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Citizens' participation in policy-making [in Europe]', CINEFOGO Working Paper

### Original Citation

Grimshaw, Lucy and Lever, John (2008) Citizens' participation in policy-making [in Europe]', CINEFOGO Working Paper. Working Paper. CINEFOGO.

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# **Citizens' participation in policy-making: Working paper**

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## **1. Introduction**

This working paper explores different approaches to engaging citizens in policy-making across EU member states. The paper is based on the objectives of WP14 and will focus on the following issues:

- The relationship between representative and participatory democracy;
- The relationship between different forms of deliberative democracy and the extent to which different forms engage and are responsive to citizen voice;
- Optimal ways of engaging citizens and the relative merits of individual and collective approaches in 'empowering' citizens to engage;
- What is realistic to expect and how to engage citizens at different levels – incentives and motivation;
- How citizen views are channelled and represented in partnership forums, issues about gate-keeping and accountability;
- Tensions between cohesion and diversity – how diversity of citizen's voices is mediated and particularly how usually excluded groups are heard;

The paper initially emerged from the papers delivered at the first WP14 workshop at UWE in Bristol in February 2007. The conference brought together a range of academics and practitioners from mainly EU countries. 40 papers were presented focusing on international research on citizen participation. Diverse issues were discussed including key concepts in participation and democracy, impacts of participation, urban regeneration and planning, participatory budgeting, elite relations, tensions, diversity and conflict. A sample of the UWE conference papers discussed can be found at the conference website: <http://cinefogoconference.pbwiki.com>.

The paper has been taken forward by drawing on papers from other CINEFOGO work packages that have covered similar themes since the UWE conference. Details of all the papers discussed can be found at <http://cinefogo.cuni.cz/index.php>.

## **2. Representative and participatory democracy**

This section aims to explore the relationship between representative and participatory democracy. Representation remains the core feature of all European political systems. Yet political systems across Europe are characterised by disillusionment with political institutions and declining trust in politicians (Smith, 2007; Djordjevic, 2007). Governments are also under pressure to

improve the quality and legitimacy of decision-making and improve public service delivery (Barnes and Skelcher, 2007). Citizen engagement is a response to this low or declining interest in local politics (Djordjevic, 2007). Djordjevic suggests four different reasons for participation:

1. To help secure implementation of a plan by building commitment amongst a number of local actors, to strengthen ownership
2. To help local politicians/councillors make informed decisions about development needs
3. To strengthen the legitimacy of multi-agency working in local agencies where trust is low or declining
4. To enhance democratic participation

The rise of citizen participation in European countries is often backed by government legislation. For example, even in centralised countries, like Finland and the UK, local government reforms and legislation during the 1990s have introduced opportunities for citizen participation (Häikiö, 2007). This 'modernisation' process implies less central government control and devolution to localities and new ways of governance (Häikiö, 2006). Other countries also have legislation for citizen engagement. In the 1990s, Belgium saw the *"cautious introduction of initiatives and experiments with interactive decision-making"*, and the main devices for local participation were enshrined in Belgian law, while Italy and Montenegro also have legal provisions for participation in Local Government legislation (Šarenac, 2007). Ukraine, Macedonia and Croatia also have legislation for citizen engagement, albeit "deficient" legislation.

However there is an uneasy relationship between representative democracy and participatory processes (Falleth et al., 2007; Smith, 2007). In representative democracy citizens have a role as voters or elected politicians. Representative democracy requires a government that is popularly authorised, accountable, responsive and representative through a process of competitive election and connected to active citizens (Häikiö, 2007 following Beetham, 1996). Participatory democracy is based on the involvement of citizens as active participants deliberating and seeking consensus with multiple actors to form political decisions. The tensions between these models of democracy centre on models of citizenship; is democracy about giving a vote or should citizens be directly involved in decision-making as well? (Häikiö, 2007). As Häikiö points out, both direct democracy or participatory democracy are said to be required for the fulfilment of citizenship, i.e. that citizens have the possibility to participate in the political sphere and public life.

Some papers argue that the role of citizens and citizenship is changing within the context of new public management (NPM) (see for example Verlet et al., 2007). NPM emphasises effectiveness, efficiency and quality and the creation of structures based on a purchaser/provider split and the transformation of public services to market services. Local democracy becomes closer to a business firm model (Verlet et al., 2007). The broader quest for NPM is said to frame participatory conclusions within a managerial logic, which means that the question is not about how to engage citizens but about to what extent citizens are satisfied with services and governmental processes- citizens are framed as consumers and customers rather than active citizens. Participatory democracy becomes 'user' democracy as citizens become customers (Häikiö, 2007). These

customers are expected to focus on services whereas citizens focus on the 'common good'. Thus a new kind of relationship is developing between people and local governments/the state but this does not necessarily give greater individual rights or change the status/power of customer (Häikiö, 2007).

A further tension centres on the changing role of elected politicians. Research has found that politicians are concerned about losing their role as a result of participatory policy-making (Häikiö, 2007). For Copus (2007), citizen engagement in local politics and democracy creates a tension within a representative system. Whilst citizen engagement does not negate the decision-making responsibilities of local representatives it challenges the role of representative as the final arbiter of local affairs. Copus found that citizen engagement is viewed by councillors as 'unrepresentative' because councillors take 'representative' to mean 'elected'. Citizen engagement is tolerated so far as it does not pose a serious challenge to the elite control councillors hold within the representative system. He argues that effective political action rests less on citizens taking action than it does on political elites being willing to respond to that action. Elected politicians still remain accountable for final decisions (Verlet et al., 2007). Newman (2001) highlights the need to navigate the tension between the search for new ways to engage citizens through new governance processes and the cultural processes that bestow legitimacy and authority on traditional democratic institutions.

Papers focusing on CEE countries highlighted specific tensions for the development of representative and participatory democracy, although in general little research has been carried out (Djordjevic, 2007). Swianiewicz (2005) in a comparative study of urban leadership and community involvement in CEE countries, found that practical experience of community involvement is extremely limited. These post-socialist/communist countries are characterised by weak civil society, inactive citizens, democratic deficit, and building a democratic society in strong states with weak institutions in the context of a transition from socialist to market economies presents major challenges (Ott, 2007; Djordjevic, 2007; Imbrasaitė, 2007). Very often civil society is characterised by low levels of organisational membership, low levels of social capital and ambiguous boundaries between the third sector, the state and private sector (Imbrasaitė, 2007). For example Ott concluded that barriers to effective participation in Croatia include a lack of democratic knowledge, tradition and cultural obstacles; in Ukraine procedures are not robust; in Macedonia only an indirect legal framework for participation exists (Ott, 2007).

Decentralisation and democratically elected local governments became "*central pillars of the systemic reforms*" in post-socialist countries in the 1990s and 2000s; in 2004 Hungary and Poland joined the EU, but they are still characterised by a weakly developed civil society which hampers participation. Djordjevic (2007) discussing the creation of local government in the 1990s in Budapest and Warsaw, argues that:

*"The growing number of NGOs does not directly translate into better representation of citizen interests in dealing with local authorities [nor does it] directly lead to better communication between citizens and local authorities, or even a step further to*

*community involvement into the local decision-making processes.” (Djordjevic, 2007: 16)*

As van der Meer and van Ingen (2007) confirm in an analysis of the *stepping stone thesis*, the context of association – including types of association, types of participatory experience, and institutional settings – is vitally important in any understanding of political participation.

### **3. Deliberative democracy**

Deliberative democratic theory introduces questions of morality and justice into politics in the search for new meanings. The aim is to transform the classical notion of the public sphere by making deliberation a central feature in the democratic project. This is often problematic, as Mouffe (1999) suggests, because:

*“in their attempt to reconcile the liberal tradition with the democratic one, deliberative democrats tend to erase the tension that exist between liberalism and democracy and they are therefore unable to come to terms with the conflictual nature of democratic politics” (p 1).*

Sonnicksen (2008) picks up on this conflict in an examination of the demands of the emerging European polity, where he argues that democratic theory must move past the antagonism between traditional liberal and deliberative forms of democracy if it wants to realize democracy’s promise of greater inclusion and political equality.

Habermas (1996) and Healey (1997) are frequently quoted in papers which focus on communicative democracy/deliberative democracy (Falleth et al., 2007; Djordjevic, 2007; O’Donnell and McCusker). These papers focus on interaction in planning processes and the involvement of public, private and civil society actors, while Mambrey (2008) draws on Habermas to examine eParticipation in Germany. For Habermas, democracy requires a two-way communication between government and civil society (Habermas, 1996) but O’Donnell and McCusker (2007) argue that the value of interactions is dependent on content, participant relationships and context.

Deliberative democracy is also linked to theories of governance which address issues of power and influence (Falleth et al, 2007) and often incorporates a discussion of network governance. Drawing on network governance allows:

*“us to analyse participation and influence from all actors in urban planning, also including strong, resourceful developers, landowners, consultants public agencies, politicians, etc.” (Falleth et al., 2007: 6).*

But The democratic anchorage of governance networks is further discussed by Falleth et al (2007), who argue that the inclusion of more actors expands deliberation but also challenges local government and their responsibility. Critics therefore suggest that networks undermine representative democracy’s institutions (March and Olsen 1989). jeopardising core values of political equity

and individual liberty (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005). However, Sørensen and Torfing, (2005) argue that networks can gain democratic legitimacy if controlled by elected politicians. Falleth et al (2007) present three ways of enhancing democratic legitimacy:

- (i) network *design*: of procedures, norms, rules and structures, decision-making processes;
- (ii) network *framing*: the formulation of political objectives to be pursued in the informal phases of planning processes; and
- (iii) network *participation*; who participates, is it mainly local government civil servants' partnerships and networks or the politicians? When should the public be involved and when not?

Matharu et al. (2007) also focus on networks and questions about who participates in the process of deliberation. They explore notions and questions of mobilisation, construction and inclusion which are largely ignored in network governance literature. Smith (2007) questions the decision-making process within deliberative democracy asking how, if consensus is not achieved, conflict is dealt with?

Many of the papers show that deliberation and participation is difficult to achieve in practice. Falleth et al. (2007) found that in Norway urban planning processes have 'deliberative ideals' but in reality there is a lack of participation rights. NGOs representing civil society actors are excluded from deliberative arenas and so resort instead to lobbying activities and ad-hoc campaigns. Verlet et al. (2007) conclude that interactive decision-making fits within the existing power relations and is seen:

*"not as a break with the past but stays nicely within the contours of the pacification democracy, and falls within the lines of traditional political culture... it is no more that a further evolution and certainly not a revolution...relationships between the government and the governed will... not be fundamentally changed or be turned around."*  
(pp 20).

Larsson et al (2008) claim, however, that e-democracy has the potential to enhance deliberative forms of democracy in transition countries if the presence of the governing authorities is strong and visible.

#### **4. Engaging and empowering citizens**

This section aims to examine different ways of engaging citizens across Europe and assess their impact on empowering citizens. The first section outlines some examples of citizen engagement in European countries at different levels, including through the use of new media. The second section discusses the motivations and incentives which facilitate citizen engagement. Section 4.3 explores the processes used to channel citizen representation and the final section highlights some of the challenges for citizen engagement across Europe, including tensions between cohesion and diversity and the need to include usually excluded groups.

##### **4.1 Citizen engagement across Europe**

Many of the papers highlighted the difficulties of engaging citizens in policy making, not least the tension between representative democracy and participation and the presence of power relationships within deliberative forums. Smith (2007) highlighted some of the challenges for citizen engagement:

- There is differential participation of across social groups which reinforces existing power relationships and influence;
- Citizens lack skills and competence to make political judgements;
- Participation has little effect on political decisions - views are ignored or manipulated;
- The time/burden placed on citizens and institutions can be excessive.
- Effectiveness is limited by scale.

Despite these challenges, papers provided several examples of citizen participation.

O'Donnell and McCusker (2007) focus on eParticipation and eDemocracy and review good practice case studies. They claim that ICT provides a new social space for interaction and communication and that the main barriers to citizen involvement through ICT are not technological. However, as we have seen, they conclude that there is 'evolution rather than revolution' taking place :

*"ICT does not necessarily lead to greater citizen emancipation and involvement; it can and often is, applied to further strengthen extant power relations and enhance control."* (pp 8)

In an examination of internet use by Swedish and American NGOs, PhD candidate Brundin (2008) claims that national political cultures will continue to be important factors in the take up of the internet as a means of political activism. Larsson et al (2008) draw attention to the potential of e-democracy to enhance deliberative forms of democracy in Bulgaria, but again only if governing authorities are present.

Freschi et al (2008) highlight the problems of e-participation in Italy. Despite a complex concentrated media system with links to political institutions and an unstable political system, they believe e-participation is worth pursuing. Yet as Navarra (2008) points out, important political blogs like Italy's [www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it) face a moral conundrum in that they do not really know, despite the fact that they have thousands of readers everyday, who they actually represent. He suggests that such blogs need to protect themselves from accusations of 'shallow demagoguery' by dealing with problems of accountability, representativeness and transparency. Whilst recognising that there is a danger of online blogs becoming partisan spheres, however, Vatrapu et al (2003) claim that political discourses are also created, structured and influenced online. Drawing on Habermas in the German context, Mambrey (2008) highlights the current limitations of e-democracy and calls for more discussion and research.

Munro (2007) explores the role of community leaders in various governance arenas and the compromises they make in order to be of 'significance to the state'. Community leaders hold expert local knowledge and provide a link

between disengaged citizens and councillors and local civil servants which can place them in a dependency relationship with the state. They are able to improve the legitimacy of official decisions by making a claim to represent their particular community, be that community of interest or location. But they are also referred to pejoratively as the 'usual suspects' (because of the relatively small number of community leaders involved in governance) and thus can be criticised by local government for being unrepresentative. Munro (2007) presents an initial outline of his PhD research which seeks to explore the role of community leaders within local governance and how they navigate the tensions of representing the community whilst challenging and seeking support from the state.

Two UWE papers discussed the experiences of participatory budgeting in Europe. Ott (2007) discussed 'Budget Watch' in Croatia, Macedonia and Ukraine. Budget watch is relatively new concept in Europe; 'watchers' are usually non-profit, non-governmental organisations or individuals and activities are taking place in USA, India, South Africa, Mexico. Budget watch seeks to promote transparency and openness of government, accountability and citizen participation. It is about citizens having a say in distribution of public money. Typical activities include budget analysis, distribution of information, public hearings and lobbying. Monitoring committees have been established in Croatia, in Ukraine there has been a 'strengthening' of the independence of budgetary users and in Macedonia user-friendly budget guides have been produced and distributed.

Talpin (2007) discusses participatory budgeting in Spain, France and Italy. His paper discusses power relations and the issues of procedures, framing of discussions and implementation of decisions. It is based on two-year participant observation and in-depth interviews in three municipality case studies in the three countries. In the French city, 'neighbourhood councils' were set up to decide about 20% of the city investment budget. City-wide thematic workshops were also established focusing on urban planning, education, etc. In the Italian municipality the area was divided into eight 'social neighbourhoods' and public meetings were organised to decide what local projects would be funded from the budget. In the Spanish city there were three levels of participatory assemblies at neighbourhood, district and city levels, the central element being the 'zone assemblies' at neighbourhood level which decided on which proposals and projects to put forward to the higher levels. However, Talpin argues that:

*"despite the participatory discourses and good will of local politicians, their influence often remains overwhelming in participatory budget assemblies." (pp 3)*

Thus, although the aim of the participatory democracies studied was to empower and 'give power back to citizens' by giving them control over budgets, this was found to be rhetoric than reality.

Purdue and Witherden (2007) explore the role of neighbourhood organisations in delivering the UK Government's community cohesion agenda. They study the experiences in of community organisations in six deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. The organisations include a community partnership working with new EU migrants; a community based Housing Association; two new community organisations attempting to engage across ethnic and generational lines. Purdue



(2008) examines Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders as a means of enhancing social cohesion. These papers are discussed again in Section 4.4.

Häikiö (2007) focuses on service forums, e-jury, open discussion events for residents neighbourhoods (meeting local politicians and civil servants). He discusses the involvement of citizens in the management of services, planning, development of neighbourhood sport, youth, library services, environmental improvements in Finland. The aim is to provide opportunities for participation and influence for local inhabitants and to produce local knowledge for civil servants and service providers. Local forums aim to go beyond usual methods of consultation, i.e. surveys, focus groups, market research. Customer and citizen participation is combined, the former being service-oriented, the latter citizen-oriented (Kearns, 1995). Kearns (1995) argues that service-oriented activity is an elitist approach to governance whereas citizen-oriented activity enables citizens to become involved in local democracy (see earlier discussion on p. 2). But Häikiö suggests that, as civil society organisations become partners with the state in delivering services, they lose their capacity to contest and challenge power relations. He concludes that the forums are *"clearly guided and framed from above by local authorities"* (p 17).

## 4.2 Facilitating citizen engagement

There is a broad acknowledgment that citizen engagement is a lengthy and difficult process. Given the challenges outlined in the previous sections this section seeks to explore the motivations and incentives which facilitate citizen engagement. Why do citizens become involved (or not) and what are the benefits? How can we evaluate citizen participation?

Burton (2007) uses Richardson's (1983) framework for understanding the benefits of participation. This frames benefits in terms of

- (i) developmental benefits that relate to the individuals who participate, and
- (ii) the instrumental benefits associated with the decisions or policies made as a result.

Developmental strands first emphasise ways to acquire, retain and enhance our dignity and self-esteem which are:

*"an important manifestation of the principle that all citizens in a democracy in some respects equal"* (Burton, 2007: 5)

A second developmental benefit lies in the educative role of participation whereby citizens become more self-confident and take greater control over their lives and learn about the complexity of decision-making. A third benefit lies in active citizens becoming participants and developing a more complete understanding of their own interests. A fourth benefit relates to the expression of identity. The fifth benefit claims that participation creates more sociable citizens and at the same time it makes a contribution to social integration, social cohesion and social solidarity.

The instrumental case for participation, meanwhile, suggests that participation:

*"improves the quality of decisions made both in terms of managerial efficiency and political legitimacy."* (Burton, 2007: 7).

In their paper, Matharu et al. (2007) develop a theoretical framework to explore concepts of mobilisation, construction and inclusion (MCI) of network actors, asking who is involved and how participants are mobilised. They also ask how representatives are selected, how network actors are constructed and how this affects patterns of inclusion and exclusion. They argue that inclusion focuses on rules and institutional design, through which certain publics are ascribed legitimacy and others denied it. They state that the factors for non-participation are conventionally explained by inappropriate facilities, lack of information, gatekeeping by existing community leaders, lack of civic awareness or capacity. But they suggest that these factors,

*"although important, may be epiphenomena resting on more fundamental problems about the understanding by institutional designers of how stakeholders construct themselves, and why they mobilise."* (Matharu et al., 2007: 14)

They introduce idea of interest- and identity-based mobilisation, drawing on Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) who argue that

*"stakeholder identity plays an important role alongside interest-seeking behaviour in stakeholder mobilisation."* (Matharu et al, 2007: 6).

Interest and identity interact to explain stakeholder MCI and this, the authors argue, should be considered in institutional design.

Smith (2007) also focuses on institutional design as he explores how to evaluate democratic innovations such as participatory processes. His framework is based on the desirable goods or qualities realised by democratic institutions. The issues he identifies as important to focus on are: inclusiveness; popular control; considered judgement; transparency; efficiency; and transferability.

A number of papers highlighted the lack of rigorous, theoretically informed and comparative studies of participatory democracy (Smith, 2007; Burton, 2007; O'Donnell and McCusker, 2007). As Smith explains:

*"We are good at explaining the limits of existing democratic practice and arguing the case for increased education and deepened citizen participation. But if we wish to evaluate the potential different types of democratic innovations what approach should we take?"* (Smith, 2007: 7)

Burton (2007) states that most evaluative studies are qualitative, practice stories usually about how to overcome obstacles.

*"Because effective participation is so rarely achieved in practice, there are few empirical studies that take this as their starting*

*point and go on to attempt to measure and assess its impact.*"  
(pp16)

Burton (2007) reviews a number of studies and argues that there is a need to develop measures of effective participation to provide a robust assessment of the *"putative benefits of public participation"* (pp 31). He states that procedural principles have superseded instrumental benefits in judging the benefits of participation and thus that there is a need to find robust measurements of the benefits. He suggests seven broad categories:

1. Improved self-esteem of participants;
2. Increased knowledge and awareness of aspects of civil and political life;
3. Increased awareness and understanding of own self interests;
4. An opportunity for expression of key elements of personal social identity, e.g. as socialist, conservative, feminist, internationalist, etc.;
5. Greater social citizenship;
6. Managerial efficiency – providing wider range of views, a useful reality check;
7. Political legitimacy- referring to specific decisions.

#### **4.3 Processes of engagement**

This section explores the processes used to channel citizen representation in, e.g. neighbourhood forums, citizens' juries and discusses issues of gate keeping and accountability. Many of the papers explore the processes and mechanisms through which citizens participate in decision-making and how this affects citizens' opportunities to participate. In discussing this, issues of political culture and traditions and institutional design are important.

Verlet et al. (2007) examine participatory mechanisms in Belgium, which, despite being enshrined in law, are not taken up enthusiastically by either politicians nor citizens. They ask whether these are the appropriate mechanisms for engagement or whether different devices are necessary to gain more interest. They conclude, however, that it is "too early to say". Following Kiser and Ostrom (2000:56-88) they argue that, in order to maximise formal possibilities in terms of participatory democracy, key actors have to be *aware* of potential changes (and know the range of mechanisms), to *accept* them (to internalise them as desirable) and to *act* upon them (orient their behaviour towards them). At present, they conclude, citizens are not "socialised into their 'new' role in interactive decision-making" which also requires a lot of them. They find that citizens do not want to spend much time on participating but that they do think their voice would improve the quality of local decision-making.

Verlet et al's research raises questions of who participates and who decides who participates, as do papers by Burton (2007) and Guarneros-Meza (2007). If not everyone chooses to participate, then who should be chosen? Burton asks whether participation should be based on expert or local knowledge or, indeed, on random selection?

Talpin (2007) focuses on the processes of participation in decision-making. He concludes, as we have seen, that elected officials still remain in control at all stages of the participatory budget process; discussions are mostly about urban planning and management 'hard investments' rather than about social or educational services. However, he argues that decision-making systems based on voting or consensus are each problematic. In particular consensual decision-making processes are problematic when public officials play an active role in them due to the asymmetry in linguistic and political resources between the actors – there is a danger of manipulation. He found that local politicians mistrust the competencies and skills of citizens and fear losing power.

Copus (2007) carried out a survey of councillors in English local government and also found that councillors draw a boundary between citizen input and their own position as final decision-makers over local issues. This attitude is partly due to legislation and legal requirements placed on them but also because of their attitudes towards the "proper role" of the councillor and the citizen in political decision-making. Citizens are thought to only get involved when an issue directly affects them rather than having a broad approach to governing. Copus (2007) also looked at local politicians views about the effectiveness of different types of citizen engagement- political pressure (e.g. campaigning, petitions); direct contact (individual or group context with councillor); indirect pressure (contact local MP/ombudsman) electoral pressure (joining political party activity); council sponsored (citizens' juries, focus groups, neighbourhood committees/forums). The suggestion was that councillors accept the effectiveness of and are open to legitimate forms of political protest. The most effective method for councillors, in their view is for citizen to contact their own local councillor, or the leading member of the council, either individually or collectively. In this way councillors feel they can facilitate citizen engagement in politics. However, political party also plays an important role, as Copus (2007) found:

*"Those councillors with a strong belief in the virtue of participation would admit to one thing – that if the party wish to respond negatively to, or even to ignore the outcomes of citizen involvement, then the councillor will – in most instances – back the party above those he or she represents."* (p 25)

Despite the trends towards citizen engagement, local democracy is representative and political parties remain the route by which local representation is secured (Copus, 2007). Copus concludes that the local political elite created through the party system, freed from close ties to citizenry and its wishes, enables political parties to fill the gap between governor and governed and thus dominate the political landscape.

Similarly, Verlet et al's (2007) study of mayors' attitudes to the effectiveness of various methods of citizen engagement found that mayors preferred those mechanisms associated with representative democracy, such as personal meetings in the town hall, to those linked to a more participatory democracy such as neighbourhood forums or self-organised citizen initiatives. They conclude, therefore, that, while mayors are concerned with finding out what citizens think and trying to integrate their needs and solve their problems, they

are sceptical about the principles and mechanisms of participatory and direct democracy.

In Warsaw and Budapest, Djordjevic (2007) found that local government fragmentation and the lack of experience of new political leaders (and instability of political leaders) limited citizen participation. Even where there was relatively stable local government and leadership, as in Budapest, citizen participation was limited due to *"a lack of interest in applying partnership and participatory methods"* (p 30). At the same time, NGOs were weak representatives of the citizens they claimed to represent or had limited resources and organisational capacity to get involved in public policy making. Business associations meanwhile were weak and unwilling to participate. Djordjevic concludes that the rhetoric of participatory decision-making is present in political language in Central and Eastern Europe but practice lags behind.

Similarly Imbrasaitė (2007) found in Lithuania that there was a lack of clear national and local legal norms about the participation of NGOs in decision-making. Local government officials only invited NGOs in if there was a legal requirement. The impact of NGOs was weak because of their low organisational capacity, uninstitutionalised relationships between local government and citizens and the lack of citizen participation. The legacy of the Soviet regime meant that participation culture was not embedded in civil society.

In particular policy areas such as urban planning, participation is common but has been limited, according to some of the papers. Power structures, particularly in planning and policy-making, are traditionally based on professional expertise and these experts are deferred to in institutional structures (Häikiö, 2007). Civil servants are positioned as experts. Local politicians are seen as representatives standing for viewpoints and values. Managerial competence and professional competence are often preferred over political values:

*"The task of political decision-making is to guarantee the functioning of service markets, instead of creating public arena for citizens' deliberation."* (p 11)

Häikiö (2007) found in her study of Tampere in Finland that, within customer participation/user democracy processes, services are usually predefined by professional and the state. The aim has been to create a partnership or network between civil society actors and city government rather than activating inhabitants. But the purchaser-provider model provides possibilities for direct citizen participation, particularly at neighbourhood level (see Häikiö, 2007; Purdue and Witherden, 2007). For Falleth et al (2007) exclusion from informal planning processes leads to lack of legitimacy - they found low levels of citizen participation, partly because citizens had lower levels of resources than other actors, e.g. private developers. The processes thus displayed evidence of an asymmetry of power and opportunities to participate.

Vegeris and Campbell-Barr (2007) examined what facilitates the engagement of older citizens and their findings can equally be applied to citizen engagement in general. There is a need to reinforce engagement by for example: corporate endorsement across the whole of local government departments; monitoring; sharing awareness of engagement activities; improving partnerships with

existing forums of older people; reaching out and improving communication; and feeding back to citizens to demonstrate that their involvement made a difference to decisions made and implementation of services. In an examination of citizen participation in the management of waste in two Cameroonian cities, Lambi (2008) claims that it is naive to expect that appeals to reason or opportunities for participation will be successful. He claims, however, that rules can be instrumental in bringing about values that help to construct new identities in favor of participation.

Countries across Europe are also looking for new ways to engage citizens in the provision and governance of services by involving the third sector in partnership. Pestoff (2008) focuses on co-production with the third sector in enhancing the role of citizens in the provision and governance of welfare services. He argues that the attitude of the state is a crucial factor and that *only if* democratic governance is defined as a policy that promotes pluralism and participation can this be achieved through co-production with the third sector. Bixa et al (2008) investigate the contradictory impact of participation in civil society organisations (CSOs) on political engagement and participation in Austria. They argue that it is difficult for CSOs to actively integrate members and that more effort must be made to stress the civic elements of participation if CSOs are to legitimate themselves as schools of democracy. PhD candidate Molnar (2008) examines the accountability of third sector organisations in Hungary. She claims that accountability is becoming increasingly important as social services are outsourced, and that Hungary's third sector organizations must therefore strive to meet both local and international requirements. Petrella and Richez-Battessti (2008) argue that in most European countries – despite their strong involvement – civil society organizations are not yet recognized as full partners in the governance of public services.

Howard et al (2008) highlight issues of identity, legitimacy, control and sector coherence in a discussion of partnership working in 'new governance spaces' in Europe and Latin America. Their research examines the tensions experienced by civil society actors in these new participatory spaces and the implications and dilemmas created by the emergence of 'hybrid' structures. They suggest these developments raise issues around the notion of 'sector' and ask whether we need to reassess the boundary between state and civil society.

Many papers emphasise institutional design, although this is not thought to be sufficient for an in-depth understanding of participatory processes. Matharu et al. (2007) emphasise the need for institutional designers to understand how stakeholders construct themselves and why they mobilise. Barnes and Skelcher (2007) suggest that focusing solely on institutional design is not enough and that analysis needs to combine both political theory and an exploration of epistemology:

*"A focus solely on the 'hardware' of institutional design is inadequate as a means of determining how new governance processes can be both democratic and motivate citizen participation."* (p 13)

In order to answer the question of how "the design of the institutions of participative governance affects their capacity to be democratic and to motivate

engagement by relevant publics" (p 2), their research looks across participatory governance processes in different policy areas to learn about "good practice". They claim that it is difficult to address design issues without a consideration of how different strands of practice interact with institutional governance arrangements to create a context in which citizens and service users can participate.

#### **4.4 Cohesion and diversity: excluded groups**

This section focuses on how the diversity of citizen's voices is mediated and particularly how usually excluded groups are heard. Papers focussed on groups defined by race, gender, religion, age and drug users and homeless people.

There is some discussion about how citizens are categorised (Hedblom, 2007; Matharu et al., 2007). Hedblom (2007 following Newman, 2005) discusses how power relations are affected by gender, race and religion in her Swedish case study of activation policy and immigration. Newman (2005) states that the categorisation of citizens or service users assumes that people can be neatly divided into groups based on gender, class, race and age. Hedblom (as Matharu et al, 2007) highlights the need to incorporate both interest and identity when constructing participants and to move away from dichotomies (for example, white/black, men/women) towards intersectionality which can address questions of power (Hedblom, 2007).

Purdue and Witherden (2007) discuss ethnicity and approaches to cultural diversity in relation to social capital. They present research carried out in BME populations in six neighbourhoods in the UK and state that,

*"Policies on diversity are made by central and local government, but all too often when it comes down to the neighbourhood level, successful implementation relies on the efforts of community organizations which have a more bottom up approach."* (pp 11)

These neighbourhood community organisations were found to have a dynamism missing from local government: creative approaches including grassroots networking and celebratory community events; participative consultation and strategic partnership building; development of equalities policies and procedures for service delivery and representation; developing 'pioneer' services for excluded new migrants providing bilingual community advocacy and advice. They argue that starting from a common ground rather than differences can be effective in developing collaboration between diverse ethnic groups in a neighbourhood but that trust takes time to build. Community organisations often lack sufficient resources needed to carry out vital services, and have instead to compete with local politicians:

*"Community organizations are often capable of being more flexible and more responsive to change in the neighbourhood than bigger public agencies and able to identify problems and solutions that cut across the way in which mainstream services are organised."* (pp 22)

Purdue (2008) argues elsewhere that mobilising citizens around common issues (safer, cleaner and greener) that cross diverse communities is a good way of building mutual respect and engagement. He claims that Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders in the UK have often increased public recognition across ethnic lines and increased confidence in the effectiveness of civil society to produce cohesive communities.

Vegeris and Campbell-Barr (2007) present findings from the evaluation of the 'Better Government for Older People' programme in the UK. Barriers to participation included: lack of resources (funding, staff and time) and also lack of capacity (amongst both staff and citizens); difficulties reaching older people for example because of transport and carer needs and also second language needs; unsupportive attitudes in the council; lack of awareness of engagement events; poor policy planning and tight deadlines. The content of interaction with older people is usually focussed on the discussion of health and social care services and therefore constructs them solely as health and social care service users. Vegeris and Campbell-Barr also suggest that there is a need to diversify methods and tools for engagement rather than relying on traditional methods, such as collecting information through surveys and meetings which require passive rather than active involvement, especially if these methods are to reach housebound or groups excluded/under-represented economic status, gender, age, ethnicity.

Drawing attention to the decline of institutionalised forms of political engagement and the simultaneous rise of innovative forms of civic engagement, Mariën et al (2008) claim that new forms of participation are successful at attracting 'new or previously excluded groups to politics', especially women and young people. However, they also claim that these new forms of participation require high levels of education, with the participation of the poorly educated low across these categories. In an examination of different forms of social and political participation in Finland, Blom and Siisiäinen (2008) argue similarly that large sections of the population do not have the ability to participate effectively. Comparing the Finnish case with trends in participation across Europe, they argue that research into participatory trends cannot take place in a vacuum. However while their research provides good evidence about the state of participation in different countries, they claim that it provides weak evidence about the state of democracy, power and hegemonic relations.

Anker's study (2007) focussed on organisations representing individual homeless people and drug users. These organisations face particular challenges because they represent some of the most marginalised groups in society and the nature of the issues involved means that stability and continuity within the organisation may be limited. The organisations are also faced with scepticism or suspicion from the mainstream because of the user/client group. Drug users and homeless people as a group are characterised by limited personal resources, personal problems, psychological problems, addiction, personal debt, unemployment, etc and this presents additional challenges for participation:

*"... intake of alcohol or other substances may also be a barrier to effective participation...the fragile and vulnerable state of many drug users or homeless people may limit the possibilities of taking on responsibility and a more active role in organisations." (pp 10)*



This can combine with other factors such as stigmatisation: drug users/homeless people may not want to be labelled and organise as such because it involves feelings of shame and personal failure; they may also see their situation as a temporary rather than permanent state and thus be reluctant to organise/get involved. Organisations also face difficulties:

*“Organisations of marginalised groups... have to make a special effort to prove they are worthy, to gain recognition and to be taken seriously by authorities, staff and professionals in the field.”*  
(pp 11)

In his two case study organisations Anker (2007) found that organisations preferred activists who could take part in planned activities on a regular basis which excluded those with more chaotic lifestyles. This has implications for the democratic nature of the organisations. Anker concludes that:

*“Even if the organisations... try to represent the voices of the most marginalized groups in society, they have not themselves been able to transcend the dilemmas related to creating alternative forms of participation.”* (p 15)

The participation of minority ethnic groups, women and young people in many studies is fairly low. McLaughlin (2008) picks up on the low participation of women in an analysis of caring practices associated with raising a disabled child. Exploring the impact of caring dynamics within the family on how we think about citizenship, she claims that participation in medical interventions is widely assumed to be something mothers willingly incorporate into their caring role. However, she found that over time women were more likely to question medical advice and to refuse to participate in interventions based on neo-liberal constructions of self that threatened to further exclude disabled people and their families:

*“Where care provision is presented as individualistic, as focussed only on the ‘condition’ rather than the child, as concerned only with overcoming the tragedy of disability, as a form of charity and private responsibility, rather than public right and entitlement, families remain locked in marginalised positions that construct them as ‘troubling’ to society and enforce the caring role on the mother”* (pp 13/14).

In an examination of how youth and democracy became a field of political intervention in Sweden through youth councils, Sörbom and Börjeso (2008) claim similarly that the trend towards setting up structures which promise greater power but do not deliver it can work against the participation of young people. They conclude that it might be better to leave the organisation of participation to the young people themselves.

Finally, In a discussion of waste management projects in the north and south, Valentim and da Silva (2007) discuss how the participation of ‘waste pickers’ encourages ‘the self management, inclusion and the formation of people’. They argue that this type of work offers new and creative answers for old questions

and the possibility of a form of sustainability that unites dignity with economic growth.

## 5. Further questions

The studies summarised above cover a wide range of experience in participation in the EU and beyond. They generally find that, while there is a rhetorical commitment on the part of politicians and other state actors to participation, practice does not meet expectations. In particular, politicians still struggle with the relationship between representative and participatory democracy. Civil society organisations, too, have to grapple with issues of accountability if they are to have legitimacy. And there are still many groups who are marginalised from participatory processes. Effective participation depends on both the will of politicians and the readiness of citizens to engage and in some parts of the EU, both are difficult to achieve, especially where the legacy of state socialism remains. Even where the context is more promising those committed to participation face many challenges - most studies acknowledge that effective and inclusive participation is difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, there are a growing number of examples of good practice through which these issues can be addressed. The studies suggest that there are many questions still to be addressed:

- Why is participation important? Where is the impetus for citizen participation coming from?
- How can different types of democracy (representative and participatory democracy) be reconciled when they have different ideals/systems?
- What is the role of citizens/local politicians within this emerging mixed system?
- How can political cultures/traditions be altered to make participation more acceptable to elected politicians? How can the political culture of individual citizens and institutions be changed to embrace participation as part of a representative system of democracy?
- How can we ensure that citizens have the skills, time and resources to participate? How can issues of scale be addressed?
- How can power differentials in existing power structures be addressed - between politicians and citizens, between groups of citizens, and between the mainstream and those who research has shown to be consistently marginalised groups?
- How can we evaluate the impact of participation on individual citizens, on decisions made and on the implementation of services?

Some of these issues need further research – the experience of the seminars on which we have drawn suggests that comparative research is particularly important. But research is not enough: these are issues that need to be more openly confronted and debated by politicians and civil society actors across Europe. Research can help, however, by providing frameworks for thinking and debate about participation and identifying the key questions that need to be addressed at the outset of any participation exercise. Finally, both research and a dialogue between citizens and decision makers at EU level is needed to consider the impact that EU discourse supporting public participation in decision-making can have on the level and quality of participation at the municipal level in different parts of the EU (Djordjevic, 2007).

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