A seventh article was submitted as regular manuscript but was deemed thematically closely related to the thematic issue’s topic and was thus included in the thematic issue. As is customary

at IJDS, all articles underwent a regular double-blind peer review process, including recommendations for revisions provided by the guest editors.

What can we learn from the articles presented in this thematic issue? A theoretical cornerstone of the thematic issue is the contribution by Lerner, Wang, Champine, Warren, and Erickson (2014). The authors give an excellent summary about theoretical and methodological issues in their theoretical article, referring to the relational developmental systems (RDS) meta-theory and summarizing results from empirical studies supporting the model of civic engagement development based on developmental systems theory.

Two empirical contributions focus on the identification of different profiles of civic engagement as well as their timely stability. The article by Johnson, Agans, Weiner, and Lerner (2014) examines the stability of belonging to different profiles of civic engagement and the association with education status changes as well as participants’ levels of contribution ideology, using data from young adults from two time points of the Young Entrepreneurs Study. Wray-Lake, Rote, Benavides, and Victorino (2014) also describe civic engagement typologies, revealed by latent class analysis, and transitions in and out of typologies using several waves of data from the Longitudinal Study of American Youth. These studies show that there is great heterogeneity in the development and expression of civic engagement. So what causes this heterogeneity? And what consequences does it have?

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These are questions that are addressed by three empirical studies with a focus on possible long-term predictors and outcomes of civic engagement. How far does a positive social-emotional classroom climate further students' democratic experiences in school? This question is tackled in Eckstein and Noack's (2014) article, using a multilevel structural equation modeling approach with a sample of adolescent high school students from the federal state of Thuringia, Germany. The two-wave (1-year-)longitudinal study by Crocetti, Garckija, Gabrielaviciute, Vosylis, and Zukauskienė (2014), conducted in Northeastern Lithuania, revealed reciprocal associations between identity styles and civic engagement in adolescence. Müller, Ziegelmann, Simonson, Tesch-Römer, and Huxhold (2014) investigated age differences in longitudinal effects of volunteering on three facets of subjective well-being, with self-efficacy as mediator, utilizing longitudinal structural equation modeling in their study with participants from different age groups in adulthood from the German Ageing Survey.

The thematic issue also contains an experimental contribution: In a randomized controlled intervention study, van Goethem, van Hoof, Orobio de Castro, and van Aken (2014) examined the effect of community service program-quality on changes in Dutch adolescents' intentions to volunteer, referring to the Theory of Planned Behavior model. Results indicated that reflection is an essential ingredient in successful civic engagement interventions, which is an important lesson for further efforts to increase civic engagement in schools.

The thematic issue concludes with an excellent commentary by James Youniss (2014), who outlines a historical perspective of the developmental approach in the context of civic engagement research. Indeed, research seems to have come a long way towards recognizing that the development of civic engagement can only be understood from a multiple-systems perspective that also includes looking at youth's agentic experiences within diverse political systems. The report on the 2014 Youth Civic Engagement Preconference of the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence by Karakos and Wray-Lake (2014), presented at the end of the thematic issue, reinforces the view that recent research is indeed taking a more interdisciplinary approach than in the past.

Our hope is that this thematic issue contributes to the growing research on the development of civic engagement in children, adolescents, and adults. The results reinforce the picture that civic engagement is conse-

quential for psychosocial development. In addition, this issue contributes to the growing empirical evidence indicating that civic engagement can be understood as a developmental outcome, with underlying successive and systematic change from early developmental stages on. The study by van Goethem et al. shows that it is possible to experimentally intervene in these developmental processes, though findings also indicate that the results of such interventions can be complex. Fortunately, a highly talented community of researchers appears to stand present to tackle these and other issues, so there is reason for optimism that the coming decades will produce substantial progress.

Finally, we want to thank all those who responded to our call for abstracts, although in the end not all proposals could be included. We want to thank the authors of the manuscripts for their contribution to this thematic issue. The reviewers deserve our special gratitude for providing high-quality reviews and their willingness to work to a strict timeline.

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### **Bio Sketches**

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