# Co-Creating Cities: Dynamic Citizenship and its Foundation in Collaborative Argumentation

Authors

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## Abstract

This paper integrates research on citizenship education and argumentation studies, positing that argumentative dialogue holds the potential to foster dynamic citizenship, which is essential in the co-creation of cities. Our contribution has a dual purpose. Firstly, we discuss the theoretical interrelation between argumentation studies and dynamic citizenship, focusing on the concept of 'collaborative argumentation', and taking the Toolkit for Educating to a Dynamic Citizenship project (TEDYC), addressed to young people aged 12 to 18, as an exemplar of this interrelation. Second, based on qualitative results from a test phase of the TEDYC project, we identify empirically what aspects related to argumentation emerge as prominently important for dynamic citizenship. Based on our findings, we discuss the importance of two aspects: promoting 'inventio' (discovering arguments) and reflecting on the delicate role of non-canonical third participants in argumentative discussions on the co-construction of cities.

## Introduction

Beyond any aspects relating to the urban environment, co-creating a city means co-constructing 'citizenship'. Citizenship encompasses participation in a community, based on argumentative discussion (for an elaboration of this concept, see van Eemeren 2018), or argumentative dialogue, which may be defined by the pursuit of reasonableness and respect for all the interlocutors. Just as argumentation spaces cannot be taken for granted but are the result of dialogue spaces being designed (Greco 2018), so too do citizens' communities require co-construction. This demands an effort to "*educate to dynamic citizenship*" (Lupatini 2018). Against this background, the goal of this paper is twofold. Firstly, at the theoretical level, we investigate the connection between argumentation and dynamic citizenship; then, having outlined a theoretical integration of these areas, we present the principles that inspired the design of an ongoing collaborative project entitled Toolkit for Educating to a Dynamic Citizenship (henceforth: TEDYC,  www.dynamic-citizenship.ch)1, which is devoted to fostering dynamic citizenship in young pupils aged between 12 and 18. Secondly, at an empirical level, we consider the following research question: based on an initial test phase of the TEDYC project, what are the aspects related to argumentation that emerge as prominently important for dynamic citizenship? To answer this question, in this paper we discuss some qualitative aspects taken from the preliminary findings of the test phase of the project carried out in 2024.

## Theoretical framework: Dynamic citizenship and argumentation

The reflection we present in this paper originated in view of two converging streams of research. On the one hand, argumentation competences play a role in the development of dynamic citizenship. On the other hand, from their very beginning, argumentation studies have always focused on the close connection between argumentation and civic participation. These two research streams are discussed in this section.

Citizenship is a polysemic concept, as it can be understood both as a consequence of status and as a matter of choice in terms of one's participation in public life (Audigier 2002, 21; Staeheli 2011, 394). In the latter case, citizenship operates at multiple levels and is constantly evolving (Mouffe 1993, 66; Staeheli 2011, 396). It can therefore be regarded as dynamic, in contrast to the more static conception associated with its status-based definition. When citizenship is conceived as dynamic, citizenship education emphasizes competencies - such as argumentation skills, critical thinking, and decentration - rather than mere factual civic knowledge regarding, for example, the functioning of the political system in a given country. Con-

troversial issues, ambiguous, complex or wicked problems, and socially or politically significant matters, all of which represent distinct but interrelated aspects of open-ended, multi-perspective, and socially constructed challenges, play a crucial role in fostering these competencies (Lupatini 2021).

As Fabre (2022, 8–14) notes, public policy, particularly in the fields of architectural design and urban planning, has provided fertile ground for open-ended and multi-perspective problems. Building on the legacy of the City Beautiful Movement and within the framework of Lyndon Johnson's *Great Society* program, urban planning, especially with regard to public spaces, has evolved into a domain that requires negotiation between multiple stakeholders, including authorities, experts, and citizens, to discuss issues and find common solutions. These issues thus become subjects of public debate, requiring expertise grounded in reasoned argumentation and communicable knowledge. Thus, we might say, the conception of urban planning has been evolving from a strictly Cartesian science to a more Kafkaesque approach to reality.

Argumentation as the reasonable management of disagreement over how to think about public spaces and how to build them is at the center of the co-construction of dynamic citizenship because public space, as Arendt (2003, 96) writes, is the space of the 'Allseitigkeit' (En. 'allsideness'), where it is possible to observe the same social object from different perspectives. Public space is the place where different systems of thought, visions, and ideologies about the functioning and goals of communal life appear and interact (Bedorf & Röttgers 2010; Marchart 2010; Mouffe 2005; Weißeno et al. 2010), including not only experts' recommendations but also citizens' perspectives. It can therefore be considered as the space of the political (Lévy 2013). We claim that the city, and specifically urban public space, is a privileged space for building coexistence, co-production and cooperation; activities which need participants to consider different points of view through argumentation.

In fact, as early as in Aristotle's reflections, at the beginning of the tradition of argumentation studies that originated in ancient Greece, argumentation and the construction of the city were closely linked. Piazza (2015, 9ff) observes that, for Aristotle, the 'logos' (reason and discourse - in a word, argumentation) is intrinsically linked to the social life made possible in the 'polis', i.e. the city, which was the typical form of organization of social life in ancient Greece. Argumentation, thus, makes the organization of the city possible; conversely, citizens learn how to use argumentation through participation in the life of the polis, learning how to live according to values, distinguishing for example between good and bad, or right and wrong, through the use of argumentation (Piazza 2015, 10). Hence, argumentation and the city are inextricably linked.

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Even though the Aristotelian concept of argumentation has evolved over the centuries, argumentation studies have remained connected to the construction of public debate in the political and public sphere. A clear connection between argumentation and the construction of a public space exists in the 'debate tradition', which is flourishing in different countries. In the English-speaking literature in particular, the tradition of argumentation studies fed into several debate handbooks (Ziegelmuller & Kay 1997), which discuss how to construct issues and what kind of argument schemes can be applied in public debate (see the discussion in Rigotti & Greco 2019, 182-185). Often, debate is seen as a means of fostering a very important aspect of argumentation, namely 'inventio'. In the tradition of rhetoric and argumentation, 'inventio' refers to the capacity to discover appropriate arguments, creatively reflecting and taking into account possible worlds, as well as considering the appropriateness of arguments in relation to other participants in the discussion (Greco & Mazzali-Lurati 2023).

Nowadays, the practice of debating is often conceived of as an exercise for students (for example, high school students), sometimes being used in relation to disciplines or subjects associated with education to citizenship as we have defined it in the preceding section. The existing practice in debate clubs in various countries may sometimes be organized in an adversarial fashion, though not always to the same degree, being organized as competitions, in which only some of the teams can win, while the others lose. The adversarial nature of debate practices, together with their clear organization, can motivate students to engage to the best of their ability. At the same time, however, if the competitive aspect is made too prominent, it risks promoting an idea of argumentation that is exclusively related to a win-lose disputation. While situations of win-lose argumentation do exist in society (for example, in some political contexts, if a candidate wins, the other one will lose), they are not the only form of argumentative discussion that is relevant to social and political life.

In our view, further important insights into the connection between argumentation and life in the political community of a city can be derived from the concept of 'collaborative argumentation', also called 'deliberative argumentation' (Schwarz & Baker 2017), i.e. an argumentative discussion in which different individuals discuss a contested issue in order to find a shared and, ideally, reasonable solution to a common problem on which they disagree. This process also requires them to take into account the social dimension and the emotive components that any relationship inevitably includes. Collaborative argumentation is widespread in the context of public life, including many instances that have to do with collaborative

decision-making in a city; in such contexts, arguers do not normally have the goal of defeating their opponents but of finding a reasonable solution with them. Imagine, for example, an argumentative dialogue between some local associations promoting different interests but working together to improve life in a certain neighborhood; or discussions within a municipality, in which politicians from different parties need to find concrete solutions to improve the life of its citizens. Problem-solving and conflict-resolution mechanisms based on argumentation and established at the community level, such as conflict mediation, are also examples of collaborative argumentation. In all these cases, it is not the adversarial idea of winning one's case that is prominent, but a kind of argumentative dialogue that is oriented towards problem-solving and the building of a reasonable consensus (Greco 2020). It has been argued that argumentative dialogue is often not a given but requires an explicit effort of designing a dialogue space (Greco 2018), sometimes with the help of neutral third parties, who can be formal or informal mediators (Greco 2018; van Bijnen 2020).

In situations of collaborative argumentation, some characteristics of argumentative dialogue become significant personal competencies: for example, the capacity to 'decentrate' and learn that there might be a plurality of equally admissible positions on a given topic; or, again, the capacity to submit one's standpoint to critical scrutiny, offering arguments but also being able to listen and change one's mind (Muller Mirza et al., 2009; Greco, 2020). Notably, other studies that extend beyond the domain of argumentation emphasize the importance of skills that are close to collaborative argumentation, such as the ability to value otherness in all its forms, in an increasingly multicultural and interconnected world, as well as the capacity to tolerate positions considered ambiguous, that is, the ability to face situations, ideas and contexts characterized by uncertainty, complexity or a lack of unambiguous information, without reacting with anxiety, rigidity or rejection (Council of Europe 2018). Taking all this into account, we have considered the concept of collaborative argumentation and its relation to education to citizenship as the core of the project that we are going to discuss in the next sections.

Before moving forward, however, it is important to mention that some recent developments in argumentation studies have considered the fact that increasingly public space can include forms of interaction that are digitalized. Hence, some scholars and organizations have proposed online platforms with the aim of fostering the co-construction of a city in online discussions. Among many existing platforms for enabling democratic debate (for example, Decidim - decidim.org, see Leal García, Calleja-López &

Linares-Lanzman 2023), some have been explicitly inspired by principles of argumentation. A prime example of a platform specifically inspired by argumentation is the deliberative democracy platform Bcause, designed for groups to *"co-create solutions to complex problems by openly discussing them with others"* (bcause.app/, see Anastasiou & De Liddo 2023; see also developments within the ongoing European consortium ORBIS www.orbis-project.eu). Another example of a platform explicitly oriented towards collaborative argumentation and compromise, but designed to be used in educational contexts, is Middle Ground (middleground.nl), designed from an idea by Jan Albert van Laar from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands (van Laar 2021). Our project, which is also intended to be used in educational settings, also features an online platform, although the simulation games can be played in face-to-face interaction as well, depending on the educators' goals.

**Principles guiding the simulation games in the TEDYC project**
Having outlined the proposed integration of argumentation and dynamic citizenship, which underpins the TEDYC project, we will now discuss how this theoretical basis has guided the construction of the activities within our project. From the very beginning, argumentation studies have comprised both a component of analysis and evaluation of argumentation and a component of construction of good argumentation. Our project clearly sits within the construction element, in line with the concept of dynamic citizenship presented above, and makes use of simulation games, available in both an online and offline version, to foster collaborative argumentation. In general, simulation games are used in citizenship education because they strengthen teamwork and improve compromise skills (Raiser & Warkalla 2011).

In this project, we have proposed two fields of application for our simulations, related to fields that can easily be applied to the students' experience; both cases involve contested issues. The first contested issue is the introduction of a dress code in a school, which requires discussion and a decision-making procedure. The second contested issue is set in the context of a city council discussion, which aims to make a decision on an entrepreneur's plan to convert an abandoned industrial building into holiday apartments. In different ways, both contested issues have to do with communities, with the second simulation being directly related to a city context. Both fall within the domains outlined in the previous section, in which collaborative argumentation is important.

Multiple positions and multiple players are foreseen in each simulation, distinguishing them clearly from one-to-one debates and characterizing our

simulations as clearly 'polylogical' argumentative discussions (Lewiński & Aakhus 2023), i.e. discussions in which "*multiple positions are debated by various players across a number of places*" (Lewiński & Aakhus 2023, viii). Notably, discussions to co-construct life in cities realistically tend to be polylogues. In the pursuit of collaborative argumentation, students are asked to find a common solution to the contested issue and a moderator (or a small team playing the role of a moderator), selected from among the students, is given the task of attempting to steer the discussion towards reasonable agreement, while encouraging everyone's argumentative contributions.

**Methods used to respond to the empirical research question**
We now turn to a discussion of the methods adopted to respond to the empirical research question presented in the introduction, namely: what are the aspects of argumentation that emerge as important in dynamic citizenship education? Following a test phase of the games which took place in spring 2024 among lower and upper secondary II levels in certain schools in the Swiss Canton of Ticino, a self-assessment of the simulations was conducted among the pupils and teachers who had participated in the games, using surveys, interviews and focus groups. The results of this test phase, which aimed to verify the appropriateness of the simulation games in relation to the goal of fostering dynamic citizenship, have been presented in previous work (Lupatini & Plata, 2024; Lupatini et al., in press). Subsequently, and based on the results of the test phase, we proposed a second, smaller scale test phase in November 2024; this included a simulation with university students enrolled in an argumentation course, in which we considered the main points that emerged in the test phase.

At the time of writing this paper (May 2025), the project is about to be finalized and has been proposed to a broader group of teachers and interested educators including the local population, for use in the coming school years. In the next section, we will focus on some prominent qualitative aspects that emerged from the self-assessment. In particular, having introduced the theoretical importance of collaborative argumentation in the intersection between argumentation studies and dynamic citizenship, our research goal in the following section is to identify what aspects of the proposed simulations emerge as being most directly relevant to fostering dynamic citizens through collaborative discussions. Methodologically, these aspects have been identified by means of a qualitative analysis, developed through looking at recurring themes in interviews and focus groups based on a thematic discourse analysis inspired by Bokarova (2016); we also considered open questions which were posed in a survey distributed to the university students who had participated in the simulation.

"Argumentation, thus, makes the organization of the city possible."

**Qualitative results from the test phase and current developments: A platform for building dynamic cities**

The results of the test phase, based on self-assessments, generally indicate that the project platform is seen by the participants as a positive tool for reaching the intended goals of learning argumentation to foster an attitude of participation and dynamic citizenship. Given our focus on collaborative argumentation and its importance for building cities, in this section we leave aside the quantitative evaluation, which was discussed in previous work (Lupatini & Plata, 2024; Lupatini et al., in press), and focus instead in particular on two qualitative aspects that emerged prominently in the test phase: namely, the delicate fostering of the capacity of 'inventio' (that is, discovering arguments) in educational simulation games and the crucial role of moderators in collaborative argumentation. Both aspects, in our view, are closely related to the construction of a community in the city as a public space.

The first qualitative focus that emerged is the promotion of participants' capacity to develop their own arguments when thinking about a contested issue, i.e. the concept of inventio, already discussed above as a central notion for the theory and practice of argumentation. This point is particularly important in educational contexts, which are the situations primarily considered in our project. Cities, in fact, are also built by prospective citizens, such as young pupils who may not yet have voting rights. During the test phase, we tried two different versions of the simulations. One included a basic list of arguments for each position, while the other version was issued without arguments having been identified or with a single argument presented as an example. Our results from the test phase indicated that participants tended to prefer the version in which arguments were not already proposed.

Apparently, the suggestions of possible arguments were not seen as a starting point for developing further argumentation but as a replacement of one own's inventio - to the point that one participant said that the simulation became like a theater performance, as everybody knew what to say. Teachers were of a similar opinion. This led us to change the simulation games, prominently proposing the version without arguments. In addition, teachers could be given a blueprint of arguments to suggest to students where necessary. A first emergent result of our project, thus, is the importance of leaving room for students' inventio, which can be seen as part of the process of familiarizing them with dynamic citizenship.

A second qualitative focus that emerged from our test and self-assessment phase is the important role of moderators, who are somehow explicitly given the role of pushing the discussion towards collaborative argumentation.

Moderators do not have a specific cause to defend in the simulations; their task is to bring the group to a common solution. The role of moderators is reminiscent of non-canonical participants in argumentative discussions taking the role of neutral thirds, such as dispute mediators or other informal mediators who play the role of architects of others' argumentative dialogue (Greco 2018), as mentioned in the theoretical discussion above. What emerges from interviews, focus groups and also from the feedback discussions with university students, is that students have noticed the delicate nature as well as the importance of the role of moderators.

Some students who played the role of moderators noticed that ideal argumentative discussions do not necessarily emerge spontaneously, for example because some people do not participate. As one student said: *"It was difficult to make them talk, often they looked at you and remained silent and it was always the same ones who talked"*;[2] another noted that moderators cannot say what they want, arguably because their role is different.[3] Some students enjoyed the role of moderators, as one student noted, highlighting the fact that the role was engaging and placed moderators on a different level to the others:

> *"Well nothing, I've done that, I've been a moderator. I felt more engaged than usual, that is I felt one floor above the others, it was something different anyway. It was an experience that made you think like an adult with smaller kids. Someone who commands in that moment".[4]*

In our view, the metaphors used by this latter student (being "*above the others*" and "*commanding*") do not refer to a position of power; after all, moderators cannot impose a decision on the other participants. These metaphors might be interpreted as referring to non-canonical third party roles: architects of dialogue, in fact, can be seen as "*above*" the others in the sense that they are in charge of managing the discussion process.

## Conclusions

This paper has fulfilled two purposes. On the one hand, at the theoretical level, we have discussed the convergence between argumentation studies and the concept of educating for dynamic citizenship, focusing in particular on the importance of collaborative argumentation, to be considered alongside more adversarial forms of debate in the co-construction of social life. On the other hand, we have shown a case study derived from the Toolkit for Educating to a Dynamic Citizenship (TEDYC) project in which these

principles have been put into practice. In this regard, in order to respond to our empirical question about what aspects of argumentation emerge as significant for dynamic citizenship, we discussed some qualitative results derived from a preliminary phase of test and evaluation.

Two prominent aspects emerge as part of collaborative argumentation in the co-construction of dynamic citizenship: the importance of fostering participants' inventio, leaving them free to think about their own arguments, and the delicacy and importance of the role of moderators in the construction of the discussion space. Notably, these results refer us to the basic principles of public deliberation as indicated by Fuji Johnson (2015), namely: inclusion (the involvement of all participants), equality, access to information, reasoning based on factual justifications, the search for consensus, respect, and the guarantee of the integrity of the process (in this case, ideally assured by the moderator). These quality criteria for public deliberation could also be seen as forming part of the guiding principles for argumentative processes such as those created in this case through simulation games.

In particular, more reflection on the role of moderators and other non-canonical third participants in argumentative discussions proved to be one of the key findings of our project in relation to the construction of cities through argumentation. This invites us to reflect on the fact that collaborative argumentation in the construction of a public space is not a given, as we do not always experience collaborative argumentation spontaneously when given room for discussion; the discussion, in fact, can degenerate or develop in directions that are far removed from a reasonable management of disagreement. Such degeneration is even more likely in the context of a polylogue, which discussion in the city necessarily is, because common ground between multiple parties and in multiple venues is more difficult to establish in polylogues (Lewiński and Aakhus 2014, 180).

Hence, the role of a non-canonical third participant who is a sort of 'guardian' of the discussion space (see Perret-Clermont 2015) is as delicate as it is important. Teachers are aware of this delicacy and importance, and often comment on their choice of the students they have selected as moderators, sometimes expressing a preoccupation with the attribution of the moderator role.5 While the role of moderators was not our primary concern when preparing the games, its importance has emerged prominently from the results of the test phase. Arguably, this is due to the polylogical nature of discussions to co-construct the city, which require careful work in designing a dialogue space for argumentation that will unfold according to principles of reasonableness and decentration, as discussed in our theoretical section.

This latter point brings us to a concluding reflection: it might be useful to introduce training for teachers and other educators about the role of non-canonical third participants in a discussion. In this way, any worries or anxiety can be turned into an explicit consideration of the opportunities that such a role offers for public life in the city. This point might be at the center of further reflection, including teachers' and other educators' training sessions relating to dynamic citizenship, to increase awareness about the special role of third persons in co-constructing dialogue spaces in the city.

"What emerges from interviews, focus groups and also from the feedback discussions with university students, is that students have noticed the delicate nature as well as the importance of the role of moderators."

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**Endnotes**

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2 Original Italian: 'Era difficile farli parlare, spesso ti guardavano e stavano zitti e parlavano sempre gli stessi'.

3 Original Italian: 'Come moderatrice mi sono trovata in difficoltà perché non potevo dire quello che pensavo'.

4 Original Italian: 'Niente, l'ho fatto il moderatore. Mi sono sentito più convolto del solito, cioè mi sentivo un piano sopra gli altri, era comunque una cosa diversa. C'era un'esperienza che ti portava a pensare come un adulto con dei ragazzi più piccoli. Qualcuno che nel momento comanda'.

5 Original Italian: 'Un ruolo in particolare mi è sembrato un po complicato, eh, quello del moderatore o dei moderatori'.