Democracy through political parties and public participation

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6. Defects in Participatory Theory

6.1 Views on Citizens

6.1.1 Knowledge and Willingness to Participate
According to Sartori (1987), “mountains of evidence” concerning political capabilities of the public show a “crushingly” “similar tenor”: “The state of inattention, non-interest, sub-information, perceptive distortion, and, finally, plain ignorance of the average citizen never ceases to surprise the observer” (p. 103). The cases of Groningen presented so far seem to add to these mountains. In other words, the cases reveal that participatory theory imposes an unrealistically heavy burden on citizens.

For example, in the case of traffic planning for the northern neighbourhoods and Groningen-north, residents mostly did not demand measures against through traffic, although they in fact wished to keep out through traffic. Particularly concerning the closure of Noorderplantsoen, the overwhelming majority of them opposed it, and their alternative was at most to build bridges or tunnels in the park without closing it. Even after the municipality presented various measures to prevent the shift of through traffic, they were reluctant to close the park. However, once the experiment started, they supported the closure, and Oranjebuurt, which had opposed the closure most strongly, supported it at “two hundred percent”. As Rousseau (2002), the guru of participationists, himself acknowledged, “Men always desire their own good, but do not always discern it” (p. 172).

Citizens were also not prepared to devote themselves to participation so much. Even if citizens supported the VCP, most of them did not attend the public hearings and voice their support. The referendum on Noorderplantsoen was valid, but still the turnout was very low, and those who did vote were rather motivated by personal interests. In the Things May Change, indeed a large number of citizens responded to the questionnaire and participated in the working groups. But many of them could not follow the process to its final product.

6.1.2 Consensus
The Things May Change also belied the participationists’ expectation that citizens could improve their political or communicative capabilities through participation. They after all did not change their existing views and attitudes, and, as a result, no substantial consensus was reached among them.

For communicative theorists, one of secrets to consensus is “generalisable interests”. As examples for such interests, Dryzek (1990) mentions “avoiding war” (p. 54) or the “continuing integrity of the ecological systems on which human life depends”. In an ideal speech situation, “[a]rguments based on generalizable interests have much greater power”, and participants try to persuade others “through transcendence of interests particular to
any subset of the parties involved”, which could “facilitate the discovery of generalizable interests” (p.55). Because all the people can agree on generalisable interests, a consensus can be reached in an ideal speech situation, and, excellently, such a consensus is also conducive to the public interest, Dryzek argues. Based on this theory, Andrew Dobson (1996) insists that environmentalists, or “greens” in his term, should be committed to discursive democracy:

The point is that all rational, uncoerced and knowledgeable individuals (i.e. all individuals in the ideal speech situation participating in the procedure of discursive democracy) will come to the conclusion that the ecological systems upon which human life depends should be protected. (…)

This amounts to saying that sustainability is a generalisable interest, and that the procedures of discursive democracy will always produce decisions in favour of it. (…) To the degree that there is a determinate answer about the “right” values and the “right” kind of society in which to live (and greens, in the round, believe that there is), then greens should be committed to democracy as the only form of decision making that (…) will necessarily produce the answer. (pp.137 and 139)

These arguments confuse generalisable interests, or general objectives of public policy, with concrete measures to realise them. Without entering an ideal speech situation, most people already support generalisable interests as Dryzek cites them. In the cases of Groningen, residents, members of environmental groups, and shopkeepers, all of them did not have any objections to objectives of facilitating public transport, realising the liveable residential environment, or maintaining employment, without experiencing an ideal speech situation. Moreover, whether an ideal speech situation is realised or not, most people put forward their arguments as if they were consistent with generalisable interests or the public interest. For example, when the ENFB argued for closing the Korrebrug or Noorderplantsoen, it as a matter of course did not insist that the interests of cyclists were more important than those of shopkeepers. It argued that those measures could rather increase sales by increasing customers by bicycle. Or, when shopkeepers opposed the closure of Noorderplantsoen, they as a matter of course did not profess that the residential environment should be sacrificed for their sales. They rather argued that the closure could undermine the service level of neighbourhoods, increase crime, or cause unemployment, and that through traffic would disappear once the ring roads were completed. Controversial is always not what generalisable interests are but how they should be realised, and because citizens cannot agree on the latter, they cannot reach a consensus. It is too naïve to assume that they can reach a consensus once they argue based on generalisable interests. To appeal to as many as possible, citizens normally do not insist on their personal interests exclusively.

Communicative theorists put forward another secret to consensus, namely, sociology of knowledge. Our views are formed socially and framed with discrete cultures, so a consensus can be reached by “striving to understand the cultural tradition and/ or conceptual framework of the other participants” (Dryzek, 1990, p.42). Healey (1997) is talkative in this respect. Participants in an ideal speech situation have to achieve “recognition not merely of the information communicated, but reflection on the way people say things, the images they use, the communicative routines they adopt, emotional
responses as well as rational-technical ones, moral arguments as well as empirical ones”. These are a “minimum degree of interest” (p.267), and it is an “ethics” for participants to pay attention to these. By understanding others’ cultures in this manner, we can “see the social processes behind the formation of the ‘interests’ over which we get into conflict” (p.63), she says.

However, citizens are neither philosophers nor sociologists nor linguists. The above requirements or “ethics” are far from being “minimum” for the overwhelmingly majority of citizens. If communicative planning theory is literally applied, participants have to collect and analyse information other than expressed statements, and reflect, for example, why shopkeepers so strongly oppose measures against car use, why residents tend to fall into Nimbysm, or why members of environmental groups are so enthusiastic about environmental protection. These might be interesting topics for researchers, but citizens are too busy to be engaged in such topics. I am afraid that many participants would decline to participate any more, if required such considerations. That is why, the Things May Change did not require such considerations from participants, and Forester requires them only from planners.

In addition, even if participants are fortunately cooperative or sympathetic with communicative planners, and have understood others’ cultures, this understanding does not guarantee a consensus. Because it is one thing that people understand why others think in a particular manner, and it is quite another whether they agree with what others argue. As long as they do not completely yield to sociology of knowledge, and they believe that their views, whether socially formed or not, are objectively correct, as is usually the case, they cannot reach a consensus. What mutual understanding of cultures can achieve is at most to calm hostile feelings.

6.1.3 Sticking to Participation
To sum up, citizens are not well informed, not so dedicated to participation, and not well prepared to change their existing views to reach a consensus. This is neither an “elitist argument” nor a “presumption”, as participationists allege, but the “fact” (Sartori, 1987, p.162). In the introduction of her participatory theory, Gould (1988) professes, “this work is not a study in empirical social science, but rather in normative social and political philosophy” (p.28). The proposed “normative principles are not derived as empirical generalizations from observed behavior (…), but rather are constructed on the basis of a critical reflection upon the fundamental character of human agency and the possibilities of human development” (p.29), she argues. However, such a reflection should be based on “empirical generalizations from observed behaviour”, if the theory is applicable not only in an abstract imaginary world of philosophy, but also in reality. As characteristics of participatory theory, or “utopianism”, Wintrop (2000) points out its “naïve assumptions about men and women, and their actual and potential behaviour” and “the basing of political and other objectives on abstract moral and other philosophic analyses rather than on psychological, social and political realities” (p.87). This characterisation seems pertinent, judging from the theory and cases as explained so far.
Therefore, public participation does not bring about positive effects, except that it democratises a process in terms of participatory theory, based on which a process is anyway more democratic, if it just provides more opportunities for participation. Participation does not realise the fundamental wishes of citizens, nor guarantee the public interest. Nor does it change existing views of citizens, nor does it facilitate consensus among them.

Concerning the workers’ control in Yugoslavia, Dahl (1985) admits its disappointing results: “Such evidence as we now have does not, I think, warrant high hopes for huge changes in attitudes, values, and character from greater democracy at work” (p.98). For example, he quotes Josip Obradovic’s observation about the Yugoslavia’s case that “the direct experience with self-management has been so frustrating that their [workers’] sense of alienation has become even greater” (p.97). However, he believes in participation, saying, “I cannot help thinking that if their experiment in self-management lasts a hundred years, Yugoslavs will be different in important ways” (p.98). This argument rather reveals that there is no substantial reason to insist on participation, if we do not espouse the participatory belief that participation is democracy.

6.2 Participatory Institutions
The problem with participationists is not only about their views on citizens, but also about their proposals for participatory institutions. Although they criticise liberal-democratic institutions, they cannot put forward their own convincing institutions. In this respect, participationists can be divided into two categories. On one hand, there are some participationists who concentrate on the world outside the existing government or “state”, as if they hoped that the state would disappear in some way or other in the future. On the other hand, there are some who do deal with the state, presenting how to democratise it.

6.2.1 Laying Aside Industrial Democracy
As a principle for democracy, Bachrach (1967) advocates “equality of political power”, which means, for him, the equal right to directly participate in decision-making. He refutes Dahl, who discards this principle because “it is impossible to realize in any large political system” (cited in Bachrach, p.85). Bachrach sees “no reason why a principle, serving both as an ideal to strive for and as a standard for judging the progress of a political system toward the achievement of that ideal, must be realizable in practice to perform its function” (Bachrach, p.86).

However, if the principle is remote from reality, it can serve neither as an ideal nor as a standard. To prove that this principle is not remote, even if not fully realisable, it is essential to translate this principle into concrete institutions. As mentioned earlier, however, Bachrach from the beginning gives up “democratising” government, whether at the national, regional, local, or even neighbourhood level. The prevailing “elite-mass
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structure of present-day society” “is an unalterable structure only if political
decision-making is viewed narrowly, as governmental decision-making” (pp.101-2). That is
why, he turns to industrial democracy: “If the political scientist is to be realistic, he must
recognize that large areas within existing so-called private centers of power are political
and therefore potentially open to a wide and democratic sharing in decision-making”
(p.102). In other words, governmental decision-making is “an unalterable structure”, and it
is unrealistic for the “political scientist” to strive for a “wide and democratic sharing in
decision-making” in government.

Therefore, he exclusively argues for facilitating participation by workers within companies.
Moreover, even within these limited areas, his proposal is extremely vague, only with the
suggestion of “radically altering their hierarchical structures to facilitate the devolution of
the decision-making process” (p.97). “Admittedly at this point it is a matter of conjecture
whether such an undertaking, from both a political and economic standpoint, is workable”,
he concedes. “However, in my view, it borders on dogmatism to reject this challenge out of
hand” (p.104), he insists. But it is rather dogmatism to advocate a principle without
presenting any convincing measures to realise it.

Pateman (1970) criticises Bachrach, because he “indicates why we should retain the ideal
but gives only the most very general suggestions as to how to set about realising it, and no
evidence to show whether this is possible” (p.16). Although she also gives up participation
in government at the national level, she recognises its possibility at the local level.
However, she devotes most pages to industrial democracy, and her suggestions about it
are after all “tentative in the extreme” (p.106) in her own words. In the concluding chapter,
she for the first time pays attention to other areas, and just suggests, for example,
participation in “running large housing developments” (p.109) at the local level. Therefore,
she, like Bachrach, does not come up with any alternative governmental institutions. She
hopes that, through participation in industry, the individual would become “better able to
assess the performance of representatives at the national level, better equipped to take
decisions of national scope when the opportunity arose to do so, and better able to weigh
up the impact of decisions taken by national representatives” (p.110). However, there
should be no necessary relation between capabilities in running business, which would be
cultivated through participation at workplace, and capabilities in politics as mentioned
above.

Ten years later, in “The Civic Culture” (1980), she still does not work out alternative
institutions. She focuses on the different level of participation dependent on
“socioeconomic status” and sex, which has been revealed by the “empirical theorists”,
among others, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. In her view, this difference has been
caused by the “liberal democratic political structure”, where “working class individuals and
women feel it is not worthwhile to be active” (p.93). She stresses the necessity of
“development beyond liberal democracy” (p.97), but it is unclear what lies beyond liberal
democracy: “In the abstract it is very difficult to say anything definite about participation
within an alternative sociopolitical context, but it is only if, in a participatory system, a
certain proportion of (randomly distributed) citizens choose not to participate that theorists would be justified in writing of the ‘naturally’ apolitical individual” (pp.94-5). There is no further explanation about “an alternative sociopolitical context” or “a participatory system”. Although the working class individuals are not daunted by the intellectuals at the ballot box, they can be at the face-to-face meeting. On the other hand, it would be ridiculous to force everyone to receive the same level of education.

The Community
Not only anarchists, such as Proudhon and Bakunin, but also Marx and Engels wanted to dissolve the state into smaller units, although the former insisted on destroying the state immediately, while the latter expected it to "wither away" gradually. Inheriting this thinking, the New Left Movement in the 1960s tried to realise its participatory democracy through community self-government. As one of “root principles” in participatory democracy, the Port Huron Statement argues that “politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community” (SDS, 1962, p.4), and suggests, “Our monster cities (...) might now be humanized, broken into smaller communities, powered by nuclear energy, arranged according to community decision” (p.31). In his 1966 paper, Tom Hayden, one of the prominent leaders of the SDS, urged to establish the following "counter institutions" in the middle of the existing institutions:

... this means building institutions outside the established order (...). Community unions, freedom schools, experimental universities, community-formed police review boards, people’s own anti-poverty organizations fighting for federal money, independent union locals - all can be “practical” pressure points from which to launch reform in the conventional institutions (...).

Ultimately, this movement might lead to a Continental Congress called by all the people who feel excluded from the higher circles of decision-making in this country. (cited in Cook & Morgan, 1971, p.36)

In an attempt to realise such institutions, the New Left organisations, such as the SDS and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), launched the community organising projects, through which student organisers were engaged in various problems in urban blighted areas, living with the poor. On the other hand, they tried to anticipate these decentralised institutions within their own organisations, because “a radical movement always begins to create within itself the structures which will eventually form the basis of the new society” (Hayden, 1971, p.44). Therefore, they were organisationally “pluralistic, amorphous and multi-layered”, and “initiative rested in the hands of local groups (...)” (cited in Young, 1977, p.51), which "arose and dissolved as they were needed" (Young, 1977, p.51). Each local group pursued participatory democracy in its own way:

Always meetings and more meetings lasting long into the night. Participatory democracy. There was a real community of spirit; everything belonged to everybody; the building was “liberated.” ...

Here was a single commune in which adult hypocrisies did not apply any longer, where people shared and shared alike, where democracy decided everything. (cited in Cook & Morgan, 1971, p. 9)
However, the reality of these experiments was frustrating. The urban poor were understandably more interested in material benefits than in decision-making processes, and the loose organisation made the New Left Movement vulnerable to ideological attacks (Young, 1977). Moreover, decision-making at each meeting was rather chaotic than democratic, allowing demagogues to dominate discussion. For example, the AOUP in 1965, with two thousand participants, was described as follows:

AOUP had no organizational structure nor established discipline because its decision-making process was by “participatory democracy”. This meant that not a single policy was predetermined and imposed; all policies could be established or modified by the participants in the Assembly. (…) Participatory democracy has no initial organization or policies for a demonstration … Decision is by neither voting nor consensus. In fact, decisions in the usual sense don’t occur. Policies are set and action determined by those who in the maelstrom of discussion and debate, exert the most influence through courage, articulateness, reasonableness and sensitivity to the feeling of the group. Influence is enhanced by image characteristics such as reputation, looks and style of living that appeal to young people. (cited in Feuer, 1971, pp.57-8)

After several years of these experiments, some of the SDS leaders discarded participatory democracy, and, among others, Hayden turned to violence. In his 1970 paper, Hayden again puts forward counter institutions, or “new arrangements” (1971, p.44). The United States should be “broken up into self-determining parts (nations on the same land)” (p.44), which he calls “Free Territories”. “The concept of Free Territories does not mean local struggles for ‘community control’ in the traditional sense” (p.46), he says, and presents “four common points of identity” of Free Territories:

First, they will be utopian centers of new cultural experiment. (…) In the Territories all traditional social relations - starting with the oppression of women - would be overturned, or at least re-examined. (…) Second, The Territories will be internationalist. (…) All imperialist institutions (universities, draft boards, corporations) in or near the Territory would be under constant siege. An underground railroad would exist to support revolutionary fugitives.

Third, the Territories will be centers of constant confrontation, battlefronts inside the Mother Country. Major institutions such as universities and corporations would be under constant pressure either to shut down or to serve the community. (…) Fourth, they will be centers of survival and self-defense. The Territories would include free medical and legal services, child-care centers, drug clinics (…). Training in physical self-defense and the use of weapons would become commonplace as fascism and vigilantism increase. Insurgent, even revolutionary, activity will occur outside as well as inside the Territories. Much of it will be within institutions (workplaces, army bases, schools, even “behind enemy lines” in the government). (pp.46-7)

While repeatedly stressing the necessity for “self-defence”, Hayden does not at all mention participatory democracy any more. His apostasy reveals the danger of holding up an unrealistic ideal.
Whereas the New Left Movement chose the community as a foothold for its participatory democracy, Dryzek chooses the public sphere as a foothold for his discursive democracy.

**The Public Sphere**

In presenting the "discursively democratic institutions" in his 1990 book, Dryzek declares, "I seek not to defend the lifeworld against further 'colonization' by the system but to conduct a counteroffensive by taking discursive rationality to the heart of the 'enemy's' domain" (p.20). The "heart of the 'enemy's' domain" should be various liberal-democratic institutions, particularly bureaucracy. However, after all, he does not come up with any idea to democratise them. In the conclusion, he himself admits that he has "said little about the internal workings of political parties, industrial democracy, local community control, (...) and the prospects for democratizing the organs of the state, even bureaucracy itself" (pp.219-20). All he says about the state is that its "democratization should be discursive". He rather intentionally avoids "[f]lirtation with the state" (p.220) based on the typical Marxist or neo-Marxist suspicion on the state, which is essentially oppressive and should disappear ultimately.

Therefore, he places his discursively democratic institutions in the so-called public sphere or public space "between individuals and the state". Participatory democracy based on these institutions "can flourish only by creating, operating within [a public sphere], and confronting the state from an autonomous public sphere" (p.128), he argues.

He well recognises the necessity of presenting concrete alternative institutions to replace liberal democracy. If critique "intimates no feasible or attainable alternative", he says, "defenders of the status quo, warts and all, can argue that really 'there is no alternative'" (p.31). That is why, he repeatedly stresses the "constructive" character of his proposal in this book, as opposed to the preceding critical theory, which has settled for only criticising society. "Constructive critical theory offers conceivable and practical alternatives to the status quo" (p.32), he proclaims.

However, his actual proposal is far short of the "feasible or attainable alternative". Concerning "model institutions", he begins with "a specification of what model institutions should not contain", and lists following three principles:

1. First, no individuals may possess authority on the basis of anything other than a good argument. All that counts, in Habermas's phrase, is "the forceless force of the better argument." Hence hierarchy, even in the mild form of representative government as endorsed by liberals and Popperians, is ruled out. Second, no barriers to the participation of interested parties should exist. Third, there should be no autonomous formal constitutions or rules. (p.41)

He adds that model discursive institutions "may require the embodiment of communicative ethics in rules of debate" (p.41). However, based on the above third principle, "any such rules must themselves be redeemable in discourse among the parties subject to them" (p.42).
These are indeed principles presented to begin with, and not yet “designs” of political institutions that he insists on presenting. However, after all, his proposals do not go further than these, just saying, “Individuals should participate as citizens, not as representatives of the state or any other corporate and hierarchical body”, or, “there should be no hierarchy or formal rules, though debate may be governed by informal canons of free discourse”. Then, what happens if several thousands of citizens come forward to participate? How can an ideal, or at least near-ideal, speech situation be realised with so many participants? How can a nation, regions, or even cities be managed without hierarchical bureaucracy? He does not answer these questions at all, and just prepares an escape route, saying, “all the features I have enumerated should be redeemable within the discursive design itself” (p.43).

He does not specify the relation between his discursive institutions and the state, which should be there until it withers away, either. What he says is at most that “complicity in state administration should be avoided” (p.43). It is unclear whether he goes so far as to recommend to abstain from voting as a liberal conspiracy, as Marcuse did.

His discursive institutions are not only too vague, but also highly problematic. He seems to regard constitutions or laws as essentially undemocratic. “A fully authentic public sphere could of course dispense with formal rules entirely” (p.42), he argues. Such a contempt of formal rules is typical among Marxists, and Sartori (1987) severely criticises it, picking up Macpherson:

On the other hand, when Macpherson hints that our legal systems mainly or centrally protect proprietorship and its possessive and invasive market implications - this is a wholesale misreading, indeed a whole sale distortion of the entire problem of constitutionalism and of how liberty and law relate to one another. Actually, in Macpherson’s theory of democracy all the discussion that has taken us so long to survey is cavalierly ignored. (pp.378-9)

This criticism is also pertain to Dryzek. In ancient Athens, the “Greeks understood well that if they did not want to be ruled tyrannically, they had to be governed by laws” (Sartori, 1987, p.307). After a while, however, under direct democracy, “whatever the crowd approved became law, with no limits on their exercise of an unruly, limitless power” (p.290). As a result, citizens constantly feared of confiscation or ostracism, and the rich and the poor respectively pursued their own interests thoroughly, causing continuous conflict between them. Greek democracy was far from being an ideal society, although participationists yearn for it. That is why, while the term “democracy” had had rather negative connotations since then at least until the eighteenth century, Rousseau argued for separating the executive power from the legislative power and liberals resorted to the constitutionalism to impose restraints on law making. Formal laws and particularly constitutions are essential means to protect political freedom. According to Dryzek (1990), “not being bound up in constitutions and formal rules (or other controls)”, his discursively democratic institutions “allow for their own supersession”. “Their procedures can develop in the directions their participants feel most appropriate” (p.56), he says. Although Dryzek mentions this as one of the “noteworthy qualities” (p.55) of his institutions, this is in fact highly insecure and
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terrifying society, even more than Athens. Based on his discursively democratic institutions, society is at the discretion of those who can afford to participate and argue convincingly at public meetings.

“As long as a state is present, discursive designs should be located in, and help constitute, a public space within which citizens associate and confront the state” (p.43), he argues. However, once the state withers away, his discursive institutions alone would not be able to sustain society.

In an attempt to be constructive, Dryzek also puts forward the “incipient discursive designs” and the “real-world approximations” of the discursive institutions. However, first of all neither of them are political institutions as normally understood. Moreover, neither of them prove to be conducive to communicative rationality.

Concerning the former, he mentions “regulatory negotiation” and “mediation”. He frankly concedes, “we will not find Athens in regulatory negotiation or the Paris Commune in mediation.” Because “mediators sometimes manipulate proceedings and suppress discourse, and regulatory negotiators happily exclude actors lacking political ‘clout’.” However, quoting Trotsky, he concludes, “These incipient discursive designs indicate the potential for discursive democracy in today’s political world” (p.48). Both regulatory negotiation and mediation are rather action conducted in the framework of particular political institutions, not political institutions themselves. Moreover, he does not at all explain why those examples indicate the potential, despite their negative realities.

Concerning the real-world approximations, he appeals to the “new social movements”, saying, “institutions and practices in sympathy with the precepts of discursive democracy can exist in several locations” (pp.48-9). These movements are concerned with “peace, ecology, opposition to nuclear power, feminism, civil rights, community autonomy, and so forth” (p.49). These are again not political institutions, and, therefore, he slips the term “practices” in the above.

“These movements are generally committed to the promotion of communicative rationality (if not by that name) in the political life they engage” (p.49), and “a wide variety of social movements and citizen actions evidences participatory and egalitarian momentum”, he argues. However, concrete examples mentioned are again not encouraging. “One of the more impressive examples of an uncompromising discursive movement is that of the Solidarity in Poland”, but when it advanced into the established politics, “Solidarity has ceased to be of interest to critical theory”. “The U.S. Greens pursue collective decisions through discussion and consensus involving local groups, working parties, the circulation of issue papers (which anyone can write), and conferences”, he says. However, he does not present any concrete evidences for this, while it is generally accepted that most of citizens’ organisations rely heavily on a very limited number of dedicated activists. Or, he argues, “Green hostility to conventional politics is reflected in the reluctance of the U.S. Greens to declare themselves a political party” (p.50). But he does not explain why the
hostility to conventional politics is a proof for the commitment to communicative rationality.

In fact, these “radical” new social movements can have their roles in liberal democracy, but not in discursive democracy, because they are least communicatively competent in the Habermasian sense. They hardly have room to compromise their existing creeds, and are even ready to resort to direct action for these creeds. In Groningen, environmental organisations did not at all change their views through the Things May Change, and they were fed up with repeated opportunities for participation, rather expecting political leadership to take the initiative. Remarkably, Dryzek himself recognises this problem, saying, “continued confrontation with such actors [the state or other conventional political actors] is to be expected, with demands made in stark, all-or-nothing terms” (pp.49-50), “Uncompromising demands of this sort might involve the shutdown of nuclear power”, and, “So new social movements are unlikely to be found participating in the incipient discursive designs” (p.50).

However, after examining discursive institutions from their model designs to their real-world approximations, he concludes, “Critical theory and communicative rationality are fully capable of inspiring a realistic program for political organization” (p.56). Referring to participatory theory as a whole, Sartori (1987) says, “it denatures the very notion and existence of evidence. (…) if we want our ideals to be constructive, they must relate to factual verification” (p.162). This remark seems completely applicable to Dryzek.

6.2.2 Mixing Up

*Push-Button Democracy*

Just like Dryzek, Arblaster (1987) stresses the necessity of presenting concrete alternative institutions. “‘Popular power’ and ‘government by the people’ are not, I would suggest, vacuous slogans, but it is easy for critics and sceptics to dismiss them as mere rhetoric so long as those who use them fail to specify what they imply, in practice and in some detail. That must be our next task” (p.64), he says. In this respect, he goes farther than Dryzek in his book *Democracy* (1987), dealing with the state “in some detail”, but not so farther.

He says, “First we should ask whether it is necessary to popular participation that all should be gathered together at one time in one place” (p.87). His answer is, at least here, “no”. If the people do not have to meet together, then “modern technology has made the direct participation of the people in political debate and decision-making a perfectly practicable possibility” (p.88). He concretely introduces the following procedure based on the referendum: “‘Keynote’ speeches or other important contributions to the debate could easily be relayed nationally. It would even be possible for people to watch a political or parliamentary debate at home on television, and then register their vote or opinion at the end of it by pressing a button or making a free phone-call” (pp.87-8).

He adds, “it might well be argued that that level or style of participation does not demand enough of the individual citizen” (p.88). However, this level of participation is already far beyond the capability of ordinary citizens, because they have to follow the MP-TV so often
and so long. The above procedure rather well reveals that modern technology has not made direct participation a possibility.

Apart from feasibility, there are more fundamental problems with the referendum. Arblaster himself points out that referenda “have often been used to ratify or endorse decisions already taken or policies already embarked on” and that “they have been staged, and the issue presented, in such a way as to produce the outcome wanted by the government which initiates them”. But he still believes in the referendum, saying, “it is hard to see what democratic objection there can be” (p.88).

However, more serious is the fact that the referendum is an extremely unreliable measure to guarantee the public interest, as the cases of Groningen show. Citizens do not necessarily know what kind of policy benefits them, and they are not necessarily public-spirited. As a result, particularly, minority rights could be seriously undermined through the referendum. Remarkably, Arblaster repeatedly cites the case of Northern Ireland, where the Unionist Party had reduced the Catholic minority to “second-class citizens” (p.4) by winning at elections for several decades. Although he uses this case to illustrate undemocratic nature of electoral democracy, what happens if referendum democracy, as he advocates it, is introduced there? Sartori (1987) argues, “referendum democracy is a conflict maximizing structure that represents not only the perfect but also the most unintelligent (since it would be purely mechanical) incarnation of a systematic ‘majority tyranny’” (p.115). Therefore, there is a sufficient “democratic objection” to the referendum, even in the standard of Arblaster himself.

At the lower levels than national, there is no difficulty in introducing direct democracy, according to Arblaster:

If we move away from the national level to consider the smaller local communities, or particular institutions such as factories and offices, colleges and schools, it is quite clear that there are no problems of either size or communications which stand in the way of their being governed according to the principle of direct participatory democracy. (p.88)

Because “the numbers involved at such levels would normally be far below the size of the citizen population of fifth-century Athens” (p.89). However, Athenian ecclesia in the fifth century B.C. was rather a spectacle, and it is far from being clear how several hundred of students or several tens of thousands of municipal citizens can discuss together in a meaningful manner. It should already be extremely difficult to manage meetings of a few hundred of factory workers.

As a contemporary example of direct democracy, he refers to student unions in Britain, which “are governed in part by general meetings”. “Usually, of course, only a small proportion of the students do actually attend”, but, he insists, “the principle is established that all students can participate in the decision-making process, and it is not a principle which has proved to be unworkable”. Therefore, this is “certainly a model that could be adopted and adapted without serious practical difficulties in many other institutions” (p.89),
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he argues. He should not have used the word “of course”, because this fact is a proof that the principle is not workable but just nominal, and direct democracy is not realised at all. He should have rather explained how all students could be really brought together, and how student unions could be still managed.

After examining the possibility of direct democracy at the national to smaller level, he concludes, “direct democracy could be a great deal more widely practised than it actually is”. “If, despite that, there is very little direct democracy in most contemporary societies, the reasons for that are political rather than practical or technical” (p.89), he argues. However, his argument so far is not convincing both practically and technically in widely introducing direct democracy. In fact, he himself does not necessarily stick to direct democracy.

As mentioned earlier, Arblaster advocates economic equality. To support this argument, he, on one hand, relies on Rousseau. “For the good of the community as a whole to be realized, it is clearly necessary for people to think and act, not simply as self-interested individuals or as members of particular interest groups, but as citizens, as members of the community as a whole”, Arblaster argues. Concerning a condition to facilitate such behaviour, he quotes Rousseau’s “belief that too great a degree of inequality within a society would prevent a common will or common interest from developing”. This belief is “surely correct” (p.77), according to Arblaster. In other words, here Arblaster presumes a popular assembly, where citizens gather and decide public matters, and to encourage them to speak for the public interest, or the “general will” in Rousseau’s term, he supports economic equality among citizens.

However, to stress the necessity for economic equality, he, on the other hand, appeals to pluralism, strikingly in the same chapter. He suddenly starts to assume representative democracy, saying, “Nobody now supposes that political processes begin and end with elections, or that elected governments have a monopoly of political power.” “So the question for democracy is whether, outside the franchise, political power, the power to affect governmental policies and priorities, is spread evenly and equally across society”, he continues. This is a pluralistic view on democracy. Therefore, although he criticises Dahl and mistakenly Plamenatz for suggesting “both that the spread of pressure and interest groups covered more or less the whole of society and also that such groups competed with each other on a roughly equal basis”, he criticises them because these suggestions are nor realised. “There is clearly no correlation, for instance, between the numbers who support a particular campaign or demand and that campaign’s influence and effectiveness” (p.79), he says. That is why, the bottom line for him is whether there is a correlation or not, and, in contradiction to his just preceding remark, he has no objection here to interest groups advocating their own interests instead of the public interest. To realise this correlation, he stresses the necessity for economic equality.

Similar confusion can be recognised also in another chapter. In Chapter 9, arguing about “Consent, Freedom and Debate”, he first urges government to be attentive to public
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opinion, assuming representative democracy. “It is important to democracy that government should be not merely ready, but obliged, to listen to what the people (in all its multiplicity) has to say”, he argues. To be precise, “leaders and government have to be accessible to the people; (…) this probably means that the government has to go to the people, rather than expecting the people to come to it”, he insists, referring to “some Latin American leaders and regimes” (p.97) as a model.

However, again abruptly, he switches to direct democracy, saying, “Democracy involves debate and discussion, but these are not enough if they remain inconclusive and ineffective in determining actual policies. The outcome of such discussions should be popular decisions and popular demands”. Therefore, “it is then the business of government to accept and to implement the popular will” (p.98). Then, there is no need for political “leaders”.

To sum up, Arblaster does not yet work out alternative participatory institutions at all, and, as a result, his ideas are fragmentary and contradictory, mixing up participatory suggestions and populist suggestions for representative democracy. As seen in the following, Healey also reveals similar problems in a still more confusing manner.

**Participative, Discursive, Communicative, Collaborative, Institutionalist, etc. Planning**

In the introduction of her book *Collaborative Planning* (1997), Healey states that this book “develops a communicative approach to the design of governance systems and practices, focusing on ways of fostering collaborative, consensus-building practices” (p.5). Particularly in Part III, she focuses on the “search for forms of governance” (p.199).

Here, first in Chapter 7, she puts forward “inclusionary argumentation” as one of “evolving forms of governance”, and supports it. This form of governance “develops a style which could realize the ideas of participatory discursive democracy in a practical way” (p.237), she says. In fact, however, inclusionary argumentation is neither participatory nor discursive. She explains it as follows, as if it were consistent with communicative theory:

> it emphasises processes of collaborative argumentation within which those who make decisions about governance matters (...) should expect to give good reasons for their decisions, grounded, following Habermas, in the “best available attempts” at inclusionary argumentation. This means paying attention to the range of ways people have of knowing and valuing things and the cultural underpinnings of knowledge and values. It allows technical knowledge (...) to be woven together, through discussion, with practical knowledge. It allows questions of material costs and benefits to be considered together with questions of moral value and emotive appreciation. A good decision would be one derived from inclusionary argumentation (p.238)

Indeed, she uses the term “collaborative” or “inclusionary”, but clearly assumes a situation where representatives discuss and decide on behalf of the people. Following Habermas, each citizen should give good reasons for his or her argument, not representatives for their decisions. And each citizen, not representatives, should pay attention to the range of ways other citizens have. In addition, she already in this chapter dismisses the prevalent form of
governance, representative democracy. Therefore, these representatives seem not to be politicians.

Successively, without explaining how to involve citizens, she argues that inclusionary argumentation “seeks to widen out governance effort to include all those with a stake in a locality in both strategy formation and policy delivery” (p.238). However, responding to the widespread criticism that citizens do not have time to participate so often, she cavalierly says, “This is to misunderstand the approach. It is often the case that full consultation on an issue is not possible. Political communities may wish to delegate areas of decision-making to smaller groups - of community leaders, or officials, or experts” (pp.238-9). Cavalierly, because this statement means a fundamental breach of participatory theory and, particularly, communicative theory. In an attempt to justify these “central participants”, she adds that they are required to pay “attention to the diversity of people’s concerns, their ways of knowing and of valuing” (p.239).

First of all, participation is “a taking part in person”, as Sartori (1987, p.160) defines. The central participants of Healey are not participants as normally understood but representatives, and therefore her approach is not participatory democracy any more. Nor liberal democracy, because there is no democratic justification for delegating decision-making to “smaller groups - of community leaders, or officials, or experts”, who are not subject to free election.

Communicative theory is based on the “intersubjective communication”, or so to speak, communication between personalities. Participants should not only listen to the contents of others’ opinions but also probe into the personal backgrounds or cultures behind those opinions, as Healey herself has repeatedly required. To realise such intensive communication, it should be essential for people to talk to one another directly. In this respect, Dryzek is more consistent, because he rejects representatives, as seen earlier. It seems already unrealistic to require ordinary citizens to engage themselves in such communication, but Healey requires their representatives to speak for those personal backgrounds of their dozens or hundreds or more of constituents. Even if they do, this is not the intersubjective communication that is alleged to bring about communicative rationality. In addition, the reached consensus among those central participants can be rejected by their constituents, because there is no way for those constituents to share the culture building or relation building experienced among the central participants. Therefore, representatives or delegates are essentially contradictory to communicative theory, although not only Healey but also Innes^2 seems to have no problem with them.

Healey tries to elaborate political institutions for inclusionary argumentation in the following two chapters, but just adds to theoretical confusion. In Chapter 8, which deals with the “soft infrastructure” of inclusionary argumentation, she first returns to participatory democracy. In her approach, “more people are directly involved in actively seeking to change their own ‘culture’ with respect to how to share spaces and make places” (p.247), “participants come together, build understanding and trust among themselves, and
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develop ownership of the strategy" (p.249), “participants learn from each other not merely about facts, interests and preferences, but about what participants care about and why” (p.267), and so on.

Subsequently, she presents a process for a “strategy-making exercise”. At the beginning of the process, “[i]nitiators have a critical responsibility”, she says. On the other hand, the “arenas of political, administrative and legal systems” “may be, at least initially, part of the problem” (p.269). However, after all, it is unclear how these existing institutions are involved in the process, and who on earth takes responsibility for the process in place of them. Therefore, an unidentifiable body initiates the process, and at “the next step” it decides the “arenas within which the next round of discussion can take place” (p.270). Once this body has made “some initial decisions” “about the settings for strategy-making”, “attention is needed to what gets discussed and how”, she says. From this stage, discussion among citizens seems to start. This stage “involves ‘opening out’ issues”, and “undertaken with inclusionary commitment, it can have enormous power in helping people learn about each others’ concerns, about problems and possibilities, in ways which reach out across our cultural differences” (p.272). It seems that citizens talk to one another directly in accordance with communicative theory.

She puts forward three precautions in managing or facilitating such discussion. First, people “may often find it difficult to speak in alien surroundings”, and the “inclusionary approach will therefore mean actively discussing and choosing a style of discussion”. Second, participants “may still ‘talk past’ each other through using different ways of expressing things” (p.273), and so the “challenge for strategic argumentation is to accept them all” (p.274).

Third, however, she abruptly starts to talk about representatives: “The third aspect concerns representation, how the members of the stakeholder community are ‘called up’ as discussion proceeds” (p.274). The unidentifiable body or “those present” should “maintain active respect and appreciation for those members who for one reason or another are ‘not present’” (p.275). This is a fundamental breach of communicative theory, as mentioned earlier, but it is not clear whether “those present” correspond to the “smaller groups” in the previous chapter. Successively, laying out various abstract terms, such as “policy discourse”, “storyline”, and “discursive key”, she stresses the necessity for open discussion within the “discourse community” (pp.275-9), which in fact consists only of representatives.

In Chapter 9, she advocates rather extremely populist measures for representative democracy, again mixing up participatory and representative democracy. This chapter deals with the “hard infrastructure”, which is the “design of the political, administrative and legal systems” (p.286) and the “design of appropriate systems of regimes” (p.287), she proclaims.

First, she presents the following five “principles” of the “systemic design of governance
processes*, or to be simple, government:
1. It should recognise the range and variety of stakeholders (...), their social networks, the
diversity of their cultural points of reference and their systems of meaning, and the complex power
relations (...).
2. It should acknowledge that much of the work of governance occurs outside the formal agencies
of government and should seek to spread power from government outside the agencies of the
state (...).
3. It should open up opportunities for informal invention and for local initiatives. It should enable
and facilitate, encouraging diversity in routines and styles of organising, rather than imposing
single ordering principles (...).
4. It should foster the inclusion of all members of political communities while acknowledging their
cultural diversity (...).
5. It should be continually and openly accountable, making available to relevant political
communities the arguments, the information, the consideration of stakeholders’ concerns, the
images and metaphors which lie behind decisions, and should include requirements for critical
review and challenge. (p.288)

Among these principles, principles 1 and 5 are based on representative democracy.
According to these, government has to recognise the social networks, the diversity of their
cultural points of reference and so on of tens of thousands or even millions of people, and
government has to continually, that is, also between elections, take responsibility.

To secure these principles for representative democracy, Healey argues for establishing
rights of citizens and duties of government. Concerning the former, she proposes the
following rights:
●broadly-based rights of voice and influence. Concerned people should be able to call to account
governance systems dealing with land use and environmental matters for failing to provide the
opportunity to voice their views and to give attention to them;
●provisions to ensure that all parties who can demonstrate a stake in an issue have the
opportunity to challenge decisions made in governance arenas on the grounds that their stake
has not been adequately taken into account;
●a right to good quality information available to all parties (...);
●a right available to all parties to call any governance agency (...) to account for failure (...).
(p.297)

If the second provisions had been established, both the VCP and the closure of
Noorderplantsoen would have been immediately suspended, and the inner city of
Groningen and the park would be still full of cars. With regard to the fourth right, she also
argues, “What is needed are ways of calling to account any person or any arenas which
claim to be engaging in governance and are acting in some way on matters of collective
concern, to answer for their action to all members of a political community“ (p.294). So,
she rejects the liberal-democratic flow of responsibility from, in the parliamentary system,
civil servants to political executives and to the legislature, which consists of politicians
directly accountable to the people. In her government, each of civil servants is continuously subject to threats of legal appeals by citizens. This could bring about extremely inactive government, because civil servants would become too reluctant to do something new.

In response to these rights, she imposes "particularly heavy" duties on government. For example, she argues, "The duties to pay attention to the concerns of the members of political communities needs to be interpreted (...) to include a duty to treat all members not merely with respect, but acknowledging their particular circumstances and values" (p.298). This duty is, of course, impossible to fulfil.

On the other hand, principles 2 and 4 are for participatory democracy. Because she again does not specify how these principles can be realised, these sound just like a slogan. Moreover, if government should delegate power to its outside, and all members of communities should participate in decision-making, then why does government still have to assume so heavy duties as mentioned earlier? Citizens do not have rights to hold government accountable any more. They themselves have to take responsibility for their own decisions.

As a whole, Healey’s ideas about political institutions are so confusing, wavering between participatory democracy and representative democracy, that it is impossible to reconstruct a consistent image of alternative institutions based on her arguments.

**Soviet Union’s Centralism**

As opposed to Arblaster, Macpherson, in his book *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (1977), dismisses push-button democracy, at least at the national level. "It seems clear that, at the national level, there will have to be some kind of representative system, not completely direct democracy", he says. "The idea that recent and expected advances in computer technology and telecommunications will make it possible to achieve direct democracy at the required million-fold level is attractive" (p.95), but, in his view, there are some insurmountable difficulties with this idea.

First, "most of the questions that would need to be asked in our present complex societies could scarcely be formulated by citizen groups specifically enough" (p.95). Second, ordinary citizens cannot respond to questions that "would have to be as intricate as, for instance, 'what per cent unemployment rate would you accept in order to reduce the rate of inflation by x percent?'" (pp.95-6) Third, while the same citizens tend to make contradictory demands, citizens make conflicting demands, which cannot be reconciled by themselves:

People - the same people - would, for instance, very likely demand a reduction of unemployment at the same time as they were demanding a reduction of inflation, or an increase in government expenditures along with a decrease in taxes. And of course different people - people with opposed interests (...) - would also present incompatible demands. (p.96)

His conclusion is, "We cannot do without elected politicians. We must rely, though we need
not rely exclusively, on indirect democracy. The problem is to make the elected politicians responsible" (p.97).

Therefore, Macpherson in fact almost completely accepts the liberal-democratic logic, while advocating participatory democracy, which should be based on infinite trust in political capabilities of citizens. As a result, he is not qualified any more to advocate direct democracy, even at smaller levels than national, where issues are also complicated and citizens have contradictory and conflicting opinions. Indeed, his proposal for participatory institutions is strikingly modest.

In presenting his alternative system, a “pyramidal system” or “Model 4A”, he asks himself, “How participatory could it be, given that at any level beyond the neighbourhood it would have to be an indirect or representative system rather than face-to-face direct democracy?” (p.108) Therefore, he gives up direct democracy not only at the national level but also at all other levels beyond the neighbourhood. In addition, democracy at those levels operated by a representative system is more indirect than liberal democracy:

Thus one would start with direct democracy at the neighbourhood or factory level - actual face-to-face discussion and decision by consensus or majority, and election of delegates who would make up a council at the next more inclusive level (...). The delegates would have to be sufficiently instructed by and accountable to those who elected them (...). So it would go on up to the top level, which would be a national council for matters of national concern, and local and regional councils for matters of less than national concern. (pp.108-9)

Members of the national and regional councils are elected indirectly by members of lower councils. “What is needed, at every stage, to make the system democratic, is that the decision-makers and issue-formulators elected from below be held responsible to those below by being subject to re-election or even recall”, he says. He admits, “This may seem a far cry from democratic control.” “But I think it is the best we can do.” However, it is highly dubious whether this “Soviet Union’s ‘democratic centralism’” (p.109) is more participatory than liberal democracy, although he argues, “something more participatory than our present system is desirable” (p.94). Moreover, he does not specify how the only direct democracy can be operated in each neighbourhood, which should consist of at least several hundred of families.

Subsequently, he puts forward another system, “Model 4B”, which takes into account the existing “competitive political parties”. Examining the possibility of “combining a pyramidal organization with competing parties”, he finds it “much less difficult” to “keep the existing structure of government, and rely on the parties themselves to operate by pyramidal participation” (p.113). It is not clear how the existing structure of government can co-exist with the pyramidal system, and what kind of role political parties play. Nevertheless, he insists, “It thus appears that there is a real possibility of genuinely participatory parties, and that they could operate through a parliamentary or congressional structure to provide a substantial measure of participatory democracy”. He does not at all explain what “genuinely participatory parties” mean and how they can provide “a substantial measure of
participatory democracy”. However, “This I think is as far as it is now feasible to go by way of a blueprint.” After all, he expects political parties to “wither away”. “In that case we should have moved to Model 4A” (p.114), he concludes.

Trying to justify the aim of her 1988 book of providing the “philosophical foundations” for participatory theory, Gould argues, “Though the theory of political democracy, as such, has been fairly well developed historically, a comparable theoretical grounding for the extension of democracy (…) has not yet been offered” (p.24). However, participatory theory has been overwhelmingly philosophy-laden or terminology-laden, and strikingly lacking in concrete proposals for realistic political institutions. “What the anti-elitist means by participation is nothing more than that the people should rule” (p.161), Sartori (1987) says.

As a result, the remaining only function of participatory theory is just to undermine liberal democracy. As seen repeatedly in the cases of Groningen, processes that are democratic enough in terms of liberal democracy are criticised as undemocratic, on the ground that there is no opportunity for participation or no consensus among citizens. On the contrary, processes that are undemocratic in terms of liberal democracy are maintained and even facilitated, because nevertheless decision makers can claim that the processes are democratic, relying on participatory theory.

Notes

1 Based on the study of fourteen cases of consensus building in the state of California, Innes (1996) concludes, “One can make a good case that consensus building, properly designed, can produce decisions that approximate the public interest” (p.469). “In all the cases the groups reached agreements on significant products”. She also emphasises the educative effect: “Learning about the system - whether it was water, land use and transportation, or natural habitat - led to a widely shared view within all groups that ‘we are all in this together’” (p.465). However, first of all, these conclusions are based on eight cases among fourteen, and “the others fall short in some significant way” (p.464). Although six cases among fourteen are not a few, she does not examine these unsuccessful cases. Second, she describes those successful eight cases only succinctly, compressing all cases into just one page. Necessarily, she does not at all explain the contents of “significant products”. Therefore, it is impossible to confirm whether those products are really consistent with the public interest. Moreover, those products could be just principles such as “generalisable interests”. Innes herself admits, “The groups agreed on principles rather than on specific maps or detailed programs of action” (p.465). As mentioned in the text, consensus on principles can be reached without consensus building.

2 Innes (1996) says as follows: “Consensus building aims to resemble the theorists’ account of communicative rationality. It is a method of group deliberation that brings together for face-to-face discussion a significant range of individuals chosen because they represent those with differing stakes in a problem.” (p.461)