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# The role of religion in ethnic minority youth's civic agency: theoretical considerations and a case study from Finland

Samaneh Khalili <sup>a</sup>, Anuleena Kimanen <sup>b</sup> and Aleksi Seger<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>INVEST Flagship Research Centre, University of Turku, Turku, Finland; <sup>b</sup>Department of Teacher Education, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the multifaceted relationship between religion and civic agency. We present a conceptual framework representing the individual foundation and social aspects of civic agency. Based on qualitative semi-structured interviews, we investigated how young people and religious communities contribute to civic agency. The findings indicate that participating in religious groups provides pleasant emotional experiences, cognitive opportunities, experimental circumstances, a sense of belonging, engagement with others, and responsibility. However, normative adult – youth hierarchies may compromise young people's agency in everyday decision-making processes. The civic potential of religion for meaning, value, and social relations can be addressed in religious and civic education, and pupils' experiences in their religious communities can be used to enhance civic engagement. Furthermore, education in young people's own religious traditions would give them the tools to negotiate issues in their religious communities.

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## Introduction

Many democracies are concerned about young people's civic engagement and participation (e.g. Kitanova 2020; Levinson and Solomon 2021). While studies have examined participation in terms of community service, civic activity, socio-political activism (May et al. 2022), volunteering, and political activity (Ballard 2014), some researchers have called for more culturally sensitive definitions that include action in the private sphere and mutual relationships (e.g. Laura and Abrams 2020). Some have also indicated that living in a civic society requires more than civic engagement. Boyte (2009, 1) has argued that real-world democracy relies on civic agency. Civic agency entails more than merely participation and engagement and includes cognitive focus and passion. As agent citizens, it is important to develop the capacity for both reason and passion by considering logic and emotions (Dahlgren 2006). Moreover, Brady, Chaskin, and McGregor (2020) suggest that challenges in promoting civic engagement among marginalised urban youth include youth alienation from their communities and challenges of

**CONTACT** Samaneh Khalili  [Samaneh.khalili@utu.fi](mailto:Samaneh.khalili@utu.fi)  Faculty of Sociology, University of Turku, Turku 20500, Finland

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inclusion. Hence, understanding the significance of religion and religious community for ethnic minorities may provide insights for better inclusion.

When addressing the interplay between religion and society, one should recognise the multidimensionality of religion. For instance, Read (2015, 35) has identified the subjective (personal beliefs and piety), organisational (involvement in community activities), and political (religious leader's involvement in civic issues) dimensions. Lam (2002) has argued that religiosity has participatory, devotional, affiliative, and theological dimensions, where participatory is virtually the same as Read's organisational dimension and devotional as the subjective dimension, and affiliate and theological have to do with values and beliefs concerning the relationship between religion and society. In this article, we understand religion as the first two of Read's (2015) threefold classification, namely the subjective and organisational dimensions, but remain open to the political dimension, also in a broader sense than in Read's quantitative approach.

Therefore, this study aims to determine the role of religion and religious communities in the civic agency of Finnish ethnic minority youth as well as the implications for citizenship education in Finland. In the present setting, we first provide a conceptual framework on civic agency, followed by a qualitative study of the relationship between religion and civic agency based on interviews with ethnic minority youths ( $N = 21$ ) in Finland. We were guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How can civic agency be conceptualised?
- (2) What is the interconnection between religion and civic agency in interviews with Finnish ethnic minority youth?
- (3) What are the implications of youth civic agency in religious communities for citizenship education in Finland?

### **Previous research: ethnic minority youth as civic actors and religion**

The connection between faith and civic or political engagement has long been debated, especially in the U.S. In their recent review, Bloom Pazit, Arikan, and Vishkin (2021) showed that it has proved challenging to show any consistent relationship between religiosity and civic engagement. Huckle and Silva (2020) noted the same in a multifaith survey study concerning communities of colour and immigrants.

Among communities of colour and immigrants, Muslims have been a special target of study, often justified by public concern related to Muslims as citizens and Islamophobia in the Western countries. Research concerning young Muslims in diaspora has indicated both differences and similarities between young Muslims and other youth. On the one hand, there are young Muslims who are socially and politically engaged primarily in their religious communities (Teney and Hanquinet 2012) or in combatting othering and discrimination they face as Muslims (Peucker 2021). Eserverri-Mayer (2021) has shown that if the social environment promotes participation and constructive social relationships, young Muslims adopt dynamic and individualist stances on Islam, whereas segregating environments with a lack of civic participation may lead to traditionalist, combative and collective views of Islam. On the other hand, and maybe due to favourable social surroundings, research also suggests that young Muslims' democratic citizenship is equal to that of non-Muslims. Grundel and Maliepaard (2012) found no difference

between Muslim and Christian adolescents in the Netherlands in terms of civic competence or democratic practice. Pauha (2024) found no statistically significant differences between young Muslims', Christians' and religiously unaffiliated youths' sense of belonging to the Finnish society and valuing equality. As it happens, other religious minorities in Finland are so small that they have not been researched from this perspective.

Concerning students' agency, several studies have argued that it has not received adequate attention in citizenship education in Finland and that no developmental opportunities for civic participation have been provided (Gretschel and Kiilakoski 2014; P. Männistö 2020; P. M. Männistö and Moate 2023). Furthermore, ethnic minority youth often experience discrimination and a lack of belonging and discrimination (Ansala, Hämäläinen, and Sarvimäki 2020; Armila and Sabour 2019). For some ethnic minority youth, civic engagement provides diverse skills, knowledge, and social capital with which they can establish themselves as active citizens (Sunni and Mietola 2023; Airas et al. 2019). However, Finnish lower secondary students often experience that they are not expected to impact their learning environments (Alisaaria et al. 2023), while citizenship education could benefit from taking pupils' lived experiences into account (Banks 2017). As a result, it is critical to identify the potential of youth civic agency to increase their participation in democratic society, while also providing better integration.

## **A conceptual framework for civic agency**

Based on the notion that civic agency has cognitive and motivational elements, we analyse its individual and social aspects. Hence, we employ a theoretical framework of agency (Khalil, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022) to define the individual aspects of civic agency and Putnam's perspective (2000) on social capital to define the social aspects of civic agency. The former is connected to the subjective dimension of religion (Read 2015), while the latter pays attention to the diverse implications of organisational involvement in religion.

In the framework to be presented, agency is viewed not as something possessed by people, but rather as a product of engagement with their social and cultural contexts. This is associated with the relational school of thought, such as Biesta and Tedder's (2007) viewpoint. The framework of agency (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022) is derived from multiple perspectives, including Islamic views of human agency. The individual foundation of agency is divided into three categories. First, cognition has various levels of intentionality, including illusion, conjecture, certainty, and logic (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 57). These levels might begin with knowledge and progress to critical thinking. However, this transition is dependent on knowledge resources, the social context, and the learner as agent (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 59). From the civic point of view, in addition to critical, agentic thinking, cognition can contribute to forming identities and embracing community values. Second, inclination is defined as motives and emotions, habit and imagination, feelings and interests (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 57). A heightened awareness of emotions can lead to empathy, which is crucial to being a citizen in a society (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 59). Emotions play an important role in strengthening ties within religious groups, fostering a sense of belonging, and contributing to the overall well-being of members (Corcoran 2015, 2020)

Finally, will includes choice and freedom, which lead to conscious choices in personal and social life (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 59).

Putnam's social capital has both individual and collective components; although individual ties enhance our own interests, collective connections affect the larger community. As a result, social capital can be both a 'private good' and a 'public benefit' (Putnam 2000, 20). Putnam differentiates between bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) social capital, emphasising the distinction between inward-looking networks that promote exclusive identities and homogeneous groups, such as ethnic fraternal organisations. Civic rights movements, youth service clubs, and ecumenical religious communities, on the other hand, are examples of outward-looking networks that bring together people with diverse social backgrounds (22).

Putnam's perspective underscores how religious congregations exemplify both bonding (within-group) and bridging (between-groups) social capital. The close-knit networks within religious communities contribute to bonding and fostering trust and reciprocity among members. Religious institutions also serve as platforms for bridging social capital, facilitating connections across faith boundaries and thus contributing to social cohesion. The dynamic synergy between social capital and religion within religious communities underlines their pivotal role in fostering a sense of community, shared values, and interfaith understanding (Putnam 2000, 67–69).

Based on the above, our conceptual framework consists of the individual and social aspects of civic agency that will be completed by two data-driven subcategories (see Table 1).

## Methodology

We interviewed 21 ethnic minority youths aged 15–19 in a Finnish ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged neighbourhood in one of the ten biggest cities in Finland between October and December 2022. The larger project focused on the social and civic participation of ethnic minority youth, so we recruited the interviewees through the student council and peer instructor groups of an upper secondary school, a youth centre,

**Table 1.** The conceptual framework for civic agency.

| Category  | Subcategory   | Definition   |
|---|---|--|
| Foundation of agency: individual aspects of civic agency (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022) | Cognition   | Various forms of knowledge   |
|   | Inclination   | Motives, feelings, habits, empathy, and imagination  |
|   | Will  | Individual conscious choices in action and freedom of choice, the capacity to be active in discovering possibilities and choices |
| Agency and civic engagement: social aspects of civic agency   | Civic responsibility (data-driven)                                  | Describes experiences and sense of duty in acting for the common good  |
|   | Social participation, within-group (Putnam 2000, bridging capital)  | Experiences of religious community based on diverse ethnicity, language, and religion  |
|   | Social participation, between-groups (Putnam 2000, bonding capital) | Experiences of religious community based on diverse ethnicity, language, and religion  |
|   | Adult–youth relationships (data-driven)                             | Describes experiences and sense of duty in acting for the common good  |

after-school sports clubs and local contacts. Cooperation agreements with these local organisations were established via phone or email prior to recruitment. Each interviewee was assigned a number. In the youth centre and the sports clubs there were far more male than female participants, resulting in an uneven gender distribution (16 males, 5 females). Most interviewees are Muslim, one is Buddhist, and two are Christian. The participants' family backgrounds are Asian (10), African (7), and European (4).

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. An information sheet, translated into several languages, was given to the participants, also to be shown to their families if they were under 18. However, as the participants were over 15, they decided themselves about participation. A short video about the research process was also prepared but most young people preferred to ask the researchers if they wanted to know something. The participants were told that they could leave any questions unanswered and pause or stop the interview.

The research team consisted of three members, with one ethnic minority and two ethnic majority origin interviewers. The interviewers informed prospective participants that they were looking to recruit and interview youths who spoke languages other than Finnish in their homes. However, we were not exclusive when interviewing, but only those interviewees are included here whose language heritage implied an ethnic minority background.

The interviews were conducted as individual, pair, or group interviews, according to the preferences of the participants. As part of the longer interviews of 15–45 minutes, we asked whether interviewees ordinarily visited places and communities of religious practice, what it meant to them, what kind of encouragement for civic engagement they got from those communities, and what kinds of activities were directed at the common good. In this article, we concentrate on those parts of the interviews.

The analysis was conducted in an abductive manner. Abductive analysis (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) is a qualitative research method that uses data to generate novel theoretical insights. It emphasises the importance of a deep theoretical base and developing one's theoretical repertoire throughout the research process. This approach encourages the development of new concepts to account for puzzling empirical materials, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

The first two authors read the data, discussed the framework of analysis, and coded the participants' responses/mentions of religion into the categories of the analytical framework. During this initial analysis, the authors noted that the categories did not cover all topics that were relevant for understanding civic agency. Two further subcategories, adult – youth relationship and civic responsibility, were created. While the former has an influence on the social aspect of agency, the latter bridges the gap between the two primary categories. (see [Table 1](#)). Below we examine the categories individually.

## Results

The results are divided into two major components. First, we provide the results of our investigations into the individual and then into the social aspects of civic agency.

The findings indicate that religion and religious communities have a role on both the individual and social aspects of civic agency. The findings show that engaging in religious communities that share a common faith, culture, and history provides positive emotional experiences, cognitive chances, experimental circumstances, a sense of belonging, interaction with others, and responsibility. However, when it comes to youth agency in actual situations and making decisions, adult – youth interactions can be challenging. More information is provided below, organised by categories and subcategories.

### ***Individual aspects of civic agency***

The individual foundation of civic agency consists of three subcategories: cognition, inclination, and will.

#### ***Cognition***

We define ‘cognition’ as ‘various forms of knowledge; cognitive element of civic agency refers to knowledge that has potential to contribute to visions of how things are and could be better, how one could act for change as an agent in the society’ (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 59).

Youth in religious communities get an insight on faith through both theory and practice. Teachings, sermons, and texts convey theoretical information, whereas active participation in religious rites provides practical understanding. This synthesis of views shapes identity and understanding within a larger religious and societal context:

It’s pretty fun, like learning, like your own history, cause, like, you don’t learn anywhere else basically, so like going there the culture, the history, it’s pretty interesting. (Interviews 21, 18)

Here we learn how to read the Quran. You will be taught how to pray and this stuff. (Interview 11, 2)

However, cognition can vary in level of intensity, ranging from information acquisition to critical reasoning (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022). Our data mainly mentioned knowledge as information but there were certain occasions where people describe discussing religious matters and expressing their inquiries.

And at that moment I was a bit like, why not, but when the reason was explained, it was completely understandable. (Interview 12)

Similarly, King (2019) pointed out that ongoing worship rites, such as *salat* or prayer for Muslims, confirm one’s position in the community. Religious institutions offer unique opportunities for youths’ identity formation, fostering a sense of transcendence and concern for the greater good.

In line with previous research on the impact of religious communities on adolescents’ and youths’ learning experiences and moral development (Ammerman 2017; Smith and Denton 2009; Vogel 1999), our findings indicate that places of worship such as mosques and religious communities are potential locations for learning about religion, culture, and history: Participants attend worship services or religious communities to study, discover views, and discuss issues related to religion. As a result, religious communities

provide an opportunity to learn about how things are, how they might be improved and how youth could contribute for change.

### ***Inclination***

This subcategory is defined as motives, feelings, habits, and empathy. Interviewees expressed positive emotions and feelings of safety towards places of worship and religious communities: The participants most commonly discussed an inner sense of safety and happiness, as well as a sense of belonging:

Feels like I'm getting closer to my own religion and God. I enjoy that. (Interviewee 20)

I feel there are a lot of people there who understand me in a way. And I feel there are more people who are like *me* there, so I feel more comfortable there (interviewee 7, 2).

Being in an important spot where they can communicate with God both privately and with people of the same religion formed the foundation of their inclinations. Collin's research suggests that ritual participants' physical proximity to each other influences their shared rhythm and emotions, allowing them to be influenced by the emotions of others (2004, 34, 64); this can lead to empathy with others in social interactions and becoming emphatic citizens.

Some participants also mentioned positive emotions related to helping others in the religious community:

It feels very good when you do something for the common good [like charity] or help others. (Interview 10, 1, 2)

Ritual experiences foster group solidarity, a feeling of membership, by connecting participants in a shared experience, focusing on the same thing and sharing the same mood (Collins 2004, 49). Emotional energy, a form of interaction ritual, is positively associated with formal and informal civic engagement, particularly in volunteering and charitable giving.

### ***Will***

This subcategory is defined as choice and freedom which lead to conscious choices in a person's personal and social life. As a result, will can exist at several levels: it can refer to simply being active and able to do something, to following by feeling free in one's choices, and lastly, being able to make conscious choices and having the power of analysis (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022, 59).

Our findings mostly suggest that engagement in a religious community gives young people opportunities to act, decide, and be affective which is mostly at the primary level of will. Data shows young people participate in organising trips, cooking and making costumes:

For this summer, we will organize bigger trips, so we will collect money together. (Interview 13)

Here the participant clearly described choices (bigger trips instead of smaller trips) and action related to those choices:

The last time we had an event was on Saturday, and since it was such a bigger event and the children had their own performance there, what we did was sew all the children's clothes like that. (Interview 6, Interviewee 2)

Finally, this quotation shows choices made within a task that are either voluntary or not. The participant had the duty to look after the children during the religious community event, but she and her friend chose to prepare performances with costumes. Most male interviewees described the religious events arranged by others merely from the perspective of participants, but the first quotation here is by a male who was active in an organisation devoted to young people. The last two participants identified themselves as females and reported being responsible for tasks typically assigned to young women, especially in conservative communities. Compared to mere participants in the events, this gave them an active role where they could sometimes make decisions or choices. Later, we will discuss an even more agentic position taken by the latter interviewee.

### ***The social aspects of civic agency***

#### ***Social participation: within-group***

This refers to experiences of togetherness based on common ethnicity, language, and religion that can assist young people in developing trust and solidarity. According to the data, religious communities support civic agency by validating ethnic or religious identity:

So, it's, like, a Muslim community, and everyone is welcome there, but most of the people there are like that [African nationality]. So, it is also the same [African nationality] community. (Interview 6, 2)

I feel like there is a lot of people there [mosque] who understand me in a way. And I feel like there's more people who are like *me* there, so I feel more comfortable there. (Interview 7, 2)

The sense of togetherness made the participants feel welcome, understood, and comfortable, which is important in creating obligations towards the other members of the group (Šerek 2017). Participants also indicated that places of worship and religious groups provide a place where they can interact with people from the same ingroup:

Um, it's both, but mostly religion, but it's also a social place. You see your friends, you see old people, younger people. It's pretty fun, yeah. (Interview 21)

These accounts show that the participants both created new friendships and tightened existing ones. In this regard, Lim and Putnam (2010) mentioned the role of religious social networks and the contribution of religious communities to the overall life satisfaction and well-being of youth. Furseth (2017) focused on fostering shared identity and trust in religious communities. Peucker (2022) concluded that intra-community volunteering by Muslims strengthens their social networks, enriches their civic and religious identities, and promotes active citizenship.

### ***Social participation: between-groups***

Although the between-groups engagement which we define as experiences of religious communities based on diverse ethnicities, languages, and religions, is highlighted less in the data compared to within-group engagement, it still exists. This between-groups participation is not only restricted to learning about religions but also includes learning about various cultures (Reynolds 2013), which provides the participants with a broader perspective on their own community:

[...] a temple that you can visit and it has become, in my opinion, it's not much about religion anymore, so it's more like social, even if they organize events really often and they [are] more cultural. And they have like made other Finns interested. So it's no longer a place that [Asian ethnicity] and Buddhists visit but suddenly people from other countries have turned up. (Interview 14)

Well, I think it's pretty important. Not like you learn more about your own culture and even about other cultures, which is usually multicultural [mosque] ... And then it is also like that for those who are not Muslims. I have taken a friend who is not Muslim a couple of times. (Interview 5, 1)

These quotations show that the religious communities are also sites of intercultural interaction and hence can provide perspectives and networks beyond one's own ethnic group. In some cases, also interfaith interaction took place.

### ***Adult–youth relationship***

The adult–youth relationship was explicitly discussed in two interviews. Previous studies have suggested that young people are more likely to demonstrate confidence and agency if they actively participate in organisational and community decision-making (Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen 2003; Krauss et al. 2014; Larson, Hansen, and Walker 2005). Acknowledging the need to have a voice in adult-led communities is a vital step towards full civic agency. We define adult – youth relationships as agency negotiation between adults and youth which have an impact on youth engagement in social activities. These relationships have the potential to influence youth social interactions and civic agency in ways that may either promote or frustrate youth agency. The two interviewees who talked about this made interesting observations. When asked about the possibility of having an impact in his local mosque, an interviewee responded as follows:

It's more like adults. It is led more by adults than by young people. (Interview 13)

Me and my one friend, we had such a completely different opinion than the adults ... [tells about the discussion] so the adults eventually had to agree to it. (Interview 12)

For example, participating in Halloween at school was prohibited, but the negotiation about this took place in religious terms. Another case concerned activities where the interviewee tutored a children's group, which provided her with special agency and a need to negotiate its limits.

By pointing out problems in religious communities, these two young people demonstrated an awareness that the other interviewees perhaps lacked. They also demonstrated agency in negotiating with adults.

### ***Bridging between individual and social aspect of agency: civic responsibility***

Civic responsibility in religious communities serves as an essential connection between personal and social aspects of agency by encouraging members to align their personal actions with the collective values and goals of their faith community.

Accounts of actual experiences of working for the common good were scarce in the data, but there were some references to a sense of civic responsibility. The findings indicate that civic responsibility and a sense of duty to act for the common good are supported by religious communities through practices that foster individual 'responsibility towards community members and ethical and spiritual thinking:

Well, yes, every single Muslim has to pay the *sadaqa* or *zakat* that should be paid. It's all about that, so if another Muslim has a problem, all you have to do is donate a little money to him so that it recovers a little and the, like ... Well, I also pay €50 to the mosque every month. (Interview 19, 4)

These quotations mention actions such as giving alms (*zakat*) and benevolence (*sadaqa*), but the participants talk about them as common norms they have internalised. Hence, these actions are more about a principled responsibility than action. This sense of responsibility is also strongly based on solidarity within the community.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Overall, our findings demonstrate how the subjective and organisational dimension of religion (Read 2015) are both separately and in relation to each other important for the formation of civic agency. At the individual level, religion seems to boost interviewees' cognition and inclination. Being informed about their own religion fosters their identity and arouses positive emotions. In addition, religious communities can provide activities where young people can act, decide, and influence, actions which foster their will. However, there are many topics that were not mentioned in the interviews, such as encouragement to critically review or openly debate the knowledge provided in the religious communities or discussing societal issues within religious communities. Similarly to Grundel and Maliepaard (2012), Pauha (2024) and partly also Eseverri-Mayer (2021) our findings do not highlight any fraction from the mainstream society based on religion among ethnic minority youth. Their civic agency is oriented towards community building and little critical or dissatisfied views were expressed.

Furthermore, religion can influence the social aspect of civic agency by providing opportunities for identity-fostering rituals, holding meaningful ceremonies, discussing familiar topics, and participating in group activities. These activities enhance a community spirit and a sense of togetherness. Interviewees also recognised between-groups networking as an asset, highlighting the social relations aspect. As observed by Furseth (2017), young people engage in social participation in religious communities, fostering their understanding of diverse cultures and traditions, and thereby broadening their worldview. This constitutes bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) across networks of people from different groups.

Our findings also indicate that religion facilitates the implicit impact of adults on youth and power structures. Similar to Baumann (2017), we found that social interactions, facilitated by social capital, often involve bonding activities, which can reinforce

power structures based on gender roles and caste ascription, where religious concepts exacerbate the exclusion of women and youth. Based on our research, the adult – youth relationship can both foster and hinder youth agency. There were only a few mentions of the active promotion of youth agency in decision-making, and adults also had an authoritative role in interpreting religious norms. However, participation in organising events provided some interviewees with a position where they could adjust their tasks and practise negotiation with adult authorities. Political awareness or action could not be detected in the interview data.

In line with Putnam and Campbell (2012) on how religious communities contribute to the common good, our research highlights that religious communities reinforce youth civic responsibility through helping others, collecting funds, and fostering ethical and spiritual issues. Considering the twofold framework of civic agency based on human agency (Khalili, Kallioniemi, and Bagheri Noaparast 2022; see also Dahlgren 2006) and social capital (Putnam and Campbell 2012) and our analysis of the data, we suggest the seven components of youth civic agency can be fostered through religion.

While the main goal of this article was to understand the possible contributions of religion to civic agency, the predominance of Muslim interviewees may have affected the conclusions. Future research should therefore compare Finnish and ethnic-minority youths in Finland to include Christian and non-religious identities.

Based on the theoretical and empirical reflections offered in this study, we propose that civic agency is the process by which each human develops his or her cognition, emotions, and freedom to act as an agent citizen in society. This process includes social participation within and between groups, civic responsibility, and relationships with other people (in this research, adult–youth relationships).

The implications of our findings are twofold. First, the presented framework of civic agency can be employed in a variety of settings, including education, promoting civic engagement, increasing social capital, and strengthening democratic institutions. Second, citizenship education in formal education could pay more attention to the individual foundation of civic agency, namely identities and the information that can affirm them, inclinations in the form of emotions related to civic and social life, and will as the examination of one's goals, hopes, and choices. This is in line with Banks' transformative educational approach (2017), which focuses on students' critical analysis of social, political, and economic inequalities, promoting equity and justice through challenging and changing societal norms. By incorporating Banks' concept into religious communities, leaders and educators can inspire young people to see their religious principles as a foundation for political engagement. This could include taking part in social justice activities, campaigning for marginalised communities, or working on community service projects that address both local and global challenges. Religious communities can thus become venues where young people are not only nurtured in their religion but also empowered to be active agents of social change. For instance, religious education as one school subject providing citizenship education has the potential to give young people the tools to negotiate issues in their own religious communities, for instance based on knowledge, diverse perspectives, and other tools of critical evaluation. Individual agency, personal feelings, and freedom could be discussed within the framework of religious traditions. Political awareness could

be raised both in religious education and in other forms of citizenship education; promoting social justice in general and understanding the minority position in particular fit well into both religious education and social studies education. It is therefore suggested that more attention be paid to this potential in society and schools. However, integrating religious principles into civic education requires a balanced approach, acknowledging the diversity of belief systems, and promoting respect and understanding.

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## Notes on contributors

*Samaneh Khalili* holds a PhD in Philosophy of Education and has worked as a senior researcher at the University of Turku and a PhD researcher at the University of Helsinki in Finland. Her research interests focus on exploring philosophical approaches to education, human agency in various social contexts, comparative studies, ethnic minorities, and religious education.

*Anuleena Kimanen* is a university lecturer in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Turku, Finland and she holds the title of docent in the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki. Besides ethnic minority youth's civic agency, her latest research focuses on cultural and worldview diversity in education and on teaching social justice in religious education.

*Aleksi Seger* is a doctoral researcher in the INVEST doctoral programme, University of Turku, Finland. His research interests focus on the transition to adulthood and belonging among minority ethnic youth in urban contexts.

## ORCID

Samaneh Khalili  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2099-7392>

Anuleena Kimanen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0049-826X>

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