Participatory Politics: Innovations and Challenges for the Turkish Left

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Abstract: *A general indifference if not a categorical opposition to the new participatory mechanisms is observed within the Turkish left. Considering them as disguised forms of neo-liberalism under a generic title of governance, the democratic potential of these new political spheres and practices has been wholly neglected. In this paper, we shall first present different forms of recent participatory innovations to argue that the spectrum of these mechanisms is too large to let a standard generalisation about their democratic impact. We shall then discuss the challenges that they face to draw a realistic portrait with the objective of avoiding a dangerous and ungrounded idealisation of these instruments. To conclude, we shall argue that their democratic potential is nevertheless too important to be wholly neglected for the Turkish left.*

Key Words: *Participatory politics, representative politics, participatory mechanisms, the left, inclusiveness*

Katılımcı Siyaset: Türk Solu İçin Sorunlar ve Yenilikçi Çözümler

Özet: *Yeni katılımcı mekanizmalara yönelik olarak Türkiye solunun kategorik bir muhalefeti değilse bile bir ilgisizliği gözleniyor. Muğlak bir yönetişim başlığı altında yeni liberalizmin kılık değiştirmiş halleri olarak algılanan bu yeni siyasal mecra ve uygulamaların demokratik potansiyeli topyekün görmezden geliniyor. Bu makalede öncelikle bu katılımcı yeniliklerin, demokratik potansiyelleri hakkında kategorik bir genelleme yapmaya izin vermeyecek ölçüde geniş bir yelpazeye yayıldıklarını ortaya koyacağız. Daha sonra, bunlara ilişkin olarak tehlikeli ve temelsiz bir idealizasyona engel olmak amacıyla, bu araçların karşı karşıya oldukları zorlukları ve zayıflıkları tartışacağız. Sonuçta, bu yeni mekanizmaların demokratik potansiyellerinin, Türk solu adına tümden görmezden gelinemeyecek kadar önemli olduğunu savunacağız.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Katılımcı siyaset, temsili siyaset, katılım mekanizmaları, sol, içerme*

Introduction: Crisis of Representative Politics

Since 1990s, participatory mechanisms have been multiplied throughout the planet in growing numbers and with an innovative diversity. This political trend identified with greater efforts for associating citizens to politics has been mainly associated to the general disappointment about the democratic functioning of political institutions and processes. As a matter of

fact, all major aspects of representative democracy seem to suffer from the transformation of citizens' political attitudes. To put in Hirschmanian terms, people appear more tilted to adopt the option of 'exit' from politics, leading to the vulgarisation of comments about a general crisis of representative democracy.

Such a diagnosis of a political crisis may be well a *deja vu* for those who may recall the state of western political systems towards the end of seventies during which representative democracy seemed to suffer from a crisis of ungovernability or of legitimacy (depending from where you stand in the political spectrum)[1]. In that previous run, it was the neo-liberalism that had the chance of offering a concrete path of exit from such a state of crisis. In the hands of Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl or Özal, the Right appeared to hold the cure of growing discontentment of masses.

In order to re-valorize individual freedoms and initiatives through a minimal state, the program of the new right defended the widening of market control on more and more fields of social life; the restriction of state presence in economy as well as in the creation of new opportunities; the regulation of demands of some social groups that up until then exercised a significant pressure on governments; and finally the improvement of governmental functions concerning the security and maintenance of law and order (Held, 1996: 243). Thus, experts and partisans of neo-liberalism attempted to respond to the crisis of governability from which political systems were supposed to suffer, by dissociating socio-economic problems and governmental functions (Putnam, Pharr and Dalton, 2000: 5). By restricting governmental presence in socio-economic life, the new right tempted to moderate public expectations and thus to lower popular pressure on governments (Norris, 1999: 4). In short, New Right adopted the motto "Small is beautiful" in searching for an exit from the socio-economic and political crisis of the seventies; the minimisation of state bureaucracy and of governmental functions was considered the main key of political reaction in that critical conjuncture.

Failing to respond adequately, probably since it has been quasi paralysed due to the respective fall of socialist regimes, the Left remained relatively passive in this hegemonic neo-liberal trend. Fortunately, the inadequacy of the cure would be proven by itself since, a decade later, statements on a new political crisis was back in the agenda. Yet, this time, the consensus on the problematical state of politics was coupled by that on the solution: for both the left and the right wing of the political spectrum the solution was believed to be in the better association of citizens to politics. Be it in managerial terms of new public management or empowering

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[1] For a discussion of these different theories of political crisis, see Held, 1996: 233-253.

instruments of radical left[2], citizens' participation to public affairs represented the consensual path for overcoming the contemporary crisis of democracy.

This strange rapprochement of political poles led to a significant confusion on what is meant by participatory politics particularly within the Turkish left. Radical socialists defending more participatory politics on deliberative or agnostic terms, have been roughly accused for cooperating consciously or involuntarily with the neo-liberal thought. All efforts in the name of more participatory political channels have been stigmatised under a generic title of governance, which is in turn read as a pure imposition of neo-liberal international organisations such as IMF and/or World Bank. Consequently, the historical "heirs" of the republican thought and thus of participatory politics[3] seem to remain curiously indifferent to such efforts leading contradictorily to the neo-liberal use and abuse of these new political instruments. This attitude of indifference and even antagonism appears to be further interesting when some outstanding participatory practices of the Turkish left such as Fatsa or New Municipalism of the seventies are considered.

This paper aims thus to raise an objection to this indifference if not a categorical rejection of Turkish left to participatory democracy by arguing that the latter represents a large spectrum of instruments with different forms, functions, potentials as well as challenges and problems. Due to this variety of tools and practices that participatory efforts should not be wholly rejected or praised, but evaluated case by case according to their democratic potentials and deficits. In other words, each instrument presents inherently some democratic potential that can not be neglected as well as some democratic deficits and practical challenges that can be eventually overcame.

In the framework of this paper, we shall thus develop a broad regard on the existing spectrum of participatory tools. Later on, we shall discuss the inherent factors that determine the actual democratic impact of these tools. For this purpose, in the following section, we shall elaborate different typologies based on different aspects of the initiatives; namely the origin, the output, the territoriality and the theme of the instrument.

New Participatory Mechanisms

Since the nineties, the institutional landscape of political systems has been significantly diversified by the introduction of new civic platforms,

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[2] Given the limits of this paper, we feel obliged to leave aside the rich literature on theoretical assumptions of participatory democracy. For more about different theoretical approaches related to the subject, see Keyman (2000) for radical democracy (especially pp. 121-163) and Christensen and Laegreid (2001) for new public management.
[3] For a perfect demonstration of this relationship, see Pateman (1970).

deliberative institutions and consultation mechanisms. Citizens' juries and panels, participatory planning and budgets, local assemblies, district organisations have entered to the contemporary terminology of local governments. All these new political institutions or practices have a common objective: to encourage and facilitate the participation of citizens in the local political life beyond the traditional procedures of political engagement (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001: 207). In other words, they have been the concrete reflections of the theoretical and political quasi-consensus on the need for evolving to a more participatory democracy. Just as the diversity of intentions and orientations behind this participatory trend, the real experiences vary among themselves regarding to the objectives, nature and extent of participation they aim at. This diversity among the observed experiences has led political scientists to propose different typologies of new participatory mechanisms.

The Origin

To start with, George Gontcharoff (1999, 2001) proposes a bi-categorical scheme based on the origin of the initiative. On the one hand, we find 'descending movements' initiated by public authorities from above in the forms of district councils, consultative commissions, public service customer commissions, provisory commissions on specific themes or assemblies of social groups (youth, women, children, elderly, disabled etc.). These new institutions represent public officials' efforts aiming at overcoming the contemporary political crisis by regaining citizens' confidence and thus reinforcing the legitimacy of their policies by reforming the traditional administrative framework.

On the other hand, we also observe 'ascending movements' that have their origins in grassroots initiatives undertaken by citizens themselves without the initial support of public authorities. In most of the cases, such initiatives take place at the infra-local level assembling the inhabitants of a district eager to defend their collective interests against public authorities or other similar gatherings. Even if, at a first glance, it is possible to have a NIMBY[4]-like impression on these ascending movements, experiences show that while spreading horizontally (e.g. to other districts) or vertically (e.g. to higher levels of administration), they become more egalitarian and democratic.

Moreover, in some exceptional cases (such as Porto Alegre's participatory budget), these two models may be combined constituting a

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[4] **NIMBY** is an acronym for **Not in My Back Yard**. The term is used to describe opposition to a new project by the residents of a locality.

third category in the typology based on the origin of the movement (Bacqué, Rey and Sintomer, 2005).

The Output

If the origin of the initiative is important, its output is further significant in developing a typology of new participatory initiatives since the contemporary repertory of such practices reveals a remarkable richness of new forms of political participation. For instance, Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2001: 207, 216) regroup these new participatory experiences in five categories. In this typology, the *consumerist methods* represent the first form of participation. Initiatives that fall into this group are nothing other than the customer satisfaction practices that the private sector has been exercising for many decades. Transferred to the public sector with the new public management wave, these methods aim first of all, at the improvement of the quality of public service delivery. By establishing public relations departments, organising satisfaction and/or opinion surveys public authorities aim at better responding to citizens' expectations. Yet, the democratic impact of these methods is rather negligible since citizens are addressed only as customers; thus they can just only comment on the related public service.

The *traditional methods* such as public meetings, document consultation as well as question and answer sessions constitute the second category of Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker. Used over a long time, these practices aim at better informing citizens on the pursued policies and services provided by local authorities. Even if citizens are not regarded any more as simple users of public services as in the consumerist methods, these practices do not give an active role to citizens since they allow only one-dimensional communication between the authorities and the public; citizens constitute very often a passive audience of such practices. Therefore, even if they seem to be present in the political sphere by participating to such practices, citizens' influence on public policies via these traditional participation methods can only be very symbolic.

According to the authors, the third category consists of various types of *forums* which bring together citizens sharing common interests and/or concern, on a regular basis. The inhabitants of a district, citizens who are interested in the environmental problems, the users of public transport or the communities (based on a social category –women, youth, elderly etc.- or a cultural identity) can constitute the audiences targeted by such forums. Apart from making use of the traditional methods cited above, these forums encourage and enable citizens to take active roles in the government of their locality or simply the resolution of a specific problem. By developing projects and action plans within these forums, citizens contribute actively to local affairs.

The most significant group of the discussed participatory practices falls in the last two categories of the typology proposed by Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker since as their names reveal, they represent recent innovations in this domain. The authors divide these innovative methods in two categories: *consultative* and *deliberative* innovations. The difference is whether citizens are actually engaged in sustained dialogue or only consulted briefly on a particular issue. Acknowledging the importance of such a distinction, we argue though that a further regrouping is necessary since the practices that would fall broadly in these two categories dispose very specific characteristics that deserve to be highlighted by a more detailed typology.

Territory-based Practices

As a matter of fact, the form-based typology proposed by Bacqué, Rey and Simtomer (2005) can be useful in comprehending these more particularistic dimensions of the new participatory methods. The authors present a typology consisting of different forms of participation. We can skip their first category, the *assemblies*, as we have already mentioned it in Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker's typology. The second category, the *referendum* represents also a minor importance regarding our discussion since it is rather a traditional form of political participation though it has been recently quite popularised especially at the local level.

The third form of participatory mechanism that Bacqué, Rey and Simtomer present is the *district council* that assembles inhabitants at the lowest urban scale to which citizens can identify themselves. These councils, the most popular participatory practice in Europe, enable citizens to act collectively in the name of their local interests. The success of district councils lays in their potential of collective mobilisation thanks on the one hand to the sentiment of belonging to the district that bonds citizens to each other and to the probable formation of coalitions among the latter against the external institutions and/or actors on the other (Gontcharoff, 1999: 307–308)[5].

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[5] Looking at how this mobilisation potential is translated into concrete action, Gontcharoff (1999) identifies six functions that the district councils exercise. First of all, they reveal a festive characteristic with the role they play in the organisation of local feasts and in other social occasions. Secondly and thirdly, they facilitate the flow of information either from the grassroots to administrative units by informing or notifying the municipal agents about the problems of the district (ascending flow of information) or from the latter to the inhabitants in the form of providing information on the policies and actions pursued by the local authorities (descending flow of information). Fourthly, the councils can facilitate the consultation procedures undertaken by the municipalities on the projects under consideration by collecting and then transmitting to the local authority the opinions of district inhabitants. Moreover, as a fifth function, they can also serve in representing the district in other deliberative processes organised by the local government. Finally, albeit very rarely, district councils initiate concrete projects that are founded upon and managed by permanent

The fourth type of participatory method in the categprisation of Bacqué, Rey and Simtomer is the *district funds* that allow the inhabitants of a particular district to make modest investments in their locality. Usually associated to district councils but also to other participatory mechanisms, these funds are far from creating a significant political impact at the local level despite their growing popularity in the European context. In a similar way, the *community development practices* enable the inhabitants to take active role in their proximity. By delegating the management of specific public equipment to the inhabitants, public authorities aim at better associating citizens to local affairs.

Thematic Gatherings

All of the preceding three types of participatory methods bring citizens together on a territorial basis at the district level. Yet, citizens can also assemble on thematic grounds according to their interests or concerns or just by coincidence as in the *citizen juries*. Inspired from the court juries of some justice systems, the citizen juries let a group of citizens determined arbitrarily (usually by respecting a social quota system) pronounce on a specific issue after being informed adequately on different aspects of the issue in question. The citizen juries are especially important in technically controversial issues on which experts can not reach to a consensus. By letting laymen express their preferences, the public authority aims at arriving ultimately to a 'socially acceptable' (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2001) decision that enjoys a public legitimacy.

Citizen juries thus provide two significant democratic opportunities for citizens. First of all, citizens can directly influence a public decision on a specific issue. Even if the decision of the juries is not legally bonding, the public authority can hardly oppose such a decision. Moreover, the decision reached by the jury is not founded on just the personal interests and the popular knowledge of the participants. By providing detailed information on the issue, the juries bypass one of the main critics against the participation of citizens according to which citizens are not capable of deciding justly on public affairs, which necessitates a minimum technical formation. Despite these advantages, the citizen juries can not be considered as a main key for the 'democratisation of democracy' since only a small number of citizens can take part in the process. Besides, this small group of citizens does not actually enjoy a real power of representation even if specific social quotas are respected in the selection procedure. As Smith and Wales (2000) argue, the

participation of district inhabitants. Despite these ambitious functions attributed to district councils, they continue to remain as poor institutions as Domergue, Plenel and Prete (2004) note with regards to the French experience; poor because they enjoy neither a financial nor a functional autonomy and remain dependent on the political actors' will and initiatives.

fact that different social groups are included in the process does not ensure that they are all represented. Representation is not necessarily equal to 'inclusivity' since sharing a common social identity does not provide per se a representative power. Even without providing a perfect political representativeness, the citizen juries nevertheless constitute an interesting innovation in associating citizens to the public decision making procedures. This is probably why the practice is spreading rapidly all around the world[6].

A similar category in Bacqué, Rey and Sintomer's typology is *consultative commissions* that bring together public authorities with either the representatives of related associations or social groups on a specific theme. Unlike the juries, they do not seek to create a microcosm of the society by respecting social quotas but include just the concerned or interested groups. Furthermore, they do not have decision-making power since, as their name suggests, they serve as consultative bodies. Even so, by creating a channel of communication and deliberation between public officials and the related social groups, the consultative commission would create non-negligible democratic impact on public affairs.

The *representation mechanisms of citizen-customers in public services* are another type of new participatory method that Bacqué, Rey and Sintomer cite. Different than Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker's consumerist methods, these mechanisms enable the customers of a public service to participate actively in the management of its delivery. Therefore, instead of being passive clients who are expected just to provide *ad hoc* feed-backs to the public service provider via surveys or wish-boxes, customers can thus influence the direction of the public office.

All the methods cited above target very specific proportions of the society either on a geographical scale (district organisations) or on a thematic basis. One can thus easily argue that these micro efforts would not be enough to transform the political sphere even at the local level and that more developed mechanisms are necessary in order to be able to create a significant impact. Indeed, the last two categories of Bacqué, Rey and Sintomer's typology present examples of more developed models that would address to a wider proportion of society with a larger scope of themes. The first example is the *participatory strategic plans or community development plans* that give a voice to citizens in the preparation of the future of the locality. By actively participating to the urban or social planning of the city, citizens can directly influence the determination of public policies on a very large scope of socioeconomic, cultural and urban domains. The Local Agenda 21s are also good examples for this type of participatory effects.

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[6] For a detailed description of the French experience on citizens' juries see Bourg and Boy (2005).

The preparation of a plan is obviously different than its application. Citizens' engagement in the planning period does not necessarily indicate that the adopted plan will be wholly respected during its actual application. So, a model that permits the association of citizens to both the planning and the execution would have a greater democratic potential. The last category in the typology proposed by Bacqué, Rey and Sintomer, namely the *participatory budget* responds relatively to this need of covering both of the stages of public policy determination and implementation. Developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the participatory budget is a year-long process that combines both the geographic and thematic organisations as well as the planning and execution phases. Founded on a system of forums and forum representatives, the annual municipal budget is determined mainly by citizens themselves. Furthermore, citizens are also capable of inspecting whether the municipal agents respect the outcomes of the process. According to Gret and Sintomer (2002: 130–131), the participatory budget, at least as it is developed in Porto Alegre creates a positive democratic impact since first of all, it associates citizens to public policy determination without making them lose their autonomy vis-à-vis public authorities. Secondly, it improves the communication between the latter and citizens. Moreover, it avoids the political fetishism based on the political monopoly of delegates. Finally, it improves the inclusiveness of the political sphere by facilitating dominated groups' access to the political scene. In other words, the participatory budget is the closest participatory model to the democratic ideal suggested by the advocates of a more participatory form of democracy.

An additional category that is included in none of the cited typologies would be the electronic participation channels that let citizens to be informed about or react to local public affairs. Popularised under the heading of e-government, such methods provide new and rapid sources of information (web-sites, e-mail groups, electronic newsgroups etc.), of interaction (electronic forums, e-mail communication etc.) as well as reaction (online petitions and referenda). The most important advantage of such electronic participatory methods is that they may help overcoming the biggest obstacle against establishing an authentic participatory democracy in contemporary societies that are unavoidably too crowded, too torn apart and too busy to gather together. Yet, with the vulgarisation of such electronic methods, citizens would be able to take part in public affairs without being obliged to be present at a specific place on a given time. The public sphere would be thus reachable from office or home whenever the person feels free to do so. Consequently, such electronic developments would bring about either new democratic platforms or enhance the ones already present in more traditional ways. As a matter of fact, all the methods we discussed above may be democratically improved by making use of these electronic instruments.

A legitimate question after presenting a broad inventory of participatory methods would be whether they actually lead to an authentic democratic change. In other words, is it sufficient to introduce one or several

of these participatory instruments to overcome the contemporary crisis of democracy? In this section of the paper we aim to give an answer to this question by discussing the limits and the challenges of the democratisation of democracy via the introduction of these new participatory methods.

Democratic Impact of Participatory Methods

The theoretical and ideological transformation regarding the participatory democracy as well as the development of new participatory methods that we discussed above do not necessarily render the participation of the hitherto excluded more practicable. Even if the latter do enjoy enhanced opportunities of authentic participation in the political sphere, this participation does not always translate into a concrete influence within the traditional political system. The theoretical convincingness of the literature on the virtues of participatory democracy can not indeed be always affirmed by empirical observations on the actual experiences. This gap between the theoretical assumptions and empirical facts has been actually examined by certain scholars who reflect upon the challenges and the limits of the new participatory methods instead of simply praising or condemning them. While acknowledging the contemporary weakness of participatory practices, these scholars try to identify the reasons behind their actual shortcomings in order to be able to enhance them so that they can bring about a more meaningful impact on the political sphere. In this last part of our discussion, we also suggest such an analysis on the outlined participatory practices. We shall discuss how these experiences may not bring about the political changes that the 'wishful' literature on the participatory democracy has expected. For this purpose, we suggest a four-folded approach that analyses separately the inclusiveness, the scale, the operation and outcome of the examined experience. In other words, by being inspired by the golden rule of journalism we analyse the three W's and one H: who, where, how and why participate? By doing so, we hope to identify the main challenges for authentic participation that would democratise the democracy.

Challenges of Inclusiveness: Who Participates?

One of the main critiques towards new participatory methods is that they represent nothing than the reproduction of traditional political power relations in a new –perhaps more smiling- manner. According to this point of view, those who are already acquainted with the traditional participation channels and institutions will most probably be able to make more use of new participatory methods. Besides, unlike the traditional thus episodic participation channels, these new mechanisms require more time allocation and personal skills from the participants, therefore increasing the cost of participation that would be much more affordable for the upper strata than the lower social groups who have less time to spare, fewer educational skills

and lower self-esteem. In other words, unless special measures are taken, the famous 'hitherto excluded' will continue to be alienated also from the new participatory channels. Consequently, the political inequality that the representative system is accused of provoking not only remains untouched, but also risks getting aggravated because of the better organisation and mobilisation of the upper socioeconomic groups. In other words, the inclusiveness of the new channels of participation is one of the main factors determining their eventual democratic impact.

It would be unjust though to consider this danger of worsened political inequality as an unavoidable outcome since in case of establishing specific measures for reaching out to the underrepresented social groups (working class, women, youth, foreigners etc.), the new participatory method can actually overcome this trap of political inequality. For example, the methodology developed in Porto Alegre's participatory budget has managed to associate the lower socioeconomic groups to the process. Even if the poorest citizens continue to be still absent in the political sphere, the middle classes appear to lose their overwhelming dominance in similar practices (Abers, 2000: 121-127). Because of this relative absence of the middle class in the participatory budget of Porto Alegre, the problem of inequality is inversed: "since poor citizens so dominate the assemblies, middle-class neighbourhoods are sometimes totally unable to obtain benefits through the process" (Abers, 1998: 52). So one way or another, the equal participation of different socioeconomic groups, in other words the problem of political equality, is a very important dimension in the analysis of the new participatory methods.

Problem of Scale: Where to Participate?

Secondly, we ought to examine at which level of the political sphere the new method is located in order to better comprehend its nature. If for example, as we have already stated above, the participatory mechanism addresses the extreme micro-level, the practice risks of turning into a NIMBY movement motivated by very particularistic and egoistic interests. The multiplication of such NIMBY-like organisations would lead to a very conflictual context where autonomous participatory mechanisms violently oppose to each other. Even if motifs for participation are more universal at the micro-level, it is necessary to link these efforts to upper politico-administrative levels in order to be able to obtain concrete results. Getting closer to the grassroots does not necessarily bring about a democratic political change since the actual decisions are usually made at higher levels. In other words, the 'proximate' is not always the most 'beautiful' and a well-functioning coordination has to be established in between micro-local and more universal initiatives.

Operational Problems: Participate but How?

Even if the two preceding conditions are met by first inviting all social groups to the process and then establishing an adequate coordination between participatory initiatives functioning at different political levels, the democratic impact of the process should not be taken for granted since the way in which the mechanism functions is at least as important as its inclusiveness and scale. For instance, all the social groups may be present in the process albeit without enjoying equal influence within deliberations. As we have already implied in discussing the profile of the participants, the well-to-do classes are also more used to and capable of expressing themselves and defending their point of views in front of a public. However, for the ones from more modest backgrounds, watching the discussions silently from their corner might be more preferable then actively participating to the debates. In other words, categorical inclusiveness of the methods does not ensure the inclusiveness of deliberations within the process which may indeed be monopolised by an active minority more familiar with such deliberative activities. This might lead to a more serious problem of inequality since it can not be perceived only by examining the formal structure of the process; a participatory platform that brings together participants from diverse socioeconomic origins may in reality serve only the interests of a specific group.

As with the problem of inclusiveness, this functional challenge may necessitate the introduction of some measures aiming at a more egalitarian distribution of influence within the process. The public authority or the organizers of the process can incite passive participants to take more active roles by offering some stimulants or by establishing internal rules that would ensure a more plural interaction. Yet, such interventions of the organising agents may arouse questions on the autonomy of the process: if the former is expected to play such determining roles, would not there be a risk of co-optation? Indeed, enjoying the privilege of being able to shape the process, the public authority may seek instrumentalising the participatory method with the objective of obtaining a popular legitimacy for its policies or acts as well as of overcoming the opposition of social groups by occupying them with the process. Therefore, by inviting the public authority to take specific measures to ensure the political equality –be it at the level of presence or of deliberation-, we risk of paving the way to the instrumentalisation of the process by the former.

In any case, the risk of co-optation goes beyond this dilemma between the political equality and the institutional autonomy since in most of the cases (top-down movements) the public authority is free to decide upon the main lines of the new method. In Parkinson's (2004) terms, it can introduce a participatory mechanism about the issues of housing, building or the painting. In other words, it can invite citizens to deliberate on the macro policies of housing, the urban plans or the urban development strategies. In

such a participatory platform, citizens would obviously be able to shape the future of the locality. Yet, the same mechanism may be introduced at the building level enabling its participants to pronounce only on their close environment in their district, street or building. Even more specifically, citizens can be expected to express their opinion on a very simple issue such as the colour of the walls of a house. In each case, the public authority may present the initiative as a sincere effort of democratising local politics though the actual impact brought about would be obviously quite dissimilar for each experience. In more explicit terms, the public authority may instrumentalise the participatory trend by occupying citizens with the colour of the walls whereas more complex and most probably more controversial issues are spared from major popular opposition.

In short, a thorough analysis of the functioning of the process is necessary in order to identify its democratic impact adequately since respecting the representation of different groups in the mechanism or its association with higher (or even lower) levels does not ensure a democratic transformation due to the danger of monopolization of the deliberation by a more active minority or of instrumentalisation by the public authority.

Power at Stake: Why Participate?

Let's assume for a moment that a perfect participatory practice is experienced; all social groups are represented and they participate actively in the deliberations on a large scope of public themes, the mechanism is associated to other levels of the politico-administrative system and is protected from the risk of instrumentalisation by the public authority or other actors. Unfortunately, even such an ideal example of 'democratic engineering' does not seem to be sufficient to ensure a democratic transformation of local politics since such a mechanism may be used for different ends. We have already underlined that the choice of the theme deliberated in the process (housing-building-painting) is a decisive factor on its eventual democratic impact. Yet, what we mean by the power at stake of the method is different than its theme and implies the degree of power that citizens obtain via the process. The issue is not that citizens are assembled to decide the colour of the walls, but whether they have the last word on the issue in question. We are interested thus to what extent the new practice modifies the power relations within the given political system.

There are indeed numerous models in the literature that categorise the participatory methods according to the impact they create on traditional power relations. The best known model of this kind is certainly Arnstein's (1967) 'ladder of citizen participation' that regroups different participatory practices under three main groups, which cover eight subsections. As illustrated in Figure 1, Arnstein's ladder starts with non-participation practices that aim actually to enable the power holders to educate citizens through

such so-called participatory channels. At the second level of the ladder, the degrees of tokenism, we find practices that involve indeed some degrees of dialogue between the public authority and citizens without yet providing an authentic decision power to the latter. Finally towards the summit of the ladder, we approach to the participatory ideal where citizens enjoy an absolute control within the decision and policy making.
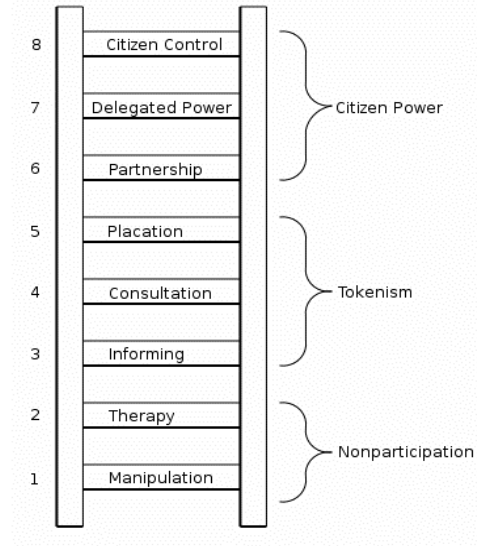

Figure 1. Arnstein's (1967) 'Ladder of Participation'

After almost four decades, Arnstein's scale of citizen participation still remains among the main references in the literature on participatory methods, albeit without lacking justified critics. For instance, Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett (1994: chp. 6) consider her approach inadequate for contemporary discussions on participatory methods for mainly three reasons. First, they believe that it is necessary to distinguish between participation and control more precisely than they are presented in Arnstein's ladder. Second, they think that several additional categories are required especially on the upper half of the ladder. Finally, they underline that the steps of the ladder should not be identical since climbing the lower rungs of the ladder is far easier than approaching its summit. Due to these three weaknesses of Arnstein's model the authors propose a new 'ladder of citizen empowerment' based on three main levels as in the older scale but covering four more rungs. The first level, citizen non-participation, covers the practices that are presented as participatory initiatives whereas the real concern is improving the image of the public authority without allocating any political power to citizens. It is only after the fifth rung that the genuine citizen input begins by providing high quality information and establishing consultative and advisory mechanisms. These first three categories of citizen participation are

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distinguished from the rest due to the fact that the public authority does not necessarily make a commitment to follow the preferences voiced within these methods. Yet, for the upper-level arrangements, citizens dispose some power that let them acquire genuine bargaining influence. Finally, the last two categories that make up the level of citizen control indicate citizens having the power to govern a programme, area or institution more or less independently of the public authority.

Both the ladder of citizen participation and empowerment illustrate well that the impact of diverse participatory mechanisms varies quite significantly from one experience to another. The democratic impact of these methodologies thus differs considerably. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the upper levels in both scales would be always preferable in each local context. For example, Swinnen (2005: 181) rouses a very legitimate question: *should* we try to climb up in the scale as high as we *can?* Since his answer to this question is not affirmative, Swinnen suggests the utilisation of 'spectrum' instead of 'ladder' in the discussion on different participatory methods. The use of spectrum to describe the landscape of existing participatory experiences avoids implying a hierarchy of their actual democratic impact.
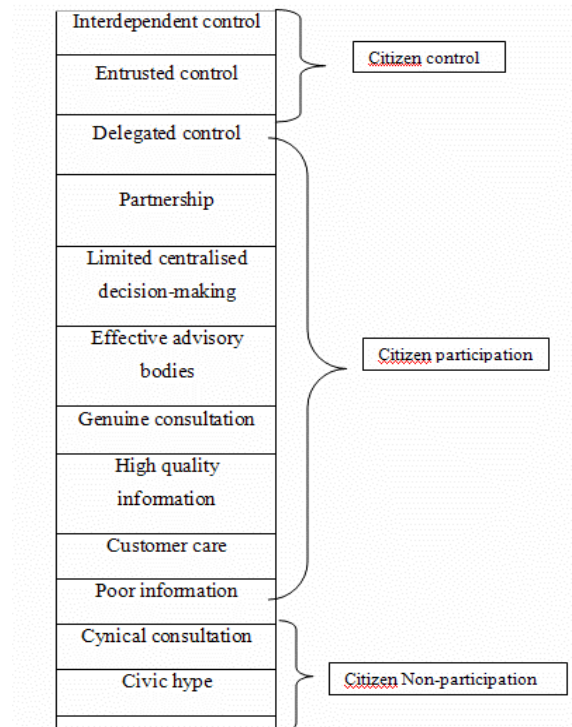

Figure 2. Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett's (1994) 'Ladder of Citizen Empowerment'

Indeed, we absolutely agree with Swinnen's warning against an unfaltering advocacy of the most elaborated participatory methods without taking into consideration the local socio-political conditions. There is no one best way of making citizens more associated to politics. Every context has its own particularities that would determine the actual impact of a given political instrument. Thus, the actual impact of participatory practices, no matter how innovative, developed and inclusive they are, should not be taken for granted. Therefore, the unrealistic idealisation of new participatory methods should be carefully prevented in order to avoid greater disillusionments about the eventual outcome of such experiences.

Nevertheless, probable dysfunctions, instrumentation and failure of innovative participatory practices should not neither be used to claim their unavoidable meaninglessness. When the challenges that we have underlined above are kept in mind and *ad hoc* regulations and cautions as well as incentives are introduced, they can assuredly offer non-negligible opportunities for citizens to acquire more enhanced civic skills and virtues as well as to better associate to politics.

Conclusion

The neo-liberal hegemony coupled with the fall of socialist states in the late eighties led to a serious paralysis of socialist political formations throughout the world. In Turkey, this shock was further aggravated because of the overwhelming pressures and repressions of the post-coup period that have destroyed the quasi-totality of the legal grounds of politics especially for the left. Two decades later, while we observe great socialist efforts of offering practical and original alternatives to hegemonic neo-liberal structures, Turkish left remains to a large extent indifferent or even opposed to such opportunities on the grounds that they are in fact disguised forms of neo-liberal wave.

As we have tried to underline throughout our discussion, new participatory structures are not exempted from risks of unequal representation and/or of instrumentation due to structural characteristics of the practice or to the local context. Nevertheless, limited or counter-democratic impact of certain experiences should not be referred to prove the ontological inadequacy of these tools in the perspective of democratic politics. With some institutional modification or social intervention, the outcome of the process can be easily and significantly improved.

The categorical indifference to the democratic potential of these experiences in the pretext of some observed deficiencies or dysfunctions would lead to two major consequences. First of all, it would represent missed chances of reaching to social groups that have been distanced from politics

due to the successful moves of de-politicization of the post-coup period. Socialists have been more weakened in this process since the junta have implicitly (or even sometimes explicitly) favored the rightist wing that shortly re-established its power. The socialist need thus more than anything else new and effective tools to reach to masses and offer a practical alternative. Therefore, new participatory mechanisms are too precious to remain incognito in the eyes of Turkish socialists.

Secondly, such an indifference leaves these instruments in the hands of already powerful groups and ideologies, confirming contradictorily the arguments that kept socialists away from these mechanisms. These new platforms serve indeed to neo-liberalism just because socialists leave them under their monopoly. Therefore, by not valorising new participatory spheres, socialists not only remain deprived from precious political tools, but also assume the empowerment of their major rivals thanks to these instruments.

In short, despite all their probable problems and challenges, new participatory instruments should be taken seriously in consideration if ever there is still a concern among Turkish socialists of reaching to masses that have been gradually distanced from socialist ideals and organizations.

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