

A Civic Studies Perspective on European Citizens: In Search for Potential in the Conflict surrounding TTIP

Introduction: We are the ones we have been waiting for

The word “civic” is a symbol of conflict and community by its origin. It dates back to the Latin word “civicus”, from which the symbol of a crown made out of oak leaves (“corona civica”) derived, dedicated to those who saved a life of a fellow citizen in battle. Today’s EUrope is far from being free of conflict, a fact that repeatedly provokes an outcry for a stronger European community to overcome the “European crisis”. However, what is often understood as “community” is a society free from conflict. In this article, I will approach this interconnectedness of community and conflict in a different way, stating that conflict in and about EUrope has the potential to create a community of active European citizens - something that I call the “European Civics”. The “European Civics” as a noun is used to describe the community of active citizens engaged in a European conflict that has been of topical public interest in the last years: the Anti-TTIP-protests. Using the capital letters in “EUrope”, I indicate that what is meant is not the EU as an institutional confederation of states, but an institutionally framed, and politically, culturally, historically and socially connected community of European citizens.

The article aims to be a theoretically informed and normatively guided contribution to the research on European societies and politics today. It will outline what “Civic Studies” is about, which central aspects are characteristic for this nascent academic field and why it is a promising approach for an alternative research perspective on EUrope today. This is most evident in two characteristics of Civic Studies, namely the focus on citizens and the search for potential in civic action. However, my argument is that Civic Studies would profit from integrating aspects of conflict theory to discover the potential for civic renewal lying in political conflicts. Therefore, I will introduce Civic Studies as an innovative perspective when it comes to the question of European citizenship and punctually enrich it with elements from conflict theory.

On a theoretical level, I will mainly refer to Civic Studies literature from “The Civic Series”¹ to provide a broad picture of how Civic Studies is understood by its contemporary representatives. In addition to that, the work of Etienne Balibar on European citizens (2005, 2016), the functions of social conflict by Lewis Coser (1956) and the approach of agonistic pluralism by Chantal Mouffe (2004, 2014) are central references. To make this explicit, the paper draws upon the case of the Anti-TTIP-protests as an example of the potential to co-

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create self-understandings as European citizens. This question gains special relevance in a moment of challenges often described as multiple crises that the European Union is facing today. My suggestion here is that democratic conflict has the potential to contribute to the politicization and the identification of European citizens with the European project. Therefore, the scientific aim of this paper is not only to develop a theoretical framework with which this basic hypothesis can be studied and to discuss the example of Anti-TTIP-protests in the light of the European crisis. It goes one step further in stressing the political importance of this perspective on European citizens especially in light of a perceived “European crisis”.

This study of contentious European citizens in the Anti-TTIP-protests follows a constructivist paradigm: Its aim is not to provide an explanation for the uprisings, its success or failure, but to reconstruct the conflict surrounding TTIP following the question: *What Potential holds this Conflict for a European Civics?* This question is based on the hypothesis that a European Civics generates from the self-understanding as a European citizen, which in turn is closely interconnected with the experiences in active political participation, here exemplified in references to the European protest actions against TTIP. The question is how the experiences of the protestors altered, reconstructed or created the self-understanding as European citizens. Thus, the focus of this research is situated on the micro-level: How do politically active citizens understand and execute their role as European citizens, in the light of their protest experiences? By asking that, the article challenges the dominant understanding of citizenship that was long equated with the idea of the nation-state. It is without doubt that this transfer to the European level will have severe implications for the concept of citizenship. (Rumford, 2003, p. 27; 29) But in the face of the worldwide social, political, economic and ecological challenges, this transformation has gained unprecedented relevance to understand and the urgent need to act: “We are the ones we have been waiting for” (Levine, 2013).

Civic Studies in a Nutshell

First of all, it has to be acknowledged that Civic Studies is neither a homogeneous field of research nor does it claim to start completely from scratch again. Quite the opposite, it builds on a rich and heterogeneous body of literature, which spans a wide range of topics, fields, and research perspectives that sometimes complement and sometimes exclude each other. Trying to meet the challenge to explain a field of research (however still nascent) in a few sentences, Peter Levine, a Civic Studies scholar and the co-founder of the Civic Studies Summer Institute, formulated the following sentence: “You are a citizen of a group (regardless of your legal status) if you seriously ask: What should we do?” (Levine & Soltan, 2014, p. 29) This phrase is a useful introduction to Civic Studies, because it tells not only about its research interest (groups of citizens and their civic actions), but it also entails some of the major convictions about human beings, political action and the social world that have concrete consequences for civic research. Let me explain this by extracting the four words of the central question: “*What should we do?*”²

² I will outline the first part of the sentence, the understanding of citizens, in the next section.

What stands for the need for strategic thinking that includes weighing carefully costs and benefits: When taking civic action, citizens have to think critically about potential risks and consequences on the one hand, and be open-minded for possibilities and alternatives on the other. The same applies for research on civic action: being (self-) critical and thinking about alternatives to promote the common good are of central importance for Civic Studies scholars. *Should* reminds us that Civic Studies is “intrinsically about values and principles” (Levine, Soltan, 2014, p. 29). While this does not mean that there is an ultimate “good” or “right”, Civic Studies makes explicitly the normativity inherent in all civic action. It is important to note that this should not be confused with the idea of subjectivity, just the opposite is the case: Normativity points to the need for a continuous and collective “struggle to figure out what is right, quite apart from what we may prefer.” (Levine, Soltan, 2014, p. 29)

This aspect of collective bargaining is also mirrored in the “*We*”: To co-create collectively as citizens does not gain its necessity from the mere fact that we cannot achieve much alone, but from the democratic imperative that we cannot know what we ought to strive for. (Levine, Soltan, 2014, p. 29) Also, Peter Levine does not ask: “What should be done?” This highlights the condition that “we” is not an abstract entity (such as “Brussels”), but it addresses a concrete social group ready to act. To “*do*”, not only to think and talk about change, but to participate in it - this ideal is based on the assumption that thinking is connected to action. It thereby also underlines the central claim for a “practical turn” in the social sciences, because: “we don’t think in focused and disciplined ways about the social world unless we are planning to act; we don’t think *well* unless we learn from our experience” (Levine, Soltan, 2014, p. 29).

The question “*What should we do?*” and its aforementioned implications show that this field of study is born out of concrete deficits and criticisms of previous research in the social sciences: Peter Levine states that there is no other academic field that would pose this question, because the dominant scientific paradigm usually excludes the *should*- and the *we*-part. (Levine, Soltan, 2014, p. 29) Although this is definitely not true for all research prospects, the scientific community is still reluctant towards normative dimensions and participatory practices of research. Therefore, the development of Civic Studies as an academic discipline can be regarded as a political project in two ways: First, it aims at improving societies by helping the citizens to engage politically. Second, it challenges dominant scientific principles by its self-understanding as a normative science engaged in participatory research and active political engagement. (Levine, Soltan, 2014, p. 30)

In doing so, Civic Studies’ scholars criticize the focus on political elites in social sciences and seek to balance them by focusing on civic initiatives. This focus means that Civic Studies points to the importance of contextual understanding, instead of striving for a broad generalization of truth. In order to preclude a common misconception, Civic Studies scholars understand themselves neither as utopians nor as social engineers or technocrats. They are aware of the boundaries and challenges that hold back civic action - but the goal is to overcome them.

After having presented a very general picture of Civic Studies, it must be added that the perspective of Civic Studies that is provided here is one that sees Civic Studies as a field of study in search of potential. Regarding the current state of the European Union, it is not only useful but also particularly urgent to analyze the potential of civic initiatives in the European society, since research of “the crisis” and its aftermaths exploded - but have thus far

remained inconclusive and have not yet generated any significant improvements. This article will show that a change in perspective towards the view of conflict as a transformative force holds potential for a more civic EUrope that overcomes its democratic crisis. The example of the Anti-TTIP-protests is an empirical focal point that can illustrate this line of thought. Following this line of thought, the potential the Anti-TTIP-protests hold lies in a civic democratization of EUrope through conflict.

The Need for European Civics in the Context of the European Crisis

In this section, I will outline the relevance of a European Civics especially regarding the so-called "crisis" that EUrope is facing today. In following Etienne Balibar, I explain why a civic democratization of EUrope has the potential to overcome this crisis: The disintegration of the EU brings about the urgent need to either reestablish the whole EUropean project from bottom-up, or, as Etienne Balibar points out, "there will be none". (Balibar, 2016, p. 16 [my translation]) There must be a democratic alternative in response to the crisis. (Balibar, 2016, p. 15) However, what becomes apparent to an attentive reader here is that mobilization serves as condition and objective alike. Conscious about this logical circle (Balibar, 2016, p. 17), Balibar locates here the very "moment of beginning" (Balibar, 2016, p. 84 (my translation)). "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." (Gramsci, 1971, p. 276) If we take Gramsci's definition and the image of a disease as a starting point, the task is to find remedies, or in Civic Studies terms to help develop strategies and skills to treat these symptoms. We can neither just wait for them to disappear nor can we apologize our inaction by lack of influence.

Etienne Balibar, French philosopher of the political Left, proposes an unusual idea how to cure EUrope from its neoliberal diseases: In his book "Europe, crise et fin?" (Balibar, 2016) he first analyzes the destructive and destructing EUropean power structures and then poses the question how these structures can be modified at all. His answer is what he calls provocatively "European populism" which in his eyes may serve as the basis of a conflictual and collective bottom-up mass movement for Europe. He sees the term "populism" stigmatized in the current discourse, in which it is predominantly ascribed to nationalistic, xenophobic, racist mass movements. However, he insists on the term due to its radical democratic underpinning, which for him is the actual characteristic of "populism": for him, populism is "just that addition to democracy [...] or maybe even its excess that is based on participation, on protests, on demands and on (spontaneous and organized) mass movements, without which to talk about democracy would remain an empty word or even a mystification." (Balibar, 2016, p. 46 [my translation]) While his concept of "European populism" is clearly debatable, it best captures what Balibar's idea of a European civic democratization says: "what is needed is rather a fresh mobilization of the people, which can only start from protest" (Balibar, 2016, p. 49 [my translation]). He argues that this "European populism" must be based on a radically democratic foundation and in strong opposition to xenophobic and nationalistic - in Chantal Mouffe's words: anti-pluralist³ - ideologies. A democratic movement of active European citizens, Balibar argues, revives the experiences

³ This is what Chantal Mouffe argues against in her concept of "agonistic pluralism", which will be a central point of reference when it comes to conflict theory.

of which forces unite and what dissociates the European people. (Balibar, 2016, p. 59) What both authors, Balibar and Mouffe, stress in their (obviously very different) works is the fact that diversity and solidarity are not mutually exclusive, but can be a driving force to (EUrope's) democratic development.

Regarding the current state of the European Union, it is not only useful but also particularly urgent to analyze the potential of civic initiatives in Europe: Going back to Gramsci's definition of "the crisis", I presume that researchers just like every citizen have the chance as well as the responsibility to give birth to "the new". While research on the so-called European crisis and European populist movements exploded during the last years, this article advocates for a change in perspective: It aims to call attention to the potential of conflict as a transformative force, a force towards a civic democratization of EUrope to overcome its "European crisis".

Civic Studies and the Potential of a European Civics

As the attentive reader might have noticed, the starting point of this article is twofold. On the one hand, I have explored the nascent field of Civic Studies and witnessed it as a valuable contribution to our understanding of citizens and their role in liberal democracies. As the academic richness and inner heterogeneity of Civic Studies cannot be captured in one article, I will put my focus on Civic Studies as a science of social potential. This dimension of Civic Studies opens up for new research *on* and *for* citizens in EUrope today. On the other hand, in the last couple of years we have seen an outstanding mobilization of European citizens going on the streets against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US. In the last four years, protests against this trade deal took place all over EUrope (and the US) and reached a remarkable politicization of citizens. Asking for the potential of this conflict is a profitable angle to look at the Anti-TTIP-protests in the context of the so-called "European crisis" today.

Against the background of the need for civic democratization of Europe, I will deepen an understanding of Civic Studies enriched with conflict theory, which helps to carry out research on European citizens ready to take civic action. Therefore, I will take a closer look on five elements of Civic Studies and expand those using insights from conflict theory: First, the idea of citizens as creative agents of political change, as "co-creators of their worlds". Second, the role of conflict as an integrative political force that harbors significant potential for socio-political change. Third, the understanding that civic action can socialize citizens politically as well as convey meanings of citizenship. Fourth, the normative orientation, and fifth, the civically engaged research practice are methodological aspects that follow from the three concepts mentioned above. In all sections, the examples of the Anti-TTIP-protests serve as an empirical focal point that is used to illustrate these line of thoughts.

1. Citizens as Co-creators of their Worlds

In the following, I will outline what is meant by citizenship, and especially active European citizenship, complemented by an explanation of the concept of co-creation that is used by Civic Studies scholars. The key characteristics of my own approach to European citizenship

finally constitute the concept of a European Civics that is introduced in the last part of this chapter.

First of all, it has to be acknowledged that many authors of political theory have written on citizenship. What characterizes the understanding of Civic Studies provided here can best be exemplified by referring to two of the most contrasting political theorists of the political Left, Chantal Mouffe and Jürgen Habermas. The latter, Jürgen Habermas, employs a notion of citizenship in deliberative democracy that sees citizens as speakers and judges of the common good. Deliberative processes of negotiation are appreciated by Civic Studies since this is useful for fair and equal decisions. However, in an understanding of Civic Studies that approves of conflicts as a productive force, Habermas' ideal of a deliberative democracy is unable to see the potential that conflict may entail. In contrast to conflict theory, the Habermasian model is consensus-oriented, and thereby rejects the view that conflicts are fundamentally irreconcilable - a perspective that Chantal Mouffe calls an "anti-political vision which refuses to acknowledge the antagonistic dimension of 'the political'" (Mouffe, 2005, p.2). From her agonistic perspective however, conflict becomes the central element of the "political" itself, the very force to "democratize democracy" (Mouffe, 2005, p.2). If Civic Studies is about self-organized efforts to actively co-create the world around us (Levine, 2014, p.7), the Habermasian model of deliberation also falls short of the citizen's role in the democratic process. It does not sufficiently emphasize the pro-active role of the political subjects who have multiple opportunities to alter and redesign the structures of society on their own. If we relate this to famous authors of political theory, the choice would rather be Hannah Arendt, whose "vita activa" (Arendt, 1981, p. 230) captures the necessity and possibility of "world building" by the citizens. Here, citizens are understood as *co-creators*, rather than simply *participants* of the world we share in common" (Boyte & Scarnati, 2014, 78).

As I elucidated earlier, Peter Levine defined a citizen of a group (which in most cases is not the national society) as a person who asks: "What should we do?" Going back to this definition of a citizen as a member of a group, it is of great importance to add that what is meant here has nothing to do with the excluding mechanisms of citizenship - as practiced for example in the legal definition of citizenship: By the definition of rights and duties, those citizens with a passport have access to privileges, which is separating them from those who do not. Here, a civic understanding of citizenship contrasts this legal perspective on citizens as customers of "government-centered acts" (Boyte & Scarnati, 2014, 79) (i.e. voters, welfare recipients...). Consequently, I also reject the narrow geographical understanding of citizenship commonly found in the discourse on EU citizenship. Whether national, European or global, political communities are understood here as the forum that enables co-creation and group loyalty and not primarily as geographical entities. On the level of political theory, I distance myself from the liberalist equation of citizens with individuals who pursue their own narrow interests regardless of the common good. (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 268) I agree with Westheimer and Kahne who, in an illuminating study, point to this individualistic concept as a *non-political* notion of citizenship. (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004)

In contrast to these understandings of citizenship, I find it particularly useful to refer to two central aspects that characterize "citizens" in Civic Studies: The first one is a *holistic understanding*, in which citizens are not seen in partial terms, as voters, as taxpayers, as demonstrators, as volunteers, but as subjects with a civic identity. (Boyte & Scarnati, 2014,

p. 80) I use the term “civic identity” as a “sense of oneself as a civic actor” (Hart et al., 2011, p. 771). Hereby, I refer to Hart et al. stating that “Civic Identity infuses meaning in, and provides the motivation for civic behavior” (Hart et al., 2011, p. 771). Regarding the current democratic crisis of the EU, the absence of a strong civic identity could explain the apathy of citizens in the political debate. A fragmentation of civic identities in Europe makes it difficult to co-create civic power into agency-based civic action.⁴ In contrast to this finding, the TTIP protests show signs of such civic action. This is why they have the potential to shape and develop the civic identities and political practices of the European Civics. As I will outline in chapter three, to an especially high degree, protest experiences socialize citizen’s civic identity.

The second aspect concerns the understanding of citizens as *co-creators of their worlds* in Civic Studies: “Civic Studies aims to develop ideas and ways of thinking helpful to human beings in their capacity as co-creators of their worlds.” (Soltan, 2014, p. 9) Here, the term “co-creators” implies that civic action entails not just individual active engagement, but also a sense of public spiritedness: “To co-create is jointly [my emphasis] to bring something into existence” (Soltan, 2014, p. 9). In researching the Anti-TTIP-movement, “co-creation” means self-organized and cooperative efforts against TTIP by a large number of people who would otherwise be divided: In the Anti-TTIP-protests, groups for animals’ rights and consumer standards, globalization critics and union-members were mobilized under the common flag to “STOP TTIP”.⁵ The self-organized European Citizen Initiative (sECI), that counts more than 3,3 Million signatures against TTIP, brought together 500 organizations in protest against TTIP and hereby created the European network “STOP TTIP”. Looking more closely at the organizational structure of the collective, we see that it is anything but homogeneous: National as well as ideological heterogeneity and differences in strength and organization characterize the movement. It might even turn out that the only thing the actors have in common is the goal to “STOP TTIP”. But despite these differences, growing European cooperation and cohesion can be observed. The Anti-TTIP-protestors find themselves united in the paradoxical situation to which Balibar refers to as “double opposition” (Balibar, 2016, p. 29 [my translation]): On the one hand they oppose the existent, anti-democratic structures of the European Union, on the other hand they are not against the European Union as a whole.

When looking at TTIP-opponents, the claim is not that this group represents European citizens in general. The focus on those specific citizens being active in political conflicts in and about Europe relates to the assumption that political practices shape the self-understanding as a European citizen. The hypothesis I will outline in the third chapter is that experience plays a crucial role in this identification process. Regardless of the motives that drive people to engage in protests, during the collective, performative action, experiential learning takes place that will shape their self-understandings as European citizens. If the social world is regarded as a “field that social actors choose how to negotiate” (Schram, 2014, p. 95), then it is interesting to focus on those social actors willing to formulate political demands in order to shape this negotiation process of the social world. I hereby agree with Dewey saying that “power must be relative to doing something” (Dewey, 1916, p. 127 as cited in Saltmarsh, 1996).

⁴ I refer to Chantal Mouffe here, who claims the reason for political apathy and populism is the indistinguishability of the political opposition. (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104)

⁵ online: STOP-TTIP-ALLIANCE (<https://stop-ttip.org>)

The group of citizens I decided to look at is what I call “European Civics”. This term was born out of the dominant use of the term “European citizens”: First, I observed that “European citizens” is often reduced to the legal dimension of citizenship (i.e. EU-passport-holders), it secondly often implies a narrow understanding of political participation (i.e. voting, taxpaying) and it is thirdly often restricted to support for the political system (i.e. civil not *civic* action). Therefore, I refer to the term “European Civics” to distinguish European citizens from EU citizens, as well as to distinguish citizens critical of the system from voters and taxpayers. It is meant as a (so far only partly existent) political community in Europe that shares the self-understanding as European citizens and the goal to co-create an alternative Europe from bottom-up.

The analysis of those citizens active in the Anti-TTIP-protests seems to be especially useful to study a European Civics because those citizens are regarded as its constituents. Therefore, it is profitable to know more about those *active* European citizens, rather than researching European citizens in general or passive TTIP-opponents. Also, a lot of research has already been done on the ways their demands are questioned and defended in the political arena, for example by EUropean institutions or the media. (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2015; Eliasson, 2014; Ghailani & Del Castillo, 2015; Strange, 2013; Strange, 2015; Vargiu, 2015) But to ask for the potential of conflict opens up for a new perspective: The “TTIP-conflict” is a particularly suitable area of civic research: A broad civic opposition against TTIP occurred both on the European and on the American side. Looking at EUrope, a wide range of collective political action took place, ranging from European Days of Action (in October 2014 and April 2015), European-wide action meetings, demonstrations in several European cities (the biggest took place with 250.000 participants in Berlin in October 2015) to the organization of the biggest European citizens' initiative in the EU's history, which gained more than 3,3 million signatures during one year.⁶ Looking at this conflict from a Civic Studies' perspective allows scholars not only to understand *what* is negotiated in the TTIP discourse, but also to study possible modes of negotiation, especially conflict - and how to carve out its potential in regard of a European Civics.

2. Conflict as “the Political” with a civic Potential

As the headline suggests, the following section is divided in two main aspects: Firstly, the role of conflict in the realm of “the political” and secondly, the conceptualization of civic potential. The concept of “the political” serves as the theoretical frame in which the democratic potential of conflict is established. Based on this, it is argued with Chantal Mouffe and Etienne Balibar why conflict must be regarded as a driving force for the civic democratization of EUrope. As I already pointed out earlier, my central argument is that Civic Studies would benefit from a perspective that takes seriously the functions of social conflict. I will demonstrate this analyzing the TTIP-conflict from the perspective of Lewis Coser, one of the most influential conflict theorists. The second part will outline what potential-oriented research means again using the example of the Anti-TTIP-protests. Since asking for

⁶ The European Citizen Initiative was refused to be accepted by the European Commission. I will show that, as a consequence, an alliance of 500 organizations in protest created the European movement against TTIP.

potential always includes the idea to follow political aims, I will conclude with the political implications which guide this research.

On a theoretical basis, the European Civics can be situated in the context of discussions (Van Deth, 2008; Mouffe, 2007; Mouffe, 2014; Marchart, 2010) which critically probe the very notion of “the political”.⁷ The political ideal that Civic Studies scholars share with these authors is characterized by the plurality of opposing and sometimes conflicting views, which are expressed and debated in the political space - and which finally form the basis on which political decisions are made.⁸ Civic political action in the understanding provided here is nourished by the concept of “the political”: It is not the task to know *the* “right” answer to political questions, occasionally threatened by voices of dissent - quite on the contrary: It builds on the idea that conflict is the very nature of the political and the mode in which political change happens.

When asking how this concept of “conflict as the political” relates to the aforementioned ideal of civic democratization, one of the most prominent references is Chantal Mouffe. Her theory of agonistic pluralism states that difference, conflict and dissent play a crucial part to keep the democratic process alive: “Agonism” is used to describe a legitimate “we”-“them”-relation between political adversaries under which democratic conflict is possible. (Mouffe, 2004, p. 20) She distances herself from the idea that the task of democratic institutions is to eliminate conflict. Instead, her understanding of democratic practices in a pluralist society follows the ideal to establish a strong public sphere of contestation, which for her is the “sine qua non for an effective exercise for democracy” (Mouffe, 2004, p. 3).

When we understand democracy as the process in which different groups compete for political power, they are depending on citizens supporting the group’s collective goals. But what mobilizes citizens to question political structures and policies? Here, Balibar’s understanding of the political can serve as a point of reference: He attests EUrope growing political and social disparities since the outbreak of the crisis (Balibar, 2016, p. 91), which now in turn asks for alternatives. The struggle that necessarily accompanies the political process to bring these alternatives into being can only take place in the very heart of the political: “Neither can this conflict develop outside a political space [...], nor can its further development take place without an anchorage in such a political space.” (Balibar, 2016, p. 94 [my translation])

What does the goal to civically democratize EUrope mean then? Following Balibar, it means “more opportunities for an opposition based on a transnational basis against decisions of the executive or even against parliamentary majorities” (Balibar, 2016, p. 25 [my translation]). This understanding points to the very notion of a *civic*, in contrast to a *civil* democratization. Due to the fact that democracy is not generally understood in an agonistic way, it is crucial to put in concrete terms the difference to top-down attempts to overcome the often lamented “democratic deficit” of the EU: As Rumford points out, *institutional* democratization is often carried out in a “piecemeal fashion” (Rumford, 2003, p. 34), which reproduces clear limits of how democratic political elites want the EU to become. It is therefore of great importance

⁷ The distinction between politics and the political, which is today common sense of critical political theory, was popularized in the late seventies by Claude Lefort. In his theory, “the political” is the collective power that questions authority, i.e. “politics”. In democracy, he states, power is always dependent on legitimacy which creates an “empty place of power”. Theorists of “the political” (Schmitt, Foucault, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, Mouffe, Rancière, Badiou) question the classical, state-oriented conception of politics and propose the concept of “the political” as its counter pole.

⁸ Of course, democratic politics is not exclusively a forum to address conflict but also to negotiate ways and strategies to deal with differences and to realize productive civic action.

to make clear that *civic* democratization of Europe is closely intertwined to the understanding of “conflict as the political”. I would even state that this is the necessary starting point for posing the question under which conditions a civic democratization becomes realizable, or, in the terms of Civic Studies: “from initially impossible [...] [to] merely difficult”. This does not mean that I don’t agree with studies stating that the absence of a lively European civil society contributes to the democratic deficit of the European Union. (Rumford, 2003, p. 26) But what is of interest here is the *civic* potential of conflict for European democracy. In short, my main focus is “how” democratic alternatives to the current European status quo can be co-created through conflict.

I see Civic Studies as a great contribution to both political and academic questions on civic engagement and the empowerment of citizens. However, the field lacks of a serious encounter of the functions of conflict in liberal democracies. It would benefit from integrating conflict theory, in which conflict is regarded as a force for both civic identification and mobilization. Civic Studies is very compatible with some of the key assumptions of conflict theory, in the way that it regards citizens as active political subjects who are not just consenting to the status quo of the political community they live in. In that sense, it is closely connected to the aforementioned concept that highlights political conflict as a substantial part of the political sphere. This understanding builds on well-known authors like Coser, who (just like Simmel earlier (1908)) sees conflict as a form of socialization (Coser, 1956, p. 31) and is interested in “the functions of social conflict” rather than its contents or its causes. Taking this as a starting point, I will outline the role of conflict for the creation of a European Civics.

Following Coser in the search for the integrative forces of conflict, at least three connecting points to the Anti-TTIP-protests can be mentioned here. This is where the added value of conflict theory for researching civic conflict becomes visible: First, Coser states that conflict may lead to new institutional structures. He outlines the possibility to re-establish unity or even to establish relationships where no relation existed before. (Coser, 1956, p. 69, 73) Using the example of the Anti-TTIP-movement, new formations and coalitions between unrelated or even antagonistic groups were created based on the understanding that their members have the collective interest to “STOP TTIP”⁹ and engage against a common opponent (f. ex. US and EU institutions, corporate power representatives). Here, a profitable field of research for Civic Studies opens up asking under which conditions a collective civic consciousness may arise. Second, conflict revitalizes social norms and creates a new framework of rules (Coser, 1956, p. 155 f.) (and windows of opportunities, Civic Studies researchers would add) since it leads to a modification and creation of how we understand our shared political environment, such as the EU. In the case of the Anti-TTIP-protests, this brings the question of European civiness back to the fore: Which European citizens do we want (to be)? Third and last, when having in mind the democratic crisis of the EU, Coser is a helpful ally to remind us that it is wrong to think that a relationship free of conflict is a sign for *not* having disruptive elements. The very opposite can be the case: The occurrence of conflict can indicate and maintain the democratic strength and stability of a relationship, since conflict can serve as a balancing mechanism. This is the shift of perspective that asks for potential in conflict, which I will advocate in the following using the example of the Anti-TTIP-Protests.

⁹ https://stop-ttip.org/?noredirect=en_GB

It is crucial to note that asking for the potential is just one characteristic of Civic Studies, however, when it comes to the discourse on the so-called “European crisis”, it is of central importance. Because it helps to highlight possibilities of alternative futures envisioned by the citizens themselves as well as to carve out the existing potential on the way to a more civic EUrope. I focus on the *potential* of the TTIP-conflict because I assume that citizens have the capacity to influence its course and outcome. Therefore, I approach this specific venue of civic engagement, i.e. EUrope, asking how it can become a more civic space. This refers to my normative claim that this conflict surrounding TTIP holds the potential to give rise to a European Civics. To explore this, Civic Studies stands out from the traditional research interest and research questions when understood as a science of social potential: “The key is the idea of difficulty” (Soltan, 2014, p. 12). Karol Soltan expands on the aim of potential-oriented social science: “We turn something that was initially impossible into something that is merely difficult, and then we reduce this difficulty further.” (Soltan, 2014, p. 12) The very fact of exploring and supporting the social potential of situations is what distinguishes Civic Studies from an exclusively problem-driven or theory-driven approach: While the latter is mostly incompatible with the claim for practical relevance in Civic Studies, a problem-oriented science differs in terms of its epistemological aspiration: Instead of merely identifying *what is* the problem, a potential- and solution-oriented approach seeks to understand *what should be* the alternative and *how* can it be archived. While this is no criticism of a problem-oriented approach in general, it can absolutely be understood as a reaction against the risk to reproduce the power relations between practical knowledge and academic knowledge: For example, if the researcher is the one who identifies a “deficit” that needs to be corrected without having any contact to the people presumably affected by it.

When looking at TTIP from a the potential-oriented perspective, we see that the conflict has the potential to redistribute power towards the citizens. The context of a perceived European crisis cannot be ignored: The crisis discourses and realities framed the Anti-TTIP-protests from the very beginning and the citizen’s low level of trust influenced the formation of the Anti-TTIP-movement. The aforementioned dimension of the political crisis of the EU, the lack of trust in EU institutions by its citizens, is mirrored in a Eurobarometer Study from fall 2014. It shows that trust in EUropean democracy is particularly low for TTIP opponents: Only 4% of the German TTIP-opponents asked were content with the democratic functioning of the EU system, while 43% were dissatisfied. Likewise, 42% respondents do not see their voice is heard in the democratic process of the EU¹⁰. If concerns about transparency in the TTIP negotiations are interpreted as a proxy for trust, the low level of trust supported citizen’s critical attitude towards EU initiatives in general.

Despite this general discontent and lack of trust, I state that the manifestation of a conflict between citizens and the EU has fostered the formation of the Anti-TTIP-movement: When the protest against TTIP was growing in 2014, the organization “STOP TTIP” launched a European Citizen Initiative (ECI) against TTIP. If accepted, this democratic mechanism allows EU citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies. In regard of the growing opposition against TTIP, the EU was unsure what to expect from its citizens, a fact that became most clearly visible in the rejection of the European Citizen Initiative in 2014 due to “formal” reasons.¹¹ This event was the kick-off for the formation of a European

¹⁰ EB 82, country report Germany (2014)

¹¹ Only recently a judgement of the ECJ confirmed the legality of the ECI:
(<https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2017-05/cp170049en.pdf>)

movement against TTIP, due to the fact that it was the very moment, when conflict parties were constructed. Apart from the legal question if the rejection was justified or not this was a central moment for the unification of the very diverse landscape of TTIP-critics in the Anti-TTIP-movement. In democratic terms, those citizens felt pushed away by the Commission and saw their concerns not being recognized. This reactivated the gap between ‘the people’ and ‘the politicians’ which has already deepened during the years of crisis. A quote by John Hilary, a member of the “STOP TTIP” citizens’ committee, expresses this formation of opposition: *“The 3 million signatures collected for this petition shows that the people of Europe stand firmly against these corporate driven trade deals. The people of Europe have spoken, the politicians must no longer turn their backs on their constituents”* [all my emphasis]. (EurActiv, 2015)¹² This quote illustrates both, the aforementioned feeling of rejection and its reaction to it: A formation of a collective of European citizens fighting against the policy of the EU institutions. This suggests that the conflict surrounding TTIP has the potential foster a stronger unity of citizens. It also reactivated and possibly broadened the gap between “Brussels” and “the citizens” which made the situation even more conflictual.

In sum, I understand Civic Studies as potential-oriented research which asks for the conditions, processes and strategies of a civic phenomenon. In the case of the Anti-TTIP-protests this means to ask for the conditions, processes and strategies which enable the co-creation of a European Civics. But it is important to note that the aim is not merely to understand, but to dig deeper and pose the question: How can we exploit this potential of conflict further? The difference to other fields of research is thus, that Civic Studies does not only focus on the analysis of problems that occur, but asks for civic potential and seeks to develop strategies in order to deal with the problems identified in the first step.

By following this approach, my research on the TTIP-conflict not only contributes to the understanding of the Anti-TTIP-protests and their meaning from the perspective of European citizens. When taking seriously the search for the potential of this conflict, it may increase the visibility of an example of effective European civic work that has long been lamented as deficient. The common narrative of “the European citizens” draw a pessimistic picture of their political participation sometimes even pathologizing their political apathy. (Görlach, 2016)¹³ Stating that citizenship is a “hollow” and “meaningless” (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 1) idea for most parts of the European population, the citizen's “disillusionment” is accused to contribute to the “crisis of legitimacy” of the European institutions. What is often left out of that narrative is a trend towards direct intervention in political questions that can be observed in movements like the Anti-TTIP-protests. They demand more rights to direct participation; however, in contrast to the loud and omnipresent lamentations of the “un-political” European citizen, “this participation is effectively depoliticized” (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 14). A potential-oriented perspective questions the narratives of European citizens limited to the extremes of either political apathy or populist radicalization of European citizens. By asking for potential, I seek to overcome these simplified analysis and outline a concept of citizenship that is neither victimizing the citizens as powerless puppets of a neoliberal and corporate-driven political elite, nor blaming them as an apathetic, indifferent or dismissive (homogeneous) mass. This narrative starts off from the specific institutional design of the EU and I state that it therefore cannot be resolved without recognizing the specifications that

¹² John Hilary, executive director of War on Want, quoted in an article by EurActiv, 2015

¹³ Newspaper article, headlined: “Europe needs better citizens” by Görlach, 2016

result from that. Due to the fact that the EU is not merely a market union or a state, the unique political construction of the EU is often referred to as a “birth defect” (Balibar, 2016, p. 47). However, I am interested in the question how the characteristic design of EUrope (and here I also refer to historical, cultural and institutional dimensions) opens windows of opportunity for citizens ready to act, in short: Which potential holds the EUropean dimension to co-create a self-understanding of citizens different from the one we see on a national level? While I agree that visibility alone is not sufficient to create a collective self-understanding as European citizens, it nevertheless contributes to the co-creation of a community of active European citizens - the European Civics.

3. Civic Performance as political Socialization

In the following section, I will highlight the interconnectedness of the two aspects self-understanding and protest experience. Before I elaborate on the effects of civic performance for the self-understanding as a European citizen, I want to deepen the understanding of the scientific value that Civic Studies adds to this question. I argue that the key is the aforementioned focus on civic potential that allows for a research that goes beyond political problems that are met by academic explanations. This search for potential (and strategies to exploit it) addresses the standing debate over agency and structure in the social sciences: Scholars of Civic Studies would stress that human action is embedded in a world where power structures are at work - but it is crucial to understand that they, too, are a result of human action. In its framing statement, the “civic intellectual community” acknowledges: “human action is partly a product of causal structures” (Boyte et al, 2007, p. 2) - but also of skills¹⁴. Therefore, Civic Studies deals with the theoretical question which skills and conditions are needed to redesign apparently casual and often naturalized factors. Again, the Civic Studies framing statement says that “action is a product of skills, not simply causes”, meaning that citizens equipped with skills can design and redesign the system of causes. (Boyte et al, 2007, p. 3) While it is obvious that agency plays a crucial role in Civic Studies, citizens are regarded as “both ruled and rulers” (Boyte et al, 2007, p. 3) of the structures they live in. When having the relevant skills and capacities¹⁵, citizens are capable to redesign the structures of power - and this is what Civic Studies claims to develop.

In this sense, Civic Studies does not merely research or even concede citizen’s agency - the goal is to develop ways to foster this civic agency. Researching the conditions under which a formation of a European Civics is possible, scholars of that field hope to find ways helpful for citizens in this process of creation. Going back to the example of the Anti-TTIP-protests, Civic Studies scholars would research skills and capacities, meaning which personal abilities and which technical prerequisites are needed to make people go on the streets against TTIP. However, I stress the importance to first understand what is needed to become an active European citizen: What makes citizens feel the need to re-design EUropean policies as well as political power structures when raising their voice against TTIP in protests? I would state that the focus on skills and capacities is just one way to understand how a European Civics comes alive; an additional perspective asks which self-understanding is needed to take into consideration to eventually use these skills, asking: *What kind of self-*

¹⁴ Some of them inherited, some teachable.

¹⁵ “Relevant” are not only reasonable and instrumental skills to achieve the ends wanted, but also the capacity to reflect on appropriate means and their potential outcomes. (Boyte et al., 2007, p. 3)

understanding translates into civic action? And, equally important, how is this transformed, altered or reproduced through civic action? And finally: Why are conflicts on the transatlantic negotiations of a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) an insightful and useful case to examine the experiential construction process of self-understandings as European citizens? These are questions I seek to address in the next part of the chapter.

To understand how the self-understanding as a citizen and civic protests are intertwined, the term “civic performance” is a useful device. In his article on “A definition of “civic””, Peter Levine detects different definitions of the term from the literature and thereby identifies its wide and blurry spectrum of usage. (Levine, 2016) One perspective highlights the meaning of “civic performance”: “Civic life offers spaces for people to perform and to be recognized by others.” “Performance” must be understood as a negotiation process in which the self-understanding of a group is portrayed publicly, whilst “the outside” recognizes and/or questions this performance - and thereby keeps this identity building process going. To “display characters” (Levine, 2016), as Peter Levine calls it, is a substantial aspect of an identity building process. In the case of my research on active TTIP-opponents, public protests are performances which constitute (and potentially irritate or change) their self-understanding as European citizens, i.e. their civic identity. Protest performance is displayed in different forms of civic engagement used by Anti-TTIP-activists, such as demonstrations, meetings and conferences, Days of Action, and artistic events. The study of such performative action is the idea that transnational social cohesion cannot purely rely on a cognitive understanding about the causes, problems and objectives. Instead, collective actions play an important role for cohesion, both in everyday life as well as in extraordinary activities: Personal exchange and sharing negative and positive experiences create trust and form a distinction from “the other”. (Rucht, 1995) Therefore, protest is as much a signal to those being in power, as it is for internal cohesion.

How can we relate this concept of civic performance to the construction of a civic self-understanding? Starting from the premise that “The construction of the citizen is in part a construction of an identity” (Haste, 2004, p. 421), I will outline first what I mean by “self-understanding as a citizen” and second, how this goes together with the multiplicity of pluralist societies - which is understood not as a threat but as an opportunity to unite European citizens. If the construction of European citizens is a construction of an identity, it implies that *acting* and *feeling* as (in contrast to *being*) a citizen is not an individual act that can be understood in terms of pre-existing values and beliefs of the individual only. Instead, a civic self-understanding is a continuous process of mutual influence between the self and the political world- connected through the realm of experience. We see that acting and feeling as a citizen instead of being a citizen is by no means a private thing but always the involvement in collective co-creation: During the process of political action, values and beliefs are put into practice and are thereby re-formulated in public. Therefore, it is of special interest how civic identity is shaped in the very moment of conflict in which different understandings of the political world collide and mingle.

In protest action, civicness can become part of the self, given that it is experienced and reflected: This is exactly what is meant when I refer to a civic self-understanding: ““how people see themselves as citizens and act upon this” (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 13). It has to be clear that to act and to feel as a citizen can be both, result and cause of the protest action. In fact, if protest is experienced (however not necessarily reflected in that stage), it always impacts a person’s civic self-understanding: Neither can a person experience without

being involved emotionally nor can the person's initial understanding of acting as a citizen (as we assume that experiential learning is always collective) remain unchanged. Having said this, I follow Jones and Gaventa who propose an understanding of citizenship which takes as its starting point the concept of agency: "conceptualizing citizenship as agency gives a central role to the individual's self-identity as a citizen, and emphasizes the thought and action, which this enables." (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 6) In the example of a community project, Jones and Gaventa illustrate how workers of a company developed civic identities when experiencing themselves as "active agents of their own affairs" (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 6). Coming back to the introductory quote, for the construction of their civic self-understanding it was essential for those workers to play an active role in defining this identity - and eventually to use it as an instrument for change.

What stands out is that identity is crucial to generate the feeling of being *of* a community, instead of being *in* a community. (Saltmarsh, 1995, p. 20) This underlines my understanding of active European citizen who are *taking* part in a community that I call a "European Civics". It highlights the emotional component of collective political action (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104) and thereby contrasts with passively *being* part of a community. Having pointed out collectiveness as one of the main characteristics of identity construction, this brings us to the necessary question how civic self-understanding can emerge in the pluralistic societies we live in. Does multiplicity stand in opposition to the construction of a collective identity and how?

To critically investigate the danger to essentialism and homogenization of citizens under a "veil of ignorance" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 26), Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism seems to be a useful starting point. To understand the way Mouffe provides an answer to the tension between collective identity and plurality in modern societies it is useful to have a look at how identity is understood in her terms: Mouffe argues that identity is a sum of subject positions, which come into being through dominant categories that the individual is confronted with, such as: being a woman, being an activist, being homosexual, being a person of color, being European... Each of these dimensions is shaping the others, subject positions influence and often even control the way in which people behave - in order to meet socially expected norms. A group identity emerges in the process of identification with others who have similar subject positions. (Jones & Gaventa, 2002, p. 6) The political dimension of this process is what happens in collective political action against TTIP when this particular subject position - being a European citizen - becomes dominant in the moment of protesting: The "European" dimension of an individual's political identity is practiced in citizen action, and at the same time the collective European identity is constructed and re-constructed. Identification with the group becomes possible through the construction of a clearly competitive and potentially conflictual definition of a collective "we" in contrast to "them". In her understanding, this "vibrant clash of democratic political positions" is the indicator for a flourishing democracy of pluralist societies. This makes clear why Mouffe rejects the consensus-oriented Habermasian model of deliberation: "Too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104).

In this last section, I bring together the concept of civic self-understanding and civic performance exemplified in the case of Anti-TTIP-protests following the question: Why are conflicts surrounding TTIP an insightful case to examine the experiential construction process of self-understandings as European citizens? The idea that Pan-European issues could lead to a European public sphere was and still is extensively debated in academia

(Habermas, 2001; Habermas, 2011; Rumford, 2003; Bostanci, 2014; Delanty, 1995), but neither European topics nor transnational networks of elites were able to launch a sustainable European identification process until today. What makes the Anti-TTIP-protests an interesting case is the fact that the movement articulated a transnational civic vision of Europe in contrast to the neoliberal agenda of the EU and the so-called "American way of life". In the center of the debate they put the "European citizen", who is constructed as pro-European and EU-critical. This rapidly mobilized people to join the movement: When in October 10th 2015, 50.000 people flooded the streets of Berlin against TTIP it was the largest demonstration since the break out of the Iraq war. But Anti-TTIP-protest is in no way only a German phenomenon. In other civil societies throughout Europe, critical debates surrounding TTIP can be observed. While multiple national groups united against TTIP do not yet form a European movement per se, the processes of Europeanization of protest action soon lead to the (self-organized) European Citizen Initiative (sECI), a political mechanism of the European Commission to participate directly in the development of EU policies. After only one year, the sECI counted 3,3 Million signatures against TTIP, which shows that there is doubt and resistance against TTIP in all 28 European countries. As I argued earlier, this sECI brought together 500 organizations in protest against TTIP and hereby launched the creation the movement against TTIP. Its European framework supported the movement building process and politicized a self-confident and active, critical mass under the common goal to „STOP TTIP“.

Speaking of performative action, European Days of Action as well as demonstrations, that take place at the same time in different European places, can serve as an example. Such events strengthen the sense of community due to the strong emotions they evoke - especially when there is a lot of support to it such as in most of the Anti-TTIP-protests. Studies on anti-corporate protests show that collective action evokes emotions like anger, as well as joy and euphoria; feelings that strengthen the group identity through their common experience. (Juris, 2008, p. 63) Protest forms differ in their emotional intensity: Artistic forms of action, such as the "Tango against TTIP" at the demonstration in Berlin, are emotionally more intense than classical forms of protest such as the collection of signatures during the European Citizen Initiative. In addition to the emotional intensity of the demonstrations and European Days of Action, these actions keep another important resource of collective identity building: They are the building blocks of a joint movement narrative - both for those the inside and the outside of the movement. To be more precise, the (biggest) demonstration against TTIP that took place in Berlin on 10th October 2015 as well as the collection of almost 3,3 million signatures in one year is the basis of the movement's founding myth.

The analysis of the Anti-TTIP-protests reveals parts of the puzzle of how a civic identity can be co-created in collective, transnational protests. We have seen that the feeling to be part of a European movement against TTIP evokes a sense of a civic "we". To co-create this civic self-understanding as a European citizen, people need the lived, personal experience to develop this potential further.

4. Civic Studies as a normative Science

Having in mind the practical-political impetus of civic research (which I elaborated on in the previous chapter), we need to turn attention to the fact that potential-oriented research with a practical aim is always bound to normative requirements. What follows from this normative

dimension in civic research is the very need to ask *which form* of civic engagement is aimed to strengthen. After having outlined the normative framework of Civic Studies in the first part, the second part of this chapter consists of transferring these insights to the actual European-wide trend towards populism.

Civic Studies makes research in the sense that it asks: *What happens, what makes life better and what works?* It assumes the entanglement and thereby the mutual interference of the three aspects facts, values and strategies. (Levine, 2014, p. 4f.) The latter, research on strategies, implies the assumption that “human ideals are vague, distorted, and weak.” (Soltan, 2014, 13) As I pointed out in the last chapter, when asking “*what works*” the task is to find strategies that guide civic action, weaken distorted forces and strengthen the ideals embedded in civic action. When asking “*what happens*” in today’s Europe, narratives of multiple European crises are put on the plan: an economic crisis, a crisis of solidarity, a crisis of democracy, a crisis of legitimacy, an identity crisis... (Weiler, 2011; Delanty, 2013; Delanty, 2014; Murray-Leach, 2014) Unsurprisingly, “political alienation” and “shrinking citizenship” (Boyte & Scarnati, 2014, p. 87) are regarded as an alarming consequence also by Civic Studies scholars. When asking “*what makes life better*”, the current state of the EU with its aforementioned symptoms emphasizes the need to study and to empower European citizenship and the political practices that follow.

Besides researching empirical facts and practical strategies (that include skills and capacities), civic research therefore asks for moral reflection. Against the assumption that value-free science and the exclusion of value commitments from politics are possible, Civic Studies would advocate for the potential it harbors, especially when normative claims cause conflicts such as in the Anti-TTIP-protests. Civic Studies is a *normative* science in the sense that it treats norms and values as insightful factors of science as well as political engagement: Norms are understood here as “the grammar of society” (Altinay, 2013, p. 84). Consequently, Civic Studies scholars distance themselves from the dominant objective in social sciences to do “value-free” research, in which values and norms are regarded as biases that have to be minimized or disclosed. (Levine, 2012, p. 33) It similarly criticizes the aim to research people’s values as opinions or tastes that have to be investigated, but to diminish the moral reflection on it: “to say that morality is a mere matter of opinion is to deny the existence of vice and evil” (Levine, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, scholars of Civic Studies would state that the possibility and desirability of an “unbiased” ideal of science has to be rejected. Instead, they would ask for the critical assessment and moral legitimation of values and see the citizens accountable for that. This includes the step to scrutinize the ends of civic engagement. It thereby criticizes research that is only concerned with the question how to reach the ends in the best or likeliest way possible – without asking what the ends are. What follows from this presumption is the need to teach skills to elaborate the aims critically, as well as to achieve them.

Therefore, a crucial question is *which form* of civic engagement is aimed to strengthen and to develop. This question is of special importance in times of rising populist movements all over Europe who claim to speak “in the name of the citizens”. In the following digression, this trend will be examined using the examples of actual populist phenomena and their rhetoric. By comparing these self-proclaimed “citizen’s representatives” to the normative claim of Civic Studies, I hope, this will help develop a more clear-cut idea of what “Civic Studies as a normative science” means.

In the following, I will argue that civic engagement in the understanding that is promoted here stands in opposition to the excluding and subjugatory approaches to politics that can often be found in populist narratives. This can be understood when looking at the rhetoric of the populist claim to represent the citizens. In the definition of populism that Müller suggests, the main characteristic is not the anti-elitist critique, as widely assumed. It is the very claim to represent the “true” people, the “real” citizens, the silent mass. (Müller, 2016) Examples can be found in the two most recent populist campaigns; namely, in Donald Trump’s campaign and in Nigel Farage’s victory speech on the EU referendum for his “Leave”-campaign. Trump created in his speech a clear division between “his” and “the other” people, saying: “The only important thing is the unification of the people, because the other people don’t mean anything,”¹⁶. The “other people” are those who, went the subtext, are not his supporters - which is the majority of American citizens. Nigel Farage, former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), used a similar rhetoric stating that the Brexit was a victory for “the real people, for the ordinary people, for the decent people”¹⁷. The most striking difference to the Anti-TTIP-protests is that these movements gain their power from claiming an exclusive and superior status for some citizens.

Another striking example is the Pegida movement in Germany that claims to represent the “Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident”.¹⁸ At first sight, their slogan “We are the People!” appears to match the anti-elitist and bottom-up ideal of civic politics. But the decisive difference becomes outstanding when scrutinizing the ends of this specific form of civic engagement: First of all, Boehnke and Thran state that “It is a sentence that excludes foreigners, who are not meant by the word “we”” (Thran & Boehnke, 2015, p. 198). Second, the “Europeans”, that become active and politically engaged here, differ from the Anti-TTIP-protestors in the desire to construct a Europe of nation-states as a “community of “homelands”” (Thran & Boehnke, 2015, p. 192), which are ethnically and culturally homogeneous. (Thran & Boehnke, 2015, p. 200) Another example that contains this trend to re-nationalize Europe is the concept of “Occident” (German: “Abendland”) that is used by Pegida. As the German historian and anti-Semitism researcher Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Benz (Technical University of Berlin) points out in his book, this concept has always been a slogan used for demarcation according to the historical situation – against the Orthodox Church, Islam or Bolshevism. (Benz, 2012)

In performing practices of “othering” and building hierarchies, populist leaders - and this refers to the compelling argument made by Chantal Mouffe - divide the society into enemies instead of adversaries. (Mouffe, 2014, p. 28) Mouffe argues that populism contrasts the agonistic concept of domestication: In agonistic politics, political conflicts between adversaries are seen as democratically useful, while conflicts between enemies are antagonistic and therefore often result in violence. We have seen that populist movements (such as Pegida) contrast the ideal of a “more civic Europe” provided by Civic Studies. Therefore, the mere statement that “Civic actions are actions of engagement in the interest of a common good and guided by principles and values” (Harvard, 2013, p. xv) falls short to make explicit the inclusiveness and emancipatory impetus of Civic Studies. So far, this quote underlines the representative character of the engagement by acting in the name of a collective (Pegida would see themselves as representatives of the “Patriotic Europeans”)

¹⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/06/trumps-populism-is-about-creating-division-not-unity/?utm_term=.eb051ce409b4

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/24/nigel-farage-ugliness-bullet-fired>

¹⁸ For an analysis of “The value-based Nationalism of Pegida”, I would recommend the eponymous article by Thran & Boehnke, 2015

that pays attention to the public well-being (in the eyes of Pegida this would mean to fight “Against the Islamization of the Occident”). The second part point to the conscious guidance and (I would add) the activating force of principles and values that frame civic engagement. However, the crucial point is that it must be made explicit *which* principles and values (for example inclusion and emancipation). Then, the form of civic engagement that Civic Studies seeks to support can be recognized as a practice of empowerment and emancipation that by definition excludes such populist movements. This is exactly what Civic Studies means by “civic education”: The goal is that citizens take the responsibility to acquire their theoretical, moral and institutional means to be able to act.¹⁹

5. Civic Research as Co-Creation of Knowledge

“Civic research” can be understood in many different ways, complementing and contradicting each other. (Fine, 2012, p. 38) Therefore, it is important to take a look at different conceptions of civic research and marking them off from the understanding of civic research in this article. I will explain why civic research can generate new insights for research on European citizens due to its praxis-oriented, citizen-centered and democratic outline. In the understanding of civic research as co-creation of knowledge, it is as much a scientific inquiry as it is political engagement.

One of the most common understandings of civic research in the social sciences is research *on* civic engagement, which is for example social movement research. (Staggenborg, 2011; Strange, 2015; Tilly, 2004) While the themes of interest overlap with some of the research in Civic Studies, the crucial addition is that most scholars of Civic Studies would also understand her/his research as civic engagement. In this case, it means that it is not enough to name and analyze effects and causes of the civic engagement against TTIP. Civic Research must collect and provide this data in the aim to provoke, enable or support civic action. The goal is a collaborative and balanced researcher-practitioner-relation. Following this perspective the term “civic research” means here “civically engaged research”²⁰. The precondition is to take citizens seriously as co-producers of scientific knowledge, and second, “to study human co-creation by participating in it” (Schram, 2014, p. 10). If Civic Studies is about co-creation, consequently, the same applies for Civic Studies’ researchers: It is not enough to analyze politically relevant issues “from the outside”, but the civic researchers, too, need to become active citizens in the process of civic engagement.

Following the idea of a paradigm shift by Thomas Kuhn, Schram identifies the need for a “practical turn” in the social sciences: While his argument is not that all research needs to produce direct political impact, he nevertheless strives for a new self-understanding of academic work as always connected to civic struggles. (Schram, 2014, p. 98) Following his idea, I see “civically engaged research” as an additional approach to the spectrum of scientific methods that makes sense in some settings - such as the Anti-TTIP-protests, where a lack of civic knowledge can be observed. The need of “civic knowledge” is based on

¹⁹ Eatman states that civic actions often lack a deeper understanding of its key factors, what he calls the “senses of civic engagement”. He identifies the following five senses of civic engagement: hope, history, passion, empathy, and planning, symbolized by the five fingers of the human hand. (Eatman, 2014, p. 74) In practice, this is difficult to achieve. That’s why civic education is of great importance to some of the research in Civic Studies. A crucial part of civic education is to open up diverse settings and strategies for an ongoing process of deliberative negotiation over principles and values. (Soltan, 2014, p. 15)

²⁰ A concept that Flyvbjerg named “phronetic social science”- a politically engaged research that is based on the classical Greek concept of Phronesis, the comprehensive knowledge of experts in a field of practice (Schram, 2014, p. 98 citing Flyvbjerg)

the assumption that citizens have an understanding of the field that is lacking on the side of the researcher - and the other way around: Civic research aims for “mutual education” (Nyden, 2014, p. 106).

Looking back on the last years of the crisis, I state that only the combination of academic and civic knowledge seems useful for the effective change of European politics. Before I specify this need for a change of perspective towards civic research, let me first elaborate on what I mean by “crisis”. What interests me as a constructivist researcher are not numbers and the “reality” they suggest. From a constructivist standpoint, what we call “crisis” is the product of a process in which negative diagnoses construct the people’s perceived reality. I am concerned with the perceived “democratic crisis” because, albeit a construction, it is real in the sense that it affects people’s thinking and acting. Having said this, According to Balibar, the European crisis is characterized by a interconnectedness of institutional and constitutional questions with moral and ideological dimensions. (Balibar, 2016, p. 68f.) What can be observed is that the crisis has become both omnipresent and invisible in the discourse. Even more destructive for civic engagement is that it is presented as irreversible. (Balibar, 2016, p. 17) As a consequence, European intellectuals felt prompted to publish manifestos for a “new Europe”²¹, to propose institutional changes and to mobilize European citizens - without success. I argue that European Studies too long have been busy with researching the best institutional design, the most convincing narrative or the most effective identity policy to make citizens embrace the “EUropean idea”. (Schulze & Gerstenkorn, 2006; Bach, 2015) The current democratic crisis shows that these top-down attempts to close the gap between the citizen and “Brussels” did not work. Researchers as well as politicians must understand that they have knowledge deficits when it comes to the self-understanding of *EUropeans as citizens*. Although research in European Studies is often carried out in multi- or interdisciplinary approaches, it is still very limited in its possible range of perspectives, if it excludes practical expertise from citizens apart from monitoring their “opinions” in surveys and polls. (Bläser, 2013) It is long overdue to ask the citizens themselves about their self-understanding as citizens and which meanings and practices are attached to that.²² Therefore, collaborative, civically engaged research is needed to understand and eventually engage in European civic action and political change.

These assumptions have consequences on the methodological level: Civic research is “collaborative”, meaning that it involves citizens as equal partners in research. The idea of nonscientists getting involved in the research process has been around for some time: In public sociology, a relatively new field in the social sciences, research aims to address the public audience or/and the policymakers with research findings to strengthen the sociopolitical implications and the practical output of their results.²³ Such developments are born out of the deficit to reflect on power structures of knowledge and the question who (re-)produces them. However, civic research offers a much larger variety of opportunities to involve citizens in the research process than as a helping hand to gather data or as an audience concerned.

²¹ For example: Beck, 2014: Wir sind Europa! Manifest zur Neugründung der EU von unten. Habermas & Derrida, 2003: February 15, or What Binds Europeans Together: A Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Core of Europe. Negt, 2012: Gesellschaftsentwurf Europa. Plädoyer für ein gerechteres Gemeinwesen. Cohen-Bendit & Verhofstadt, 2012: FÜR Europa! Ein Manifest. Enzensberger, 2011: Sanftes Monster Brüssel oder die Entmündigung Europas.

²² Worth mentioning as an exception is the study by Bruter, 2004; and earlier: Diez, 1999; Jachtenfuchs & Diez & Jung, 1998

²³ A good introductory article on public sociology is Burawoy, 2015

Civic Studies builds on an idea that is not strictly new, namely to generate political thought in order to support political practice. A very common example in political science is public policy research, which helps to see how differently this idea is implemented in civic research. What is different is first and foremost the research perspective on citizens: This shift changes not only the actors, but also the goals of this field of research. What we see in the case of TTIP and other civic protests, political practice that is regarded as “efficient” by political decision-makers must not meet the perspective of the citizens. As we see here, Civic Studies is very serious about the premise I already mentioned earlier: “citizens are not objects of inquiry but subjects of action, therefore the question what is true about citizens is replaced by the question what is meaningful to them.” (Schram, 2014, p. 91) From this citizen-centered idea of research follows that Civic Studies adopts a bottom-up perspective, which follows the ideal of perspective instead of objectivity. Civic research in this sense means to ask the citizens studied for their own description of relevant aspects and categories instead of determining it “from the outside”. Studying Anti-TTIP-protests, I ask what “being a European citizen” means for the citizens themselves. More precisely, I reconstruct *the citizens’* understandings of European citizenship “from within”, understand their beliefs and behaviors in terms that are meaningful to them. In doing so, civic research opens up the possibility to give citizens more power to regain the structures they opt to redesign. It thereby follows the democratic paradigm that “knowledge of democracy should be put in the hands of those who make that democracy.” (Schram, 2014, p. 91) In contrast to public policy research, the methodological claim in Civic Studies is that citizens are not the object to be studied *for* political elites (such as in the consultation of political decision-makers). Instead, the impulse is to study citizen’s concerns in order to enhance their capacity to deal with them. Civic Studies follows the idea that what guides civic research is not to find an ultimate goal or a solution to problems. Instead, as we already know, the aim is to carve out its potential. My research on and with the “European Civics” is meant to initiate and foster a bottom-up-process of EUropean democratization. The decision for this kind of civic research carries the ideal to co-create a democratic and creative interplay of research, activism and the mutual education of the two.

In many respects, this kind of research challenges epistemological foundations of scientific research. First, the classification of experts and non-experts is no longer justified. As a consequence, different types of valuable knowledge will become visible. Second, civically engaged research has to overcome the illusion of impartiality, which is still a very powerful aspiration in social sciences and goes hand in hand with the fear of being biased: “civic research practice challenges “business as usual” in which the gold standard are peer reviewed articles, and citizen voices are seen as abandonments of research objectivity” (Nyden, 2014, p. 112). In contrast to the positivist paradigm, research on the personal experiences of the Anti-TTIP-protests needs to inquire the citizen’s subjective interpretations of this world. These interpretations are a rich and inexhaustible fount of new knowledge and topics that need to be discovered.

A final Word...

...ought to be said on the introductory claim from which this article started off: “We are the ones we have been waiting for” (Levine, 2013). For me as a “citizen-academic” and a scholar of Civic Studies this implies the promise to do civic research that is helpful for European citizens to co-create this EUrope currently being in multiple crises. Especially the lack of a civic democracy on the EUropean level raises the need to reconstruct the self-understandings of European citizens asking: *What do they perceive to be their own civic mission and how do they understand and execute their role as European citizens?*

On a theoretical level, this article argued that Civic Studies, especially when carried out as a potential-oriented civic research is well advised to take into account insights from conflict theory. The analysis of Anti-TTIP-protests shows that, in fact, this research perspective is able to uncover the potential of conflict for a civic democratization of EUrope, which is carried out by a community of active European citizens that I call a “European Civics”. After having said this, what does this claim for a “European Civics” actually mean? Karol Soltan refers to a “New Civics” as “a global movement of civic awakening and renewal” (Soltan, 2014, p. 16). Applied to the example of the Anti-TTIP-protests, this must be understood both in intellectual and in politically practical terms: The “European Civics” consists of an emerging community of activists and researchers *as citizens* both having the common goal to co-create the civic democratization of EUrope. This article aims to broaden and deepen the understanding of what constitutes the European Civics (Harvard, 2013, p. xvii). The analysis of citizens who participated in the Anti-TTIP-protests helped to see how they construct their civic self-understanding as European citizens.

The relevance of this research is best understood when considering that the political “Inertia grows from a pervasive sense of powerlessness in the face of dramatic transformation” (Boyte & Scarnati, 2014, p. 77). While the script is not new, the gap between the political power of the EU on the one hand and the political passiveness of the citizens on the other is constantly widening. However, in the Anti-TTIP-protests we see a countermovement to this paradox. The conflict surrounding TTIP entails the risk to deepen *as well* as the potential to overcome the democratic crisis that EUrope is confronted with today - depending on the way it is dealt with. What can be observed in the political practice though is not a democratic recognition of the Anti-TTIP-protests but a defensive and evasive attitude. This observation concurs with Giroux’s analysis, in which he criticizes the dominant understandings of civic engagement either as “a hindrance to the goals of a market-driven society or a drain on society to be treated as a sign of weakness.” (Giroux, 2013, p. 14)

In following the political theory of agonistic democracy, the political aim of this article is to fight against the “civic illiteracy” that risks emerging in so called “post-political” settings. (Zizek, 2001) When faith in politics is fading, we face the risk to cause depolitization and social defragmentation as a consequence. However (I hope you’ll excuse the cliché), from the potential-oriented perspective of Civic Studies, the current democratic crisis of EUrope can also be an opportunity. The reason is that democracy is not only regarded as a political structure but also as construct coming into existence only through the civic force of the citizens. As a European citizen and an engaged scholar of conflict studies, I argue that in addition to undoubtedly needed changes in the institutional design of the EU, the power of the EUropean project resides with the citizens. Therefore, civic research must strengthen the

civic self-understanding of European citizens. By referring to conflict theory, I have shown the importance of civic conflicts because they have the potential to generate change in and for a more civic Europe. To achieve this, the example of the Anti-TTIP-protests can demonstrate that personal experiences of civic action trigger a process of political socialization and civic identification.

In conclusion, the (not exactly modest) goal of the research on a “European Civics” is best captured by Giroux saying: “The time has come to develop a political language in which civic values, social responsibility, and the institutions that support them become central to invigorating and fortifying a new era of civic imagination, a renewed sense of social agency, and an impassioned political will.” (Giroux, 2013, p. 14) I seek to support this “new era” by opening windows of thought - and thereby also windows of opportunity for a civic democratization of Europe. I know that this may sound utopian. Don’t worry, it’s only radically ambitious!

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