

Authors Meet Critics

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Articles: Participation in Urban Contention and Deliberation (2010, IJURR 34.3, 453–77)

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Chatzi, Venetia	Schrader, Stuart
Colini, Laura	Stefanovska, Jasna
Darrah, Jennifer	Teotia, Manoj K.
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<**Torrasi, Giovanni**> Good day to everybody. Two of our three authors have already logged in. Let us wait a few moments for our third author, Hilary Silver. Today we will be discussing ‘Participation in Urban Contention and Deliberation’.

<Silver, Hilary> Hi everybody!

<Torrise, Giovanni> Wonderful. Welcome Professor Silver and greetings to Professor Kazepov and Professor Scott. I suggest we begin immediately. Last time two hours were really short. While the participants begin to post their questions, it would be nice to quickly introduce today's theme by our three authors.

<Silver, Hilary> Our theme is 'participation' — in reality! How is it that people want to affiliate and solve problems or accomplish goals collectively?

<Kazepov, Yuri> In particular, we are interested in the fact that 'real life' is a synthesis of oppositional theories which try to simplify life to understand how it works, but are not able to do that properly without considering a procedural approach. — But let's go to the questions which are already appearing in the left hand box.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Thanks. Let us see online participation in reality. First question by Caroline Cage already.

<Cage, Caroline> My research is exploring the difference between NGO and Slum Dwellers International (SDI) supported community umbrella organizations in slum areas. The two supporting organizations have quite different backgrounds, as well as probably quite different incentives for supporting these groups. The NGOs, that of consensus-building at the grassroots level with the aim of facilitating transactions between the state and the individuals within slum communities, whereas the SDI has a more confrontational background in promoting slum-dwellers rights. Therefore, while the NGO-supported groups may be better connected to the state through their association with NGOs, they may not have the autonomy or capacity of the SDI-supported groups to advocate for themselves. What do you think the role of community umbrella organizations could be in engaging in decision-making and implementation processes, and how do you think the organizations that support them may affect the way they are structured, run, and also perceived by policymakers?

<Silver, Hilary> Umbrella organizations are not only useful interlocutors with the state; they facilitate transnational social movements and mutual learning across the grassroots. They also help with coalition building. Umbrella organizations are also valuable to pool resources, pool risks and distribute funds to grassroots NGOs as needed.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Thanks a lot. Adhya Anirban poses a question about the new social media (Facebook, twitter). I also look forward to the answer to this question.

<Anirban, Adhya> How do you see twenty-first century social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) impact (or not) the framework of democratic participation in terms of scale, context and outcome (considering the recent Egyptian revolution as a case in point)?

<Scott, Alan> In the early response in social movements analysis to the use of new

media (e.g. Tarrow, 1994) the suggestion was that new media may act as a substitute for collective action. The kinds of example you mention suggest that this is not the case. From a sociological point of view, it is the practices that emerge around new technologies, not the technologies themselves that are significant. These media can be used as ways of gaining editorial control and organizing flexibly and fast. Some of the cases discussed in the symposium looked also at top-down examples.

<Silver, Hilary> I think social media are awesome in coordinating participation, telling people where to meet, even how to avoid police repression. Of course, ‘e-government’ may also impede face-to-face deliberation. Communication — even the one we are engaged in now — is less deliberative when conducted indirectly through social media.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Very well. What about the influence of the new media in the North African Spring?

<Kazepov, Yuri> Actually coordination is indeed an issue, and new social media can be an important resource as soon as they work as information hubs, like in the North African case.

<Torrise, Giovanni> This issue catalysed a lot of attention among participants. The next question by Sai Balakrishnan focuses on the ‘global South’:

<Balakrishnan, Sai> Many recent innovations in participatory democracy are emerging from cities in the ‘global South’ (in your symposium, you find that cases from middle-income democratizing countries provide grounds for optimism, while more sceptical positions are taken with respect to the two post-industrial cities in the US and Germany). Bearing in mind that successful democratization is contingent on local histories and institutional contexts, can we, nonetheless, advance some general explanations for why these middle-income democratizing countries are fertile grounds for successful experiments in participatory democracy? Also, for too long, the West has been the epicentre for the production of urban theories and knowledge, and countries in the ‘global South’ learn from the experiences of the West. Can the ‘participatory democracy’ discourse lead to a reversal in the flow of knowledge? Can we now start asking questions like: ‘What can Berlin and Philadelphia learn from São Paulo and Durban’?

<Kazepov, Yuri> This is a challenging issue and quite a thought provoking one. I (we) think that it is not by chance that participatory democracy is emerging in cities in the global South. They are contexts with a low redistribution of resources, so participatory democracy is a redistribution of power to a low resources share. In contexts where redistribution is high (I am thinking here more of Germany than the US) conflict and opposition is ‘kept’, let’s say, ‘under control’ through that higher redistribution. The real challenge is to do what ironically is called ‘institutional shopping’, and export lessons from the global South, where interests are more structured and the resources involved more relevant, to the global North so the selection of who participates and who decides becomes even more crucial — not just symbolically but also substantially. There are many attempts and experiments in Europe, but the accountability issue is

always a critical point which is not always solved properly; so what the global North should learn is not only a new form of institutional engineering but at the same time an involvement which should also target more relevant resources. I am not sure this is an easy task (mission impossible?) and I am rather pessimistic, but if you know of good examples let us know.

<Silver, Hilary> I think cities in the North can and should learn from experiences in the South. Democratic practice in 'late democratic states' is decaying. Voting turnout is miserable, and class-biased. Political parties have very little to do with encouraging popular participation. Like Michels said! The elites run things and try to demobilize ordinary people. The direct democracy in cities of the global South is inspiring, and may energize citizens in the North.

<Torrise, Giovanni> This is very interesting. I think it may also have something to do with different ways in which social capital is structured in different democratic models...

The next question deals with a scale factor. Why are we speaking about urban participation and not simply about participation? Stuart Schrader:

<Schrader, Stuart> I wondered if you could specify the meaning of 'urban' in your piece. I realize that you are synthesizing some theory about contentious politics and giving an overview of case studies, but in reading your piece, I wondered if there was anything particularly 'urban' about the way politics is operating. Is 'urban' merely an empirical description or does it have a particular effect on politics. Space is not necessarily the medium or stake of the struggles discussed, and scale is treated as an available tactic in struggle — e.g. 'differentiated room for manoeuvre available to the different types of actors' (p. 456). Yet is there something particularly 'urban' here other than the face of these struggles' occurrence in what we historically recognize as cities? Thus, can this tell us anything about the changing character of 'the urban' in recent decades?

<Kazepov, Yuri> The urban is related to different dimensions which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Actually, the urban is the scale on which all other scales conflate, but participatory democracy in its main features usually foresees bottom-up participation and face-to-face 'confrontation' or exchange. Social media change this setting but they are adding a relevant complication that despatializes the 'procedures'. Access to social media for, let's say, the 'poor' is also a problem (the digital divide) so the local dimension becomes an option to (partly) overcome this divide as well. We know however that 'the poor' — if we consider their participation rates — are usually underrepresented in these events and advocacy groups take over. The issue is complex because the local is built into the very premises of participatory democracy. In particular when it comes to redistributive issues (the local knows more about the problems of the local ... and should be able to find proper solutions). At the same time it avoids some of the macro issues at stake (e.g. redistributive issues under capitalism). This is why I am pessimistic about participatory democracy. In the end the experiments of the local (urban) laboratory should scale up, at least to the national (if not supranational (EU) level), otherwise they will remain small experiments with no

impact.

<Scott, Alan> But (in part in response to Yuri's comments) some of the arguments we discussed (e.g. those of Paul Hirst, 1994; 2005) stressed that developed democracy has always been urban. In that sense, there is a non-contingent relationship between the urban and democratic processes. Can you imagine the kinds of case study examples we discussed in a non-urban context?

<Torrise, Giovanni> Our authors are quicker than light! And quicker than bits!

The next question by Wouter Van Gent deals with the classical inclusion paradox of most experiments of participative democracy:

<Van Gent, Wouter> Hello. First, let me say that I found this paper to be very insightful because it brings together so many complexities in thinking about civic participation and deliberation. Having done research on the policy and practice of neighbourhood regeneration in Western European cities, resident participation often came up. From that background, I have the following question: Your paper tackles some of the contradictions in the literature, but I was wondering what you think about the following paradox of participation: in the paper you make the point that more educated elites tend to dominate deliberation and protest. This may be countered by empowering the disadvantaged through legislation. However, to effectively participate or deliberate, citizens/residents need to have some level of knowledge, learning and memory about the issues at hand. To attain more knowledge requires an investment in terms of time and effort, and will create an uneven relationship with the constituents. In sum, to be active and participate requires a level that entails being part of an elite; to be part of an elite implies not being disadvantaged. The paradox works the other way round too. Disadvantaged groups are often unrepresented and do not engage in the political process. In my neighbourhood studies, I have found that because of their poverty and exclusion, many disadvantaged people direct all their energy and attention into their livelihoods (surviving) rather than participating in regeneration processes. So, in this case, being disadvantaged and not participating in the political process is a mutually reinforcing mechanism (people are disadvantaged because they are not part of the political process; people are not part of the process because they are disadvantaged). I may overstate the case, but my question is: Are not participation and deliberation in the city by definition uneven processes which presume a more educated, more knowledgeable, more charismatic, smarter and smaller group of people that represents a larger less advantaged constituency? If yes, what are the consequences for the practice and theory of participation?

<Silver, Hilary> We see that the reduction of opportunities to participate in political party or electoral activity in Western (Northern) democracies demobilizes ordinary (less well-educated) people. But problems in their immediate environment — pollution, natural disaster, crime — will often bring neighbours together to address practical issues with no need for special expertise.

PS I'm glad you liked the paper...

<Torrise, Giovanni> Thanks. Let us continue with a question by Junxi Qian.

<Qian, Junxi> Dear Professors, thank you for your very comprehensive article. My question is about the political potential of participation within a specific arrangement of power relations. As many critics have observed, nowadays many social movements are easily co-opted by the dominant political institution (inter alia the capitalist economic system), therefore reinforcing rather than challenging hegemonic political power. Iris Young also warned of the risk that political movements might simply be reduced to interest-group bargaining. In your paper, you seem to emphasize both the moments of consensus and confrontation (it is also enlightening to see you have warned against the possibility of undemocratic social negotiation). So I would like to ask what criteria you would propose in order to distinguish between such a moment of *bargaining* and instances of challenging the dominant power structure.

<Scott, Alan> Yes, that is exactly the problem. Some of the cases discussed in the symposium looked at top-down examples (e.g. Belfast and Philadelphia). Some of these forms of partnership governance are highly selective and this (as in the Philadelphia case) may endanger the legitimation of the process. Where there is a stronger tradition of civic activism (e.g. Durban) they may be more inclusive. We tried to stress the importance of classical criteria: Who gets invited to the table? Who decides? And always the danger is that the least well resourced do not get a voice (squeaky wheels get oiled).

<Kazepov, Yuri> This reconnects to Wouter Van Ghent's question about elites, and Alan's comment on my response to Stuart Schrader's question re the intrinsic urban nature of participatory democracy, in particular in relation to 'bargaining', negotiation, etc. The nature of participatory politics is indeed urban (or local), and it challenges the given structured forms of power, but the selection mechanisms are really those of 'post-democracy' (the provocative title of Crouch's 2004 book), i.e. mechanisms through which the *demos* is left out.

Maybe some want to be left out or don't care. Participation in elections is in some countries rather low, but the new forms are also new forms for reappropriation of the process, and I guess this very genuine aspect is what Hirst (1994; 2005) refers to.

<Silver, Hilary> I would interject a distinction here: urban or local scale often facilitates direct interaction, face-to-face cooperation, deliberation, and in the process itself, the building of trust.

<Scott, Alan> There is also the question: What are the interests of the 'dominant power structures'? In the Berlin case we are left with the impression that the local government was happy to negotiate as long as there were no immediate uses for the common gardens, and no immediate interest in the land. It looks like a holding operation rather than a longer-term process of civil inclusion, if the account is correct.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Thanks a lot. It seems we are getting into a very good rhythm now... Christy Nwachi brings to the table a *glocal* issue. It relates to Nigeria, but I guess it is not just a Nigerian issue.

<Nwachi, Christy> Hello everyone, Christy from Nigeria. A clear cut model of citizen participation may not work in a diverse and developing society such as Nigeria where there are no less than 250 tribes of very fierce and loyal affiliations. In some instances the radical democratic approach takes prominence, which leads to conflict. And in others a participatory approach may work, but the issue here — be it deliberative participation, radical, or participation in its hybrid form — is the lack of ideas or methodologies on the part of government operatives about how to reach out to the citizens. What approaches can decision makers take to include ordinary citizens who are massively uninformed about participatory governance?

<Silver, Hilary> Usually such contexts have traditional tribal elders, people who speak for their group, and in a sense provide 'representation' of 'ordinary' or 'uninformed' citizens.

<Kazepov, Yuri> Difficult question. The context-related nature of everything needs careful reflection. Also the 'best practice' approach by the European Union, or the 'institutional shopping' I referred to earlier, tends to decontextualize important practices with the result that they don't work in another context. The issue you are posing with 250 tribes and no participatory tradition in the sense it is discussed here does, of course, undermine the options of successfully importing it in that context. What should be done is to distil the very abstract elements of the process and see how they can be 'recontextualized' in your case. This is a very difficult exercise, which is not usually in the 'vision' of politicians, who have other interests (rather short term), while these exercises require quite some time and relational skills.

<Torrise, Giovanni> The question is difficult indeed. Christy, what means do you think could be more appropriate in Nigeria? Or do you think that participatory democracy is not the kind of democracy that best fits?

<Nwachi Christy> I think the hybrid participatory approach may work to some extent.

<Kazepov, Yuri> Actually all are hybrid approaches as contamination is the result of interaction, but I agree with you that ideas travel and are recontextualized and reshaped.

<Scott, Alan> I am not so sure. Hybrids can lead to confusion about process and responsibility.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Even though this discussion is very interesting, it would need much more time. We need to pass the floor to Caroline Cage, and her question:

<Cage, Caroline> You mention that 'public funds can subsidize the operations of new organizations of excluded groups to equalize collective resources, although this poses the danger of dependency, loss of autonomy and capture' (p. 472). There is much debate at the moment about the role of micro-finance in economic empowerment of the poor. Micro-finance (or more importantly micro-savings and loaning) seems to be a way of empowering marginalized groups, that may then go on to become more

involved at a higher level. What do you think about this (or other approaches) as an alternative way of building the capacity and solidarity of marginalized groups to give them the confidence, skills and level of organization to get involved in decision making?

<Silver, Hilary> Caroline, I am sorry that I did not — on second reading — fully answer your first question. I will come back to it.

On micro-finance: I believe the evidence suggests a problem of ‘scaling up’ — that it offers subsistence to participants, but not collective affluence. Mobility chances are few. Also it can produce domestic violence if the whole family is liable for a loan. And some of the people's banks (Grameen) have been accused of corruption.

<Cage, Caroline> I would agree on micro-finance, but perhaps other forms of savings and loaning in groups? I also agree that perhaps there is an issue of scale with this.

<Silver, Hilary> To return to your first question: umbrella organizations that ‘bridge’ across locales for purposes of pooling resources for larger projects have potential if sufficiently transparent and if monitoring by grassroots contributors is ongoing. But there are always dangers when larger organizations are not accountable to their investors — public or non-profit.

<Torrise, Giovanni> The next question comes from Nathaniel Lewis.

<Lewis Nathaniel> First, thank you for a discussion that provides some working typologies for the issues of participation I've encountered in my work on urban governance. In a recent project on business improvement districts in Washington DC (somewhat similar to the EZ case mentioned in the article), I noticed that civic participation in BIDs was frequently discussed in opposition to ideas of ‘pragmatism’ and ‘function’. Many BID directors said that if they ‘did the right thing’ and actively sought resident-based approval processes for BID implementation or resident participation in BID meetings (few ever attend), then the BIDs would either never be approved or would rarely be able to move ahead with their projects. Few have criticized the neoliberal, opaque processes through which BIDs govern ... Would you ever agree with these directors; i.e., can a case ever be made for speed/efficacy/pragmatism over participation?

<Scott, Alan> Hilary will respond on the US, but here is a preliminary comment: democratic processes — whether participatory or representational — are slow; slower than those who want a fast decision would like. That this is not possible under the ‘exceptional’ condition is not in itself a reason for always preferring decisionism over democracy and due process. There is always a tension between process and decision.

<Silver, Hilary> The only things I ever read about BIDs are critical. They are business led and privatize public space. Perhaps you are referring to the requirement in regulations for community comment on local plans or zoning?

<Torrise, Giovanni> Maybe Lewis Nathaniel would like to answer to that?

<Lewis Nathaniel> Community comment on zoning might be a better representation of the type of conflict that I'm talking about. But I point to BIDs specifically because they are technically publicly approved/facilitated/enabled in theory — but as you pointed out Professor Silver, they rarely incorporate much public opinion in practice. If you have any thoughts on how the legislation should be changed I'd love to hear it. Thanks!

<Silver, Hilary> Outreach for public meetings — serious publicity for community forums — might increase participation, bringing out both opponents and proponents of a development or BID or other project to talk to (or more usually shout at) each other. It would be good if community organizations themselves mobilized their members for a big turnout at such community hearings.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Let us move on to Laura Colini's question, which is again on the 'elite' issue:

<Colini Laura> Hi all. I enjoyed reading the article, and I agree with the argument, which raised some reflections I would like to share with you. Now, having worked on occasion both as an activist and as a policymaker, my reflections involve neoliberal aspects that do not only relate to elites. In the article, neoliberal governance seems to be coupled with social elites, but I have also started to think about the *dictatorship* (real or metaphorical) of local/grassroots knowledge, both in well-intentioned policy making and in theory about public participation. In Western societies, the average citizen is often permeated with neoliberal thinking, and sometimes protests can even be far from democratic or progressive. Bearing that in mind, my question is about the relation between public participation and social fairness and justice.

<Scott, Alan> On Laura's point, a short comment: if I get you right, yes, there is that danger. Partnership governance has sometimes been characterized as 'government without opposition' — i.e. capture or co-optation of social forces/groups that may hinder policy intent.

<Kazepov, Yuri> I completely share your point Laura. Actually NIMBYism is an increasing risk and those who have a 'voice' are usually not the disfranchised but those who are able to make their voice heard. So if we take the perspective of the poor we need to take an advocacy perspective and help these people to participate. If we take Amartya Sen's approach we have to build capabilities also for participatory democracy, which is not easy, but surely worth a try.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Another question related to social media ... and scale of participation by Sabina Uffer.

<Uffer, Sabina> What does the role of the practices around social media mean for the conceptualization of scale? So far, scale seems to be conceptualized as the interaction of different geographical levels. Where do the practices around social media fit in this?

<Silver, Hilary> Castells' work on the Informational Society points to a 'space of flows' that, in effect, touches earth in variable localities. Social media facilitates this, as we saw in the jumping of popular participatory protests across countries of the Middle East last month.

<Kazepov, Yuri> Scales are indeed less clearly cut defined through new social media. Social media challenge borders — or better the way in which borders are constructed — and the issue becomes how to scale-up protest and contraposition to the next relevant scale. In general Alan might be right about a non-contingent urban or local scale, but there are cases in which upscaling is successful. Take the opposition to the 'Stuttgart 21' project, that brought about change in the political majority in Baden Wurttemberg for the first time in 60 years (!) and elected a member of the Green Party as head of the Land — which is quite a powerful position given that Baden Wurttemberg is one of the richest regions in Germany, even in the world! So it depends very much (again) on the context, and our ability should be directed to disentangling how much is context vs. how much can be upscaled. Upscaling can also occur through coincidence — e.g. the impact of the recent Tsunami in Japan where the prospect of a nuclear reactor meltdown escalated opposition to the industry; so, you see, contingency.

<Scott, Alan> Difficult question. Some of the empirical analysis suggests that social and new media use remains quite local, either in a strict spatial sense, or if geographically wide, then still confined to specific networks.

<Silver, Hilary> Yes, the Network Society means the social media may only connect Arabic speakers or those who can deliberate together. I like the Stuttgart 21 example, because here is an anti-development uprising of ordinary citizens outside the conventional party system.

<Scott, Alan> And interestingly in the Stuttgart 21 case current debates about democracy and 'post-democracy' (Crouch, 2004) were quite prominent.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Adhya Anirban proposes to deepen the contraposition between planned vs spontaneous participation in shrinking cities.

<Anirban, Adhya> In a shrinking city (like Detroit), where a formal top-down planning approach and governance have failed in many ways (no investment, minimal infrastructure development, no services in several neighbourhoods), bottom-up local movements (design activism, guerrilla architecture, local art, community education, food production in community gardens) have taken over the role of urban governance and management. How do you see democratic participation working in such a context, where participation is not planned but is spontaneous; where creative coalitions are not designed, but informally appropriated for survival?

<Kazepov, Yuri> That's great and probably the only way it really works. Inducing this institutionally is important, but if 'emotions' are not there (like in the Stuttgart 21 case), it is difficult to mobilize 'masses'. The point is that we have to find solutions that

are able to guarantee (like in modern welfare states) people in a similar condition of need similar provisions and equal citizenship rights. And in such cases this is, of course, not given. It is possible to induce participation institutionally, but we should have a frame which allows that — a frame that at the same time provides and guarantees equal access and equally redistributed resources. It isn't easy.

<Silver, Hilary> Detroit is a distinctive case of unplanned shrinkage, and the Mayor is trying to consolidate the spatial organization of people on the terrain. But people are invested in their homes, and resist moving, even if they will have new neighbours instead of vacant houses that are being turned into artistic creations. Is this really 'participation'? Are 'graffiti artists' participating — i.e. interacting with others, except indirectly through symbolic communication? Interaction and deliberation require dialogue not monologue.

<Kazepov, Yuri> And dialogue might bring about unexpected results.

<Torrise, Giovanni> As today's discussion is demonstrating. There could also be some level of serendipity —thus good unexpected results. The next question comes from Hiba BouAkar:

<BouAkar, Hiba> Thanks for the great discussion. Discussions on participation — both consensus-based and conflictual — tend to assume a clear category of citizenry and a very clear, separate and coherent sphere of government or even of 'the state'. However, what can be said about participation in places where the state cannot be discussed as a uniform, coherent entity, where the lines between the government and the governed are mediated through all sorts of other affiliations, which conflicts with the primary assumption of a clear state-citizen relationship, which is primarily a Western category. Is this sort of discussion relevant to the participation question?

<Scott, Alan> This is a very good and difficult question. I am not sure that I can answer directly, but can simply note that one implication of a participatory or partnership model of governance would be to blur the distinction between the governed and governing, everywhere it is applied, at least if we take their claims at face value.

<Silver, Hilary> Please give us a concrete example. Public-private partnerships? Or do you mean 'failed states'?

<Torrise, Giovanni> Hiba will answer to that directly.

<BouAkar, Hiba> An example comes from my own work in Beirut. One might call it a failed state but I prefer to reflect on it differently. For example the lines between who is in charge of planning and who is planned for in Beirut are not clear. They are often mediated by what I call 'religious political organizations' based on religious and sectarian lines, the local presence of political parties, etc., so in these cases the division between private and public, state and citizen, and even market and non-market are very difficult to decipher. And 'participation' here looks very different.

<Silver, Hilary> Personally as a political sociologist I find it hard to find a clear boundary between state and society. — Oh, I just wrote something on Beirut in City & Community! Sometimes civil society is part of the state to the extent that citizens are engaged politically.

<BouAkar, Hiba> I actually read it in preparation for this meeting. Great piece.

<Silver, Hilary> Thanks! I enjoyed my visit to the city.

<BouAkar, Hiba> Glad you did!

<Silver, Hilary> Yes, beautiful. And the new downtown provides much hope.

On the question of religious organizations — not just in Beirut but in Indian cities and other places where local mafias reign. How democratic are they? Are they responsive to members? Do they allow laymen to participate as autonomous citizens or only as 'clients'? If the organizational leaders are not accountable, and only tell people how to behave, or hire desperate unemployed people to be 'henchmen,' can we say this is democratic participation or rather, repression, patronage, clientelism? The state should have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force or violence — when it doesn't, when there is no rule of law, participation is not free.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Sorry to hurry you, but time is getting short. Manoj Teotia brings in an example from India.

< Teotia, Manoj K. > I must congratulate the authors for a highly informative article on a crucial issue. The analytical framework of the issue under consideration is very interesting. I find that certain generalizations confirm the findings of some studies I have conducted in the past. In my M Phil dissertation on a world famous participatory initiative in Sukhomajiri village I found that 'social homogeneity' and 'economic interests' play crucial roles, first in gaining support and then in terms of the long-term sustainability of participatory initiatives. Later, in another study of a segregated settlement in Chandigarh I found that augmentation of urban environmental infrastructure (removal of encroachments and then development of parks, streets, plantation, drainage, etc.) mobilized the participation of the local population. In Kerala state, the People's Plan Campaign in the mid-1990s, supported by the state government, played a crucial role in institutionalizing and strengthening people's participation in the planning process, which is considered crucial for strong local governance in the state today. Another local context-specific case is the provision of a constitution of Ward Committees in local governance in India. Few states and city governments have gone ahead in promoting 'political participation' through this mechanism. But Indian social diversity has its own positives and negatives. So many states are unable to have consensus on this issue (which may have political implications also). My recent study on voters' behaviour has found that young adults (aged 18 to 25) are not participating in democratic process and are not voting at the time of elections. I am doing a second phase of the study to explore the reasons for that. Maybe the authors would like to say something about that?

<**Scott, Alan**> Manoj, do you have any idea why there is this lack of interest? This is a much debated — and contested — issue.

< **Teotia, Manoj K.** > This is what I am trying to understand now.

<**Silver, Hilary**> Kerala is an interesting place with much more democracy and political participation than the usual Indian state/city. But there too — I was in Kochin last month — the political parties are atrophying. Demobilization results. The Communist Party is losing support there. They often mobilized popular participation.

< **Teotia, Manoj K.** > Kerala has participatory budgeting also as you discussed... yes this is something political parties are bringing from outside.

<**Torrisi, Giovanni**> Thanks a lot, we need to move now to another question. From India, we move to China. Junxi Qian:

<**Qian, Junxi**> Could I ask a question about project-specific public participation? That is related to my research on the empowerment of displacees during urban redevelopment in China. One interesting phenomenon is that while displacees often voice strong opposition to the state and the developers, their action is fragmented into specific development projects. In each case, affected residents launch activism against the government and an agreement may be reached, but this process of 'demolition–activism–negotiation' is endlessly repeated in every project. No genuine political empowerment is achieved. How would you comment on this?

<**Silver, Hilary**> Popular protest in China is very dangerous. So of course, urban protest remains localized. We all need to support democracy in China. It will come.

<**Van Gent, Wouter**> A question that is a bit further away from your article. You mention the decline in ways in which poor citizens can participate in elective and civic democracy in Western Europe (decaying democratic practice), while disconnected elites may have colonized the formal deliberative process. I am wondering whether these two trends can be connected to the rise of anti-establishment political movements such as the Front National in France, Liga Nord in Italy, Freedom Party in the Netherlands, and perhaps also the Tea Party in the US. For disadvantaged groups these movements may represent a new way to be empowered and to be included again. Or is this too simplistic?

<**Silver, Hilary**> I see these right wing movements as populist, like you do. Populist participation has its own logic, unfortunately one that leads away from democracy because leaders only communicate one way. Neo-fascist, in my view.

<**Scott, Alan**> Some people have suggested that there is a systematic connection between neo-corporatist forms of government (such as those one finds in countries like Austria) and the rise of the far right. In the 1970s and 80s it looked as though opposition to the political establishment in these contexts would come from the ecological-left (so-called 'left libertarians'). Now it seems that the far-right has more

successfully positioned itself to mobilize the reactions of those excluded from social partnership arrangements. If the EU is, as some analysts suggest (e.g. Offe and Preuss, 2006), neo-corporatism writ large, then we might expect an even wider development of this type.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Another question from Nora Libertun de Duren.

<Libertun de Duren, Nora> Within the framework that you are posing, how would you conceptualize fair participation in the relationship between political jurisdiction and environmental problems. For example, there are some projects — like a new paper pulp plant in Uruguay — that impact on the environment of the surrounding area (in this case an Argentinean town). In a sketchy fashion we can argue that both towns support this plant, as it provides jobs. However, at a national level there are concerns with pollution. Thus, those most polluted are also willing to suffer this because of its short-term benefits. Now, how do you balance the short term with the long term, when those who should care about the future are urged by present needs?

<Silver, Hilary> This recalls Javier Auyero's residents of Flammable! Welcome to real politics! Balancing public goods. Compromise. Find ways to pulp paper that are less polluting?

<Kazepov, Yuri> Again very context specific, with some common issues...

<Torrise, Giovanni> A question from Marià José Zapata:

<Zapata, Marià José> In many cities of the global South, top-down participatory approaches for policy implementation have become part of the normative expectations, institutionalized as a product of aid development organizations, despite the substantial transaction and financial costs associated with long participatory policy-making processes. I wonder to what extent can these participatory processes come to operate as 'boundary objects' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) enabling translations between communities of meaning and practice (e.g. ordinary citizens and administrative elites), offering means by which divergent interests can be enrolled in a common activity? I have read some applications of these concepts in development studies, but have they been explored in urban studies?

<Scott, Alan> What is a 'boundary object'?

<Kazepov, Yuri> I don't know any case, but there surely might be some. Do you mean that becoming institutionalized, they are part of the 'identity building process'? They conflate many different expectations of participation, but also of identity and redistribution, and through this also allow dialogue in a dialectic way? If this is the case, there are many examples of this also in urban studies, for instance, in Grottamare, a small Italian municipality on the Adriatic coast, but it has specific contextual conditions (a left local government with 60% of the votes). It is a specific setting.

<Silver, Hilary> Sorry we are being cut off — time is up. Please email me if you have an unanswered question!

<Scott, Alan> Thank you all for your time.

<Kazepov, Yuri> Thanks for your understanding. It was indeed complex to manage... and the first time for three authors. We'll work on the transcript to have more coherent answers! ;-) Bye to everybody.

<Torrisi, Giovanni> Yes, we will review anyway the transcript of the interaction, in order to better organize the themes and discussion. Thanks to all three authors. It has been a very intense and at times frantic meeting! Interesting for sure.

Next time we will join up with Jenny Robinson to discuss 'Cities in a world of cities: the comparative gesture'.

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