

# Open Prototype that we experienced in the class

I have thought about which method I should use for the final project. Since I belong to EFI, I wanted to find something creative, though I couldn't have connected it with my awareness of the problem for a long time. However, once the core problem I wanted to tackle became clear, I finally had an image of using it. Furthermore, at the same time, I came up with an idea that I would use the Open Prototype which I experienced in Building Near Future.

What is the Open Prototype?

“OP is presented as conceptual and methodological framework for artistic practice and public participation that bridges the space between technology and society, and contributes to city and technology innovation (Hemment, 2020).”

“OP is an approach to developing and testing ideas, making ideas tangible, and allowing play to drive the exploration, so new possibilities can emerge untutored to specific constraints of production (Hemment, 2020).”

“OP is a means of testing and developing a concept or thing with various contributors and communities given agency at various stages of the process (Hemment, 2015).”

The reasons why young people in Japan have assumed “there is no point of getting engaged” or “they will make no change” toward society and politics, may be based on the interdisciplinary issues, such as the election system, the content taught through compulsory education, and recognition toward society and politics as massive things that is out of control. They are also probably intertwined with each other and for which no effective solution can be found in any single field alone (It is a literally wicked problem). Although The

the details of the background will be analysed from each discipline in my literature review, I will try to utilise the Open Prototype to tackle the problem, bringing together young people working in different fields and letting them think freely about solutions in an interdisciplinary way and without difficult restrictions.

Furthermore, it is what I wanted because this method itself is supposed to give the participants a sense of agency, which means they would have some hope or courage of taking action toward better society and politics after the participation!

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## **Draft of my final project plan (On the way of adding reference)**

In liberal democratic countries, it is said that citizens should consciously engage in social reproduction as members of society. In other words, I understand that one should critically examine the lives and societies that are reproduced unconsciously, raise voices, take action, and create feedback loops to make the country better. Additionally, as the premise, citizens need to be interested in society and politics and actively participate. However, in Japan, this premise is questionable.

Before explaining the situation in Japan in detail, it is necessary to define political participation and civic engagement. Both definitions vary among different people, making it difficult to define them clearly. Here, I will borrow the definitions from Ekman and Amnå (2012), which organizes various past definitions. First, political

participation involves directly influencing politicians or political parties, including activities such as voting, participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, and making donations to political parties. Civic engagement, which lead to future political participation, is behaviours that positively impact someone other than oneself in society. This range is broad and includes activities from recycling to volunteering in the community. Additionally, there is civic involvement as a potential state of them, which is an attitude of being interested in politics and society.

Applying the indicators revealing citizen's behaviours in Japan to the above definitions, the level of political participation is low, considering the declining voter turnout year by year (the latest voter turnout the national election is 55%) and only 1% of participation rate for demonstrations (1%). Regarding civic engagement, the participation number in volunteer activities among adults aged 20 and older is low at 17%.

\*It should be noted that Ekman and Amnå (2012) point out that opinion surveys do not include questions to accurately grasp the situation of political participation including potential ones, and in terms of civic engagement, it cannot be fully understood solely based on the visible numbers, due to its multitude of actions included. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there is some level of interest in politics and civic engagement. According to a survey by NHK, 84% of people are interested in society.

From all of the above, we can mostly understand the current citizens' behaviours that they hesitate to take actions toward society and politics, but they are interested in them.

In surveys investigating the background of political aversion, nihilism is found to be a factor in avoiding involvement in politics. Furthermore, according to a survey by the Asahi newspaper, 67% of respondents answered that 'participating in politics will not change the world.' In a youth survey

conducted by the Japan Foundation, only 18% of respondents answered that 'they think they can change the country or society by themselves,' indicating a lack of self-efficacy toward politics and society.

My research goals are exploring the background of this low efficacy that causes low political and civic engagements, and proposing approaches to improve.

Currently, there seems to be no comprehensive understanding of the background of this low sense of efficacy in the literature and surveys, but there are several hypotheses.

- The social system diminishes the sense of efficacy
- Representative democracy leads to lower political participation rates than direct democracy
- There are problems with education that fosters awareness of politics and society and the necessary knowledge for participation
- Due to experiences of constantly being judged by test results, confidence in one's own abilities has been eroded
- Politics and society are portrayed as too large to be controlled by individuals.
- There are problems with how society and politics are narrated.
- Media constantly reporting on despairing news, etc.

These are hypotheses, so further research is needed to verify whether these backgrounds exist and to conduct interdisciplinary verification.

#### - Research Process 1

Verification of hypotheses that are likely to exist as backgrounds for the sense of efficacy (literature review)

On the other hand, the hypotheses are already interdisciplinary, and they are likely to be intertwined. In other words, there is a high possibility that there are no clear problems that reduce efficacy and no clear solutions

(Wicked Problem). Therefore, merely verifying the hypotheses may not lead to increasing efficacy. Therefore, it will also be implemented to create prototypes of approaches to increase efficacy based on the consciousness and actions of those who already have a high sense of efficacy and are taking action, even in a society like Japan where efficacy is generally low.

#### – Research Process 2

Conduct an Open Prototype with people who already have a sense of efficacy toward politics and society and are taking some form of action to increase efficacy

What is [Open Prototype](#): Conceptual and methodological framework that interdisciplinarily connect people and develop tangible future ideas.

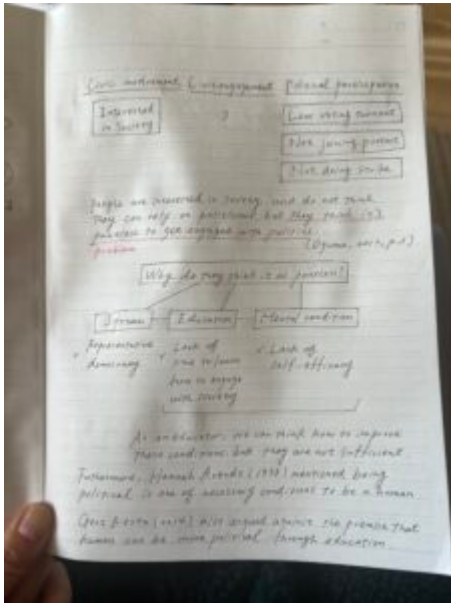
Screening before conducting Open Prototype: Select participants who answer 'yes' to 'Do you think you have the power to change society and politics?' and have answered yes to the question 'Do you take any actions in your daily life to improve society and politics?'

Through the above processes, I aim to visualize the backgrounds of low efficacy toward politics and society and their relationships, propose approaches that may be effective for the complex intertwined backgrounds, and create prototypes for increasing efficacy.

This research targets will be limited to young people (in their 20s-30s), who are known to have particularly low rates of political participation, civic engagement and sense of efficacy.

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# Core issue to be tackled and its backgrounds



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## What is 'criticism'? Learning from Giroux

I will summarise the literature written by Tanigawa (2005) organising Giroux's definition of 'criticism'.

Giroux has been trying to reconstruct the American school system, learning from Freire, who claimed to society that education should have incorporated the concepts of self-liberation and social change. He is also one of the leading exponents of 'critical pedagogy,' which can be seen from two perspectives: 'Reproduction' and 'Resistance'.

Giroux advocates the 'Resistance theory', which recognises that students have the power to change the dominating systems,

not only acquiring the 'Language of Critique' under the reproduction theory.

According to him, critical literacy enables people to critically read their personal and social world and promotes the kind of power that challenges the myths and beliefs that have structured their perception and experience.

He explains the concept of 'criticism' in critical literacy from the perspective of (i) the learner as an 'action subject', (ii) the focus on the aspect of hope through the liberation of memory, and (iii) the attention to complexity in the learning field.

Reference:

Tanigawa, T. (2005). Examining the concept of "criticism" in literacy education : H. A. Giroux's initiative. *Teaching Methods Exploring*, 8, 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.14989/190311>

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## **Q.2 Are you thinking about political awareness, political literacy or more how to be a good citizen?**

I am going to answer the second question by Huw by reading the literature. It would be appropriate to read several references for each aspect, but I aimed to make a tentative answer to the first question for now.

**Political Awareness: Political interest seems to be formed differently in young people and adults.**

Hata, M. (2016). Mechanisms of formation of political interest among 'new voters'. *Election research*, 32(2), pp.45–55. doi:[https://doi.org/10.14854/jaes.32.2\\_45](https://doi.org/10.14854/jaes.32.2_45).

Interest in politics is often described in terms of the concept of political socialisation, with young people (the scope of which is ambiguous) adapting to the concept of political and social systems in the early socialisation phase. Then, as adults, in the later socialisation phase, they become interested in politics for 'interest democracy' reasons (e.g. parents who are raising children try to benefit themselves by voting for politicians who seek to improve the child-rearing environment). The findings of this paper show that adults' interest in politics increases the moment they feel that politics may benefit them.

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## **Q1-2: Is the problem lack of political engagement or lack of civic engagement? What's the difference?**

In [my previous post](#), I looked at the difference between political engagement and civic engagement in order to answer the following question

**Question 1: Is the problem lack of political engagement or lack of civic engagement? What's the difference?**



Although there is a signal of a lack of political engagement, mainly proved by our low voting rate (I cannot explain the status only by it, though), I had no idea about the current level of civic engagement and the civic engagement stage, which is also a process of political engagement. Therefore, I read the literature "Mechanisms of formation of political interest among 'new voters'" (Hata, 2016)

### **Short summary**

Interest in politics is often described in terms of the concept of political socialisation. In the early socialisation phase, young people (the range of age is ambiguous) get interested in politics while adapting to the concept of political and social systems. Then after they get older, people(adults) the trigger of the interest in politics is generally individual merits (e.g. parents who seek to benefit themselves by voting for politicians who try to improve the child-rearing environment). This paper shows that interest in politics among adults definitely increase when they think something political are likely to benefit them.

### **Thoughts after reading**

The level of civic engagement/involvement needs to be re-examined(I could not find the clue from this article), but I found that adults and young people have different backgrounds of interest in politics. Today, I had a chat with my Japanese friends and talked about our mental distance between politics and us. All of us have been struggling with thinking politics as our important and daily topic/event. Assuming that this is the general perception, the problem in our country nowadays may be that we don't feel like politics strongly connects with us.

### **Reference**

Hata (2016) " Mechanisms of formation of political interest among 'new voters' ", *Election research*, 32(2), pp. 45-55. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.14854/jaes.32.2\\_45](https://doi.org/10.14854/jaes.32.2_45) (In Japanese)

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# **Q1-1: Is the problem lack of political engagement or lack of civic engagement?**

I shared the revisited project plan with Huw, who gave me a beautiful series of critical questions to refine it further. There are 12 questions, so I will try to answer to them in this blog (hopefully) this week.

## **Question 1: Is the problem lack of political engagement or lack of civic engagement? What's the difference?**

Before answering this question, it is important to clarify the definitions of political engagement and civic engagement, using Ekman and Amnå's literature (2012) that appears to point out the history and problems with these definitions.

### **Short summary**

There is no clear definition of civic engagement and a number of limited or broad definitions exist, including from volunteering in the local communities to electoral activities such as voting. On the other hand, the definition of political participation refers to actions that can directly influence the behaviour of political actors. The difference between civic and political participation could be said to be whether the object of influence is clear or not.

Ekman and Amnå are aware of the ambiguity of the definition of

civic engagement, and the narrow definition of political participation. They say that the degree of civic participation in society is too difficult to measure, and that political participation is too narrowly defined and there are behaviours that are overlooked.

They say that civic engagement can be a necessary condition for political participation (but not sufficient). For example, recycling does not directly influence the political actors, but it could foster citizens' environmental awareness, which could lead them to vote for the politicians who say they respect addressing environmental issues, or to participate in protests for environmental protection.

It is also argued that there is an 'involvement' that precedes action. Citing Martín and van Deth (2007), they say involvement is defined as an interest in political and social issues and a recognition that politics is important.

They conclude the literature by stating that the authentic question is how civic involvement and engagement can lead to the political participation. They also claim that current mass-research often focuses only on manifest political participation, it means whether citizens are really disengaged from politics is not properly assessed.

### **Thoughts after reading**

– In Japan, many medias have alerted that our political engagement is in crisis, considering the results, such as the declining voter turnout or the survey showing that “young people are not interested in politics”.

– What is the current situation in my country really like? Generally, many Japanese people are said to be “not interested in politics” or “have an aversion to politics”, but if I actually go and look at the potential indicators, isn't the situation actually not as bad as it is reported in the media?

– Can I find hope for society by focusing on those who are participating in politics, or the other activities called as

“civic engagement” ? Or should I still focus on investigating the actual situation because no one have investigated the authentic situation in the first place?

– I will find out if there is any literature or research that dig into the level of potential political participation in Japan and write the next blog post.

## Reference

Ekman, J. and Amnå, E. (2012) ‘Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology’, *Human Affairs*, 22(3), pp. 283–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1>.