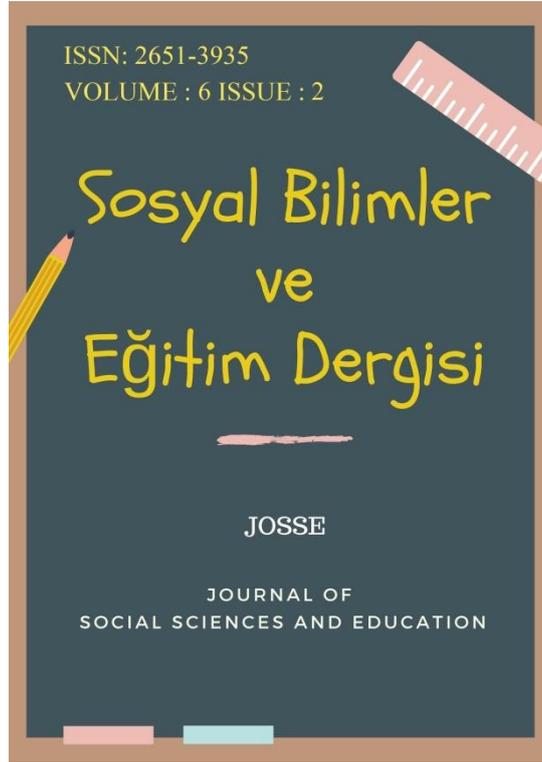


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Neighborhood Councils as A Local Participation Practice: The Case of France

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Neighborhood Councils as A Local Participation Practice: The Case of France

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Abstract

In local governments, which are accepted as the cradle of democracy, the different needs and different solutions of different local units, the fact that the compatriots are affected by administrative decisions rather than political ones, has led to the need for active participation of the compatriots in the decisions of local governments and has led to the emergence of several methods and practices related to administrative participation. Neighborhood councils are one of the practices that ensure the active participation of citizens in the social life created in 2002, by the Law of "Démocratie de Proximité" (proximity democracy) in France. The aim of this study is to examine and describe the neighborhood councils, one of the participation tools that enable its citizens to participate actively in community life. The quantitative analysis method was used as the research method in the study, and in this context, a literature review and document analysis were used. In the first part of the study, a conceptual framework was created over the concepts of neighborhood and participation and examples of neighborhood participation in the world were presented. Then, the decentralization reforms carried out in France since 1982 and the arrangements made to increase local participation in these reforms were examined. In the second part of the study, the tools of local participation and local democracy in France were examined, and then the neighborhood councils formed by the "Proximity Democracy" law created in 2002 were evaluated.

Keywords: Local democracy, neighborhood, participation, France

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Introduction

Especially rapidly increasing urbanization in Türkiye, after the 1980s, and technological, economic, political and sociological changes and transformations in recent years, the number of cities and the number of people living in cities has increased, urban societies have emerged (Gül; 2019) and urban problems have increased rapidly. The participation of urban dwellers in the solution of urban problems and the management of the city is important to ensure a sustainable quality of life. In today's understanding of governance, the participatory approach to the decision-making processes of city governments and the development of effective participation channels are considered very important in terms of local democracy and sustainable city governments.

The fact that citizens are affected by administrative decisions rather than political decisions in local governments, which are expressed as the school/source of democracy, and that different local units have different needs and different solutions has led to the need for active participation of citizens in the decisions of local governments and has led to the emergence of several methods and practices related to administrative participation. As a result of this, new political forms are emerging in which citizen participation in urban development is integrated into public action without questioning the foundations of representative democracy, where final decision-making authority is vested in elected administrators.

The gradual loss of power of representative democracy has brought participatory democracy to the forefront in recent years. Participatory democracy takes place first and foremost at the neighborhood level, mainly in the form of neighborhood assemblies. Participation at this level is a matter of involving citizens as users of urban spaces in discussions on everyday issues and living environments that require their experience and expertise. However there are, In developed countries, participation has spread beyond the local scale to the smallest forms of governance, which have so far been rarely questioned.

Although not considered a constitutional unit of local government today, neighborhood governments have historically been very important for city governments. As the smallest nucleus of urban governance, neighborhood governments are a unit that should be given importance in the context of localization, one of the trending concepts of the last quarter century. In terms of urban participation, neighborhood administrations, where social unity and closeness are seen intensely, constitute an important step in urban participation.

Today's administrative structure was inherited from the Ottoman Empire, and the Ottoman Empire was influenced by the French rigid centralized administrative system while creating its administrative structure. The French administrative system, which has influenced the administrative system of many states in the world with its centralized administrative structure, reveals the basic character of the administrative structure of our country. In addition to the decentralization reforms in 1982, France made a significant development in terms of increasing and strengthening urban participation with the "démocratie de proximité" law in 2003, which can be translated into Turkish as "democracy of proximity".

It is important to examine the developments in France, whose administrative system we take as an example, to investigate new participation mechanisms for increasing participation in neighborhood administrations inherited from the Ottoman Empire and not reformed in our country.

In this study, the neighborhood councils, which were established in France with the 2003 regulation to increase local participation, are evaluated structurally and functionally. In the first part of the study, a conceptual framework on urbanization, urban participation and neighborhood governments is drawn, followed by a discussion of local democracy and urban participation in Turkey and the importance of neighborhood governments in urban participation. In the second part, the issue of city governments and urban participation in France is discussed and neighborhood councils and advisory committees in France are examined as a model of local participation.

Participatory Democracy and Local Participation

The concept of democracy as a tool of governance for some and as a way of life, a virtue and a goal for others is being exploited and used by a wide range of people, from despotic dictators to terrorist groups. The concept of democracy, which essentially refers to a political style of government rather than an ideology (Bozan, 2016), emerged in Ancient Greece. As a combination of the Greek words "demos" and "kratos", the concept of democracy is defined as the sovereignty, power or government of the people (Gözler, 2010; Öztekin, 2003; Gözübüyük, 2003).

Defined as "government of the people, by the people, for the people" in the words of the 16th President of the United States, A. Lincoln, democracy, is a political system of governance in which no authority is accepted above or outside the people and in which sovereignty is based directly on the people, has been tried to be explained in different ways

and with different concepts since its existence, and these discourses have led to the emptying of the concept and moving away from its essence (Kocaoğlu, 2015; Yaman, 2018). While the concept of democracy, which emerged in city-states in Ancient Greece, was realized in the form of direct democracy; over time, due to the increase in population and the difficulty of direct democracy practices, representative democracy practices began to develop/become widespread. During the Roman Empire, the old Indian caste system, the civil war in England and the Glorious Revolution, the participation of all or part of the people in government through elected representatives emerged as examples of representative democracy practices. However, representative democracy gained importance as concepts such as nation-state, national sovereignty and popular sovereignty gained importance after the French Revolution (Bozan, 2016).

In its simplest definition, representative democracy, which is expressed as a political form of government in which citizens exercise their sovereignty rights through elected representatives, has become more problematic in the information age we live in, with the effect of globalization (Hopyar, 2016). With the impact of globalization and the information age, the legitimacy crisis that emerged in the relations between the ruler and the ruled and the representative democracy practices, which are limited to the election of democratic representatives and the delegation of decision-making and implementation authority to the elected on behalf of the ruled, are no longer considered sufficient (Yaman, 2018). For this reason, although it is the most widely practiced model of democracy today, representative democracy has been harshly criticized (Tekeli, 1999; Yeğen, 2001; Şinik, 2009). To overcome the deficiencies of representative democracy, the need for citizens to participate in governance through various means other than elections and the need to create new mechanisms through which the public can control the system comes to the agenda. These criticisms have led to the emergence of pluralist democracy practices, which, although they carry some differences, do not represent a serious break from representative democracy; over time, participatory democracy practices, which are closer to classical democracy, have emerged (Hopyar, 2016).

Although participatory democracy practices have been developed to overcome the inadequacies of representative democracy and pluralist democracy practices, they are not against representative democracy; on the contrary, they have emerged as an effort that helps the operation of representative democracy, tries to bring representative democracy closer to direct democracy, and accepts new participation mechanisms that help the people to convey

their demands to the governments. The intellectual foundations of participatory democracy practices are based on direct democracy and emphasize the inclusion of values such as consensus, common good, active participation, participatory citizenship, which have gained value in direct democracy, into representative democracy by reinterpreting them according to today's conditions (Yaman, 2018).

Direct democracy, which emulates direct democracy, envisages that the public should have a permanent say in the policies that concern them and participate in governance in the widest possible way through different means. According to Eryılmaz (2013), not only voting is not seen as a sufficient condition for democracy, but citizens should also have the opportunity to participate in governance to influence, control and direct the decisions of administrators by taking part in participation mechanisms in decisions that concern them. At this point, citizens should have influence not only on inputs but also on outputs in participatory democracy (Almond and Verba, 1980). To ensure the effective participation of the people in governance, principles such as ensuring equality in the participation of citizens, establishing a culture of participation among citizens, the existence of accessible accurate information and the right to information, the existence of intra-party democracy in political parties, the strengthening of local governments and civil society organizations should be implemented (Yaman, 2018).

The theory of participatory democracy attaches importance not only to the high rate of participation for the improvement of democracy but also to the creation of an appropriate administrative structure to increase participation. Based on the fact that democracy emerged in small-scale communities such as the Ancient Greek polis, it is accepted that participatory democracy is primarily suitable for local governments (Yaman, 2018). In this context, strengthening democracy and increasing the rate of participation will be easier in decentralized governments, which are considered as the cradle of democracy. Participation at the local level means that people living in cities, i.e. citizens who are affected by decisions, somehow influence and contribute to decision-making processes and evaluate local service outputs (Çetintürk, 2021; Çelik and Usta, 2011; Palabıyık and Görün, 2004).

As a result of technological, economic, political and sociological changes and transformations in recent years, the number of cities and the number of people living in cities has increased, urban societies have emerged and urban problems have increased rapidly. Today, when more than half of the world's population and almost 90% of our country's population live in cities (although this data is controversial due to the metropolitan system), it

is important to develop participatory democracy practices in the decision-making processes of city governments in terms of sustainable urban governance. In terms of local democracy to be established in cities, it is necessary to ensure the administrative and financial autonomy of local administrations, to enable citizens to participate effectively and actively in administrative decisions concerning them individually or in an organized manner, and to have clear and functioning mechanisms to facilitate participation (Gül, 2017). Given the importance of the local level in the creation of participatory democracy, the neighborhood, which points to an important social and spatial identity in cities, is considered an important "intermediate institution" where solutions to local problems can be developed (Wills, 2016; Çılgın and Yirmibeşoğlu, 2019; Bulut, 2001).

Neighborhood Management in Terms of Local Participation

Developing and nurturing citizen participation in centralized structures is a significant challenge, as the overarching administrative ethos of the centralized state creates barriers to citizen participation (Kathi and Cooper, 2005). To realize and improve the manageability of sustainable urban life, local participation is an important, multi-dimensional and complex action that can be organized, individual or institutional. In this context, local participation may include the behaviors of participating in elections, identifying local problems, producing solutions to these problems, participating in planning processes for the formulation of local policies, not implementing the decisions taken by local governments, and influencing, directing or obstructing in different stages and ways from the implementation of services to their supervision (Gül, 2017).

Citizen participation is the active, voluntary involvement of individuals and groups in changing problem areas in communities and influencing policies and programs that affect their quality of life and the lives of other residents (Ohmer, 2007). Neighborhood administration as a sub-unit of local governments in terms of local participation is briefly defined by TDK as a basic sub-region into which cities, towns and villages are divided. Neighborhood residents, who reside with their families in this region, come together in physical spaces such as schools, places of worship, parks, and shopping areas they share, and some social relations emerge, which transforms the neighborhood into a sub-region as defined by TDK, as well as a settlement unit where the consciousness of common living and political, administrative, historical and social belonging are formed among the residents (Erdagöz, 2012).

The neighborhood has long been a topic of debate in urban politics. Democratic theorists from Tocqueville (1840) to Dahl (1970) have argued that small units of political participation foster citizens' sense of political efficacy and identification with the form of government. Because urban political elites and residents often see the neighborhood as the smallest unit of political participation, neighborhoods have significant potential for enacting citizenship rights and making political demands. In the industrialized world, city governments, civil society organizations, political parties and other representatives often use neighborhoods to mobilize participation, organize political processes and address policy issues (Horak and Blokland, 2012).

Neighborhood administrations, which should be taken into account in the context of decentralization of powers and responsibilities and which are considered to have a high level of social cohesion and sense of belonging, can assume roles that can improve local participation in conveying the demands, requests and complaints of neighborhood residents to higher institutions, voicing neighborhood problems, planning, implementing or preventing the implementation of services to be provided to the neighborhood. Neighborhood administrations stand out from other administrative units in terms of participation since it is much easier for residents to voice their problems to neighborhood administrations since they are physically the closest place to them. Neighborhood governance is considered as a component of local governance that facilitates the establishment of relations between residents, provincial institutions of the central government and local governments, and emphasizes horizontal cooperation as opposed to hierarchical and bureaucratic models.

Neighborhood administrations have had different administrative structures according to different periods, countries, cultures, social dynamics and paradigms (Çılgın and Yirmibeşoğlu, 2019). Some researchers believe that neighborhoods are an ancient phenomenon that applies only to urban settings or to an earlier period when neighbors interacted more frequently and had more in common than they do today (Leighninger, 2008). Especially with the increase in localization trends after 1980, the issues of local democracy and local participation have gained importance and important steps have started to be taken on new participation mechanisms to bring local participation as close as possible to direct democracy. Neighborhood administrations, which are the most basic urban space that is sustainable, livable and manageable regardless of its characteristics, constitute one of the most important units in terms of increasing local participation (Gül, 2017). The neighborhood is an important component of multilevel and multi-actor governance, as it is considered to

contribute significantly to the decision-making processes of central and local governments, particularly in urban planning (Wagenaar, 2007; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008).

Multi-actor/stakeholder governance has been intensively debated by researchers since the 1980s, with the particularity that more effective and efficient decisions can be made by freeing the potential of different levels of society and governance, i.e. by enabling their participation in managerial decisions. The concept of multi-level/stakeholder/actor governance, first used by Gary Marks in 1993, refers to the process of negotiations between actors operating in a chain, so to speak, as intertwined links at many levels of governance within a country. According to Marks, the concept of governance refers to the increasing interdependence of actors operating at various levels of governance in decision-making processes, while governance refers to the increasing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors (Marks, 1993; Çetintürk, 2021). Most problems at the neighborhood level are related to public safety, traffic problems, street crime, garbage on the streets and quality of life. Therefore, increasing neighborhood participation will contribute significantly to the creation of livable and sustainable neighborhoods. Encouraging residents to take responsibility for the development of their neighborhoods will also contribute significantly to the development of residents' sense of belonging and improve social integration and cohesion (Hosseini et al., 2017).

Establishing direct relations between neighborhood residents and administrators at different levels, building healthy relationships, and ensuring that the demands of the people reach the addressee without intermediaries will increase the effectiveness of services and contribute significantly to effective participation in urban governance. Participation at the neighborhood level is a means by which residents can influence external social systems and work with neighbors and civil society organizations to improve their neighborhoods (Ohmer, 2007). This tool, which can encompass several factors such as oversight of regulations by public institutions and organizations, democratic authority, easy financing, empowerment, resource coordination and access, has led to successes in planning, implementing and activating neighborhoods (Edling and Rydgren, 2012).

In the context of urban redevelopment plans, orientations to neighborhood democracy combine notions of local knowledge, local rights and local power. The emphasis on local knowledge is based on the recognition that residents represent sources of information and insight that are not available to outside professionals, and that harnessing this knowledge may be essential to inform more viable and sustainable policies. Second, the emphasis on local

rights is based on the fundamental assumption that in democratic societies, individuals have a meaningful say in the issues that affect them, and finally, the emphasis on local power is based on the assumption that both local knowledge and rights will be channeled in meaningful ways into deliberative and decision-making forums and that participation in such forums will further enhance the capacity of community members to become active, effective citizens (Chaskin and Joseph, 2012).

Residents' participation and cooperation cover different areas related to people of different age groups. Increasing participation at the neighborhood level is primarily a matter of preparing residents. The first and most important step for this is to inform residents, raise their awareness about the problems in the neighborhood, then try to explain how the problems will be addressed and try to address them with models based on their participation (Hosseini et al., 2017).

Participation mechanisms to be established in the neighborhood can involve residents in policy-making and program planning for the neighborhood and the city, or defend local interests through representation in administrative institutions. Through small group discussions, critical consciousness can be raised and the services provided by local governments to the neighborhood can be improved or the quality of services can be increased through neighborhood policy development (Bulut and Akın, 2019).

Residents' participation in government decisions can lead to more resources for the neighborhood, better decision-making, vocational training, a responsible environment, fulfillment of public needs, and lasting, sustainable development (Hosseini et al., 2017). The idea that increasing participation in neighborhood governments would increase the efficiency and quality of services provided to neighborhoods in particular and cities in general led all developed societies, starting with the USA in the 1960s, to think about new local participation mechanisms (Fagotto and Fung, 2006).

Neighborhood Participation Practices in The World

Theories of participatory democracy, efforts to involve citizens in policy formulation and implementation, and calls to strengthen civil society have proliferated over the last half-century. Pluralist assumptions are widely voiced that formal democratic governance mechanisms operating in the context of fragmented power and the active participation of interest groups in governance can govern effectively, legitimately and without systematically or permanently excluding minor groups. In the examples of neighborhood

councils/assemblies "Neighbourhood Councils" that emerged in developed Western countries such as the USA, Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and France, as well as neighborhood forums "Neighbourhood Forums" in the UK, the main aim of the governments is to strengthen local democracy by increasing local participation (Wills, 2016; Wagenaar, 2007; Leighninger, 2008).

Many urban researchers see neighborhoods as an important resource for political participation, as places where civic skills can be developed and put into practice. This understanding of neighborhoods is particularly evident in the United States, where Jefferson's ideal of grassroots democracy has a deep and enduring place (Horak and Blokland, 2012). In the US, citizen participation in local decision-making gained momentum as a mainstream policy approach in both national and state programs after policies in the 1950s and 1960s revitalized community participation in neighborhood planning (Fagotto and Fung, 2006). In this context, although several new programs were launched in the 1960s and 1970s to increase citizen participation, these programs were generally inadequate and ineffective as they were top-down approaches (Kathi and Cooper, 2005).

Advocates of neighborhood-based participation in the US have argued that "there is no better way to ensure the long-term success of public participation than to institutionalize a decision-making role for that participation" (Thomas, 1995). Beginning in the early 1970s, local governments in places such as Portland, Oregon, Dayton, Ohio, and Saint Paul, Minnesota, established neighborhood council systems as a way of involving residents in public decision-making and problem-solving processes. In a study conducted in Orlando, Leighninger (2008) lists the strengths and weaknesses of neighborhood councils as follows. Advantages;

- Neighborhood councils give a legitimate voice to a much wider audience in public decisions taken at neighborhood and local levels;
- Neighborhood councils tend to have strong roles in policy-making, sometimes formal, sometimes informal, and some receive various funding from City Hall.
- Although they are a legitimate part of the local policy-making process, most neighborhood councils can develop policy proposals independently of the process and City Hall as a formally recognized community organizing vehicle.
- Neighborhood councils can provide accessible "ramps" for people who may not see themselves as participants in decision-making processes.

- Many neighborhood councils are engines of "public work": In cooperation with the town hall and other groups, as well as with their voluntary efforts and energies, they have produced all kinds of concrete results.
- Many neighborhood assemblies ask residents to help city councils make smarter policies, often defusing controversies before they arise.
- Some neighborhood councils build links between leaders from different neighborhoods and create opportunities for them to work together on decisions or projects that affect the whole community.
- Participation in neighborhood councils changes the culture of the community and helps to make dialogue and cooperation a strong public habit.
- According to Leighninger (2008), its weaknesses are;
- The group of people on the typical neighborhood council is usually not as diverse - in terms of age, race, income or other demographic variables - as the neighborhood they represent.
- Neighborhood assemblies can create another barrier to participation unless they are designed and operated with the sole purpose of increasing rather than managing participation.
- Most neighborhood councils find it particularly difficult to attract people to regular monthly meetings and rely on a very small core of volunteers.
- Expectations about how local authorities will use the inputs they receive and the lines of accountability between them are often unclear.
- In most cases, this inter-neighborhood cooperation is limited to a smaller number of neighborhood leaders.
- Cultural differences between neighborhoods sometimes make communication and cooperation difficult.

Neighborhood councils, like neighborhood assemblies, are local citizen organizations, an attempt to allow citizens to form bottom-up structures within a government framework (Kathi and Cooper, 2005). In the USA, participation mechanisms such as "the Neighborhood Revitalization Program" and "Learning and Design Forums" have been established for neighborhood-oriented participation (Fagotto and Fung, 2006). In essence, the main purpose of these approaches, which envisage the participation of neighborhood residents in the planning and delivery of local services and are based on negotiation, is to enable city managers and neighborhood leaders to develop a new partnership in the planning and delivery

of city services, to design new processes to improve service delivery at every step and to identify local needs to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of services (Kathi and Cooper, 2005).

These neighborhood-oriented participation mechanisms, which have been implemented in the USA since the 1960s, are similar in European countries. States such as France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK have established neighborhood participation mechanisms to encourage residents to take responsibility for their neighborhoods to improve the quality of life, social integration, and "connectedness" of their neighborhoods. Wagenaar (2007), in his research conducted in the Netherlands, states that even if residents do not believe that their lives have improved much thanks to the neighborhood councils, they believe that the neighborhood will get worse if the neighborhood councils are abolished. The author states that residents particularly like the councils as social meeting places and that many residents have become more interested in neighborhood issues since attending council meetings (Wagenaar, 2007).

Starting with neighborhood committees in Sweden in the early 1980s (Bäck, 2003), neighborhood-focused participation in the UK has been implemented through neighborhood forums as well as neighborhood councils. The neighborhood forum, which was created to ensure the participation of residents in important decisions about the neighborhood, encouraged small community representatives and city council officials to work together to consult local people and try to develop a plan (Wills, 2016).

One of the mechanisms of neighborhood-oriented participation is neighborhood associations. As a unique form of civil society organization that acts as a bridge between residents and the larger institutions of public life, neighborhood associations can make citizens better negotiators of the common good. Neighborhood associations, which have different structures in different countries, are volunteer-based in the UK and the USA, local community-based in France, Japan and Sweden, and public-based in Thailand and Korea (Bäck, 2003).

Finally, the "Residents' Committee" in China is another example of neighborhood-based participation. With this practice, a nationwide community-building campaign was launched in the 1990s and a district-based social institution (the Residents' Committee or *juwei* in Chinese) was established as a local quasi-governmental institution to carry out the social management of urban neighborhoods. This committee has a wide range of responsibilities, from providing social services and linking various organizations and

neighborhoods, to organizing security patrols and organizing social and cultural programs (Zhu, 2020).

Local Participation in France

In the political organization of France, which can be considered the first model of the nation-state, the "Jacobin logic" plays an important role. This understanding, which owes its name to the Jacobinists who eliminated the decentralized character of the revolutionary will after the French Revolution, is best summarised by the expression 'L'une et indivisible République', 'one and indivisible Republic', which represents the tendency towards centralization and uniformity (Edwards and Hupe, 2000). In the rigidly centralized administrative system established after the Revolution, all settlements in the country were defined as administrative units at the same time, and as a result, even the smallest settlement received the status of a commune.

Although it is interpreted as Americanism in French society, significant changes focused on privatization and decentralization have occurred in the rigidly centralized French public administration system under the influence of globalization after the 1980s (Çetintürk, 2021). Adopted in 1982, the "Law on the Rights and Freedoms of Municipalities, Provinces and Regions", also known as the "Deffere Law", is considered a milestone in decentralization reforms by many researchers (Kayıkçı, 2003). It is possible to mention four main results of these reforms:

1. The territory was transformed into a new sub-national government,
2. Some powers have been transferred from the state to local governments,
3. In departments and regions, an elected official became the chief administrator instead of the state-appointed governor,
4. State control over subnational governments was reduced, giving more freedom to subnational authorities (Edwards and Hupe, 2000).

The Europeanisation approach, which progressed in parallel with globalization, led to the withdrawal of the state from its so-called core functions through privatization and decentralization reforms in France. To adapt to the multi-level governance system of Europeanisation, the most significant impact on the French administrative system has been the principle of subsidiarity and the delegation of authority to sub-national institutions and organizations. Following the Maastricht Treaty, the founding treaty of the European Union, the Europeanisation effects can be observed in the local government reforms carried out in

1992, the law on democracy of proximity enacted in 2002, and the constitutional amendment in 2003 (Çetintürk, 2021).

Today, in France, where the Constitution of the 5th Republic is in force, there are three different local government units: regions, provinces and municipalities. According to the 1958 Constitution of the 5th Republic, the councilors of all three local government units are elected and the mayors elected by the councilors govern these institutions. Although the fact that the mayors of local government units are elected by the councilors rather than directly by the people raises the argument that local participation in France is limited, there are other democratic instruments in France to increase the participation of the people in local decisions.

In France, there are important constitutional and legal guarantees for local participation. The concept of local democracy first appeared in the Law of 6 February 1992 on the Territorial Administration of the Republic. This law tried to change the information and participation of citizens as well as to strengthen the rights of elected officials in local assemblies. The law of 27 February 2002 on affinity democracy is also an important text for strengthening participatory democracy. Subsequently, the constitutional amendment of 28 March 2003 on the decentralized organization of the republic regulated the right to petition, closing an important gap in local participation (Gilia, 2013).

It can be said that significant developments have been achieved in France in terms of public participation in local decisions concerning them, especially with the regulations made after the 2000s. Today, in France, there are participation practices such as a local referendum, advisory committees, right to petition and neighborhood councils to ensure the active participation of the public in local decisions for the effective and efficient provision of local services and to create a negotiation environment between the administrators and the governed (Şinik, 2009).

Instruments of Local Democracy in France

After 1982, which is considered a milestone in terms of decentralization of the French administrative system, important participation mechanisms have been established to develop local democracy in France. One of the objectives of the localization policy of the socialist government in power just before the reform was to encourage participation. However, the reforms carried out under this government were not sufficient to raise participatory democracy at the local level, and efforts to improve local democracy were continued by subsequent governments.

The concept of local democracy first appeared in the Law on Territorial Administration of the Republic on 6 February 1992. This law seeks to change citizens' access to information and participation, as well as to strengthen the rights of elected officials in local assemblies. The law organizes consultative committees of local public services to increase citizen participation in the provision of local services. These committees are an important tool for users of public services to express their views on the services provided/to be provided (Gilia, 2013, 255).

Since 1992, several regulations on local participation have been introduced in France. A law enacted in 1992 authorized residents' consultation on a limited number of issues and allowed municipalities to organize consultative local referendums. Many extra-municipal commissions were initiated and the participation of residents was recommended. In 1995, the possibility to do so was extended; residents had the right to initiate a consultative referendum. With the regulation, one-fifth of the electorate could request the organization of a local consultation (Premat, 2009).

One of the most important instruments of participatory democracy in France is the local referendum. Although introduced with the 1982 Defferre Law, the local referendum was put into practice only in 1992. The regulation authorized municipalities to consult citizens through local referendums as a fundamental principle of local democracy, except under certain conditions. While in 1992 this consultation power was only in the form of receiving the opinions of the inhabitants of the city, it became binding with the constitutional amendment in 2003. The power to consult through a local referendum was granted to all local government units by the "Law on the Freedoms and Responsibilities of Local Authorities", which was enacted in 2003 and entered into force in 2005 (Şinik, 2009).

The referendum as an instrument of direct democracy was not used very often in the French system, with nine referendums organized during the 5th Republic. To get closer to the citizens, political decision-makers wanted to use the referendum to legitimize their future political actions. However, these referendums were an important opportunity for citizens to show their dissatisfaction with political decisions. In this sense, citizens targeted both the institutional organization of the state, such as the direct election of the president by popular vote and the creation of regional administrations and the European Union, such as the enlargement of Central and Eastern Europe and the Maastricht Treaty. The proposal to change the institutional organization of Corsica and the European Constitutional project was not

accepted by the citizens in the first referendums with dissenting votes but was accepted afterward (Hamon, 2012).

The law of 27 February 2002 on "démocratie de proximité" (democracy of proximity) is an important text for strengthening participatory democracy. The law aims to ensure a better citizen partnership in decision-making at the local level, thus strengthening participatory democracy and the rights of dissent in deliberative assemblies. One of the innovations introduced by the law in terms of participatory democracy is the consultation committees/advisory committees. According to the law, the municipal council may establish advisory committees on any matter of public interest, covering the whole or only part of the territory. Each committee is chaired by a member of the city council appointed by the mayor. The committees may be consulted by the mayor on any issue or project that is the subject of activity of the committee associations, about public services and means of proximity. These committees may be composed of persons outside the council, but representatives of local associations (Gilia, 2012).

Another participation mechanism of French local democracy is the right to petition. According to the current legislation, a voter can submit a petition to be placed on the agenda of the local council, requesting that an issue that falls under the jurisdiction of that local government unit be placed on the council's agenda. A voter can sign only one petition per year concerning the counseling organization. In such a case, the voter's petition is automatically added to the council agenda (Şinik, 2009; CoR, 2004; Gilia, 2012).

Another mechanism of participation in French local democracy is local consultation. Legislation regulates citizen consultation at both the communal and inter-communal levels. Residents of local authorities have the right to be informed about their affairs and to be consulted on decisions that concern them. The deliberative body or even citizens may have the initiative to be consulted. As far as citizen initiative is concerned, the law stipulates that 1 out of every 5 or 10 voters registered on the control list in a commune may ask to be consulted on a matter that is the subject of a decision to be taken by a deliberative body. This also applies to regional governments, which can consult their citizens on the decisions of the regional authorities (Premat, 2009; Gilia, 2012).

Between 1992 and 2003, different participatory instruments were created, such as the advisory council of local sages (conseils des aînés), local councils for children (conseils municipaux d'enfants), youth councils (conseils de jeunes), district councils (conseils de quartier), councils of foreign communities (conseils des communautés étrangères), urban

planning sessions (ateliers d'habitants) and various advisory councils (Bherer, 2010; Premat, 2009). During this period, the issue was discussed in depth between 2001 and 2003, in particular due to the law of 27 February 2002 and the second Local Government Act (Premat, 2009). The law of 27 February 2002 on "démocratie de proximité" (democracy of proximity) introduced a series of instruments designed to bring citizens closer to political decision-making into political/administrative life; among these instruments, neighborhood assemblies, on which this study focuses, are particularly noteworthy.

Neighborhood Councils / Assemblies in France

In France in the 1990s, the "neighborhood" was recognized as a crucial phenomenon against the backdrop of decentralization to mobilize local democratic renewal. Faced with a deep social crisis in underprivileged suburbs, urban authorities placed neighborhood participation at the center of urban policy to renew and strengthen the bonds of citizenship within a territorial framework (Bacqué and Sintomer, 2005). Since the mid-2000s, public authorities have seen the neighborhood as an appropriate and perfectly scaled lever to test and disseminate new sustainable urban practices. In this context, it was recognized that through neighborhood participation, residents should be integrated into the whole process by observing how they express their perspectives on quality of life and urban use practices (Gardesse and Zetlaoui-Leger, 2015).

French President Jacques Chirac, in his 2001 New Year message, on the need for increased citizen participation: "The participation of everyone in the life of their city is very limited. We need to open the city to everyone" (Le Monde, 4 January 2001). In 2007, the socialist presidential candidate Segol'e Royale introduced his program on participatory democracy by referring to the experience of participatory budgeting (Lefebvre, 2007). These recent discourses on participatory democracy by the President and the presidential candidate reflect the crisis of representative democracy in France and the need to rebuild social and political ties based on democracy. Neighborhood assemblies are an advisory body established by the law dated 27 February 2002, "Démocratie de Proximite" (Démocratie de Proximite), to find a solution to this crisis of representative democracy.

This national discourse on encouraging participation is based on an understanding of local democracy. According to this understanding, local democracy is primarily meant to counter increasing electoral absenteeism as a reflection of growing voter dissatisfaction and lack of trust in their representatives. The objectives of neighborhood councils, which are

complementary to representative democratic bodies to enhance local democracy, are to protect the right of citizens to participate, to allow residents to submit proposals and projects to elected officials, to enlighten the community with the traditional expertise of residents, and to strengthen the capacity of residents to inform, participate and intervene in all matters affecting their neighborhood, district, city or region. In neighborhoods, councils contribute to the improvement of the living environment, the implementation of local projects by residents and the development of active citizenship and act as an important factor in social cohesion, solidarity, deepening of citizenship and local democracy education.

According to Article L. 2143-1 of the "démocratie de proximité" law of 27 February 2002, which means "democracy of proximity" in Turkish, in municipalities with a population of 80,000 or more, the municipal council determines the perimeter of each of the neighborhoods that make up the municipality. These neighborhoods have a neighborhood council, the name, composition and working procedures of which are determined by the municipal council. According to the law, the neighborhood councils may be consulted by the mayor, and the council may make proposals to the mayor on any matter concerning the neighborhood or the city. The mayor may involve the neighborhood in the development, implementation and evaluation of activities concerning the neighborhood, in particular those carried out as part of city policy. The municipal council may allocate space and resources to neighborhood councils for their work. Municipalities with a population between 20,000 and 79,999 may also establish neighborhood councils on their initiative, applying these provisions.

According to the Law on Neighborhood Democracy, the objectives of neighborhood assemblies are: citizen participation in urban development and local public policies and their monitoring and evaluation, improvement of the living environment, implementation of local projects by residents, development of active citizenship and social connectivity and neighborhood development. The powers of the assemblies are to receive any question related to the area, to participate in projects carried out to improve the living environment and to formulate any proposal (idea, contribution, detailed project, etc.) related to the neighborhood and present it as a policy proposal.

One of the most important duties and responsibilities of neighborhood assemblies is to inform and raise awareness among the people of the neighborhood. For this purpose, neighborhood assemblies receive support from municipalities and each neighborhood assembly is allocated an information space in the municipal newspaper and website to provide

information about their activities. Neighborhood assemblies can also organize their communication tools (neighborhood newspaper, blog, etc.) and inform the neighborhood community about their activities. Anyone over the age of 16 who resides in the neighborhood can become a member of the neighborhood council voluntarily, there is no time limit for membership and registration is open throughout the year.

According to the law, the working procedures and forms of neighborhood councils are regulated by the municipal councils in which the neighborhoods are located. To give a general idea, according to the regulation established by the Lyon City Council, neighborhood councils have five organs: general assembly, president of the neighborhood council, office, thematic committees and elected representative of the neighborhood council (Ville de Lyon 2014).

General Assembly; The general assembly, consisting of all members of the neighborhood council, convenes at least twice a year and is open to all neighborhood residents.

The chairman of the Neighborhood Council; is elected for a two-year term from among the representatives of the residents who are members of the neighborhood, according to the conditions set out in the bylaws of the council. The chairperson is responsible for facilitating discussions within the office, respecting each opinion and ensuring the proper functioning of the neighborhood council together with the elected representative.

Neighborhood Council office/Office; The office should represent the diversity of the members of the neighborhood council. It was created for two years within the general assembly and its members regularly participate in commissions.

Thematic committees; The creation and operation of thematic committees is the responsibility of each neighborhood council.

Elected representative of the neighborhood council; to ensure the relationship between the neighborhood council, the municipal council and the mayor, to facilitate the activities of the neighborhood council and encourage its articulation with municipal council issues, and to keep the neighborhood council informed as a resource person.

Essentially, the role of the neighborhood councils is advisory, with the mayor being the person who decides whether they should be consulted on matters of community concern or city policy. Although French law provides for several instruments for citizens to actively participate in policy-making processes, the actual use and intensity of these instruments are debatable. However, it is possible to say that after the enactment of the regulation on the establishment of neighborhood assemblies, they have spread, at least quantitatively,

throughout the country. While there were only 292 neighborhood assemblies in 2002, this number increased to 982 in 2003 and 1305 in 2005. In this sense, it is obvious that neighborhood assemblies are important units for local participation in France.

Discussion and Results

Different local needs and different solution needs have led to the need for decentralization in the public and private sectors all over the world after the 1980s. In this context, policymakers' rapid implementation of decentralization reforms one after the other led to an evolution in administrative structures, and the French rigidly centralized administrative structure with a Jacobin approach to governance was also affected.

With the 1980s, in addition to localization trends, criticisms against representative democracy in the context of democracy and democratization have also intensified. Although it is the most widely applied democracy model today, representative democracy has been criticized quite harshly; to overcome the deficiencies of representative democracy, there has been a need for citizens to participate in governance in various ways other than elections and to create new mechanisms where the public can control the system. The theory of participatory democracy, which emerged at this point, aims to increase the rate and quality of participation to improve democracy.

As far as Turkey is concerned, the neighborhood is considered to be a neglected administrative unit in the local government reform that was accepted to have started in 2004. It is said that this structure, which has no legal personality and no budget due to the service provision of the municipality, has become dysfunctional as a result of the electronic service provision of the central state and municipalities. However, as a result of population density and the metropolitan municipality system, it is a fact that some provinces have crowded neighborhoods. The services that a neighborhood with a population of over 100,000 will receive from the district and metropolitan municipality, as well as from the district governorships and governorships as extensions of the center, only through the mukhtar and the council of elders, are due to its demographic power. The civil organization of this population for local, common needs and their participation in local politics/administration will lead to good governance.

In France, neighborhood assemblies are considered to increase local participation considerably, as in the other world examples briefly mentioned in the study. However, it

should be emphasized that no template should be universally imposed, as different local needs involve different contexts and solutions.

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