Participation
Citizenship, Democracy and Responsibilization

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Citizen participation has emerged as one of the buzzwords of contemporary governmental discussions, as an important regime of knowledge and action. Politicians, policymakers, NGOs and corporations all promote participation as a means of achieving citizens' democratic empowerment. This call for democratization has, however, proven to be something of a double-edged sword. In many instances, transformations in models of participation have been related to the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant governmental ideology, with citizen participation having turned into a method for legitimizing both governmental intervention and withdrawal. In this issue of *Etnofoor*, we focus on the contradictions that are inherent in citizen participation discourses and practices, exploring their presence in a broad variety of domains and placing the phenomenon in historical and global comparative perspective.

Many early initiatives towards participatory governance emerged from social and civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s that sought to democratize existing systems of governance. In the US and Europe, for instance, citizens demanded representation on planning committees and housing boards, and students demanded to be part of the governance structure of their universities. Not much later, after the fall of authoritarian regimes across the world, various experiments in democratic governance emerged, including participatory budgeting in Brazil (Cabannes 2004; Koonings 2004) and participatory health care governance in South Africa (Williams 2007). These policy models circulate across continents, as is seen for instance in the recent transferal of the Brazilian participatory budgeting model to European cities (Sintomer et al. 2008).

The engagement with participatory citizenship within democratization movements coincided to a large extent with a shift away from state-led models of economic development. Development scholars as well as international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF increasingly encouraged recognition of the popular agency of local communities in achieving development (Hickey and Mohan 2004). This also suggests the key paradox that has come to characterize recent calls for citizen participation. On the one hand, it is premised on the ideology of spontaneous bottom-up participation of citizens. At the same time, institutional authorities, varying from states to businesses to non-profit organizations, apply it as a top-down model that can be captured in 'best practices' believed to be applicable to other contexts and settings.

As a highly contradictory model of governance, citizen participation can be encountered in a broad variety of domains and is expressive of different political agendas. It is, for instance, central to alterglobalization and indigenous rights movements, urban planning, natural resource development and development models. And as state institutions in both the global South and the global North have embraced participation as a new and preferred mode of governance, the ideals and practices of participatory citizenship have become expressive of political agendas as different as neoliberalism and communitarianism.

While much emphasis is currently placed on producing participatory citizens, the contradictions of the concept of participation and its implicit political agendas are often glossed over, whether in democratic, digital or developmental realms. This issue of *Etnofoor* seeks critical intervention into this debate. The different articles in this issue provide historical analyses of the citizen participation ideal and seek to compare and contrast citizen participation projects in different contexts and settings. They demonstrate first, the variety of forms that participation can take, connecting actually existing forms to imagined future possibilities for citizens' involvement in politics and governance. These forms range from street protests and referenda to sports activities, to neighborhood barbecues, in the context of which the embodied experience of physical co-presence turns out to play an important role. The different articles also emphasize the importance of studying the origins of participatory initiatives: are they spontaneous grassroots efforts, or formal top-down governmental schemes, or is it impossible to draw such distinctions in practice?

Jeremy Rayner shows how, in Costa Rica, grassroots movements organized a series of protests against the regional free trade agreement CAFTA, mobilizing sufficient interest to have a referendum held on the matter. While they ultimately lost the referendum, Rayner argues that a more important goal was met: the movement achieved invigorated, meaningful participation, through which people were able to imagine different ways of relating to others, both in the private and the public domain.

Relating to Rayner's argument, that participation practices have an effect at the level of shared experience and imagination, Jasmijn Rana's article also identifies participation practices as having a very personal, embodied dimension. Rana shows how participation ideals in the Netherlands have been expressed through the domain of sports. Her article focuses on government projects in The Hague aimed at empowering

minority youth. Targeting mainly Muslim girls and boys, these projects encourage young people to join kickboxing gyms, in order to promote physical health and social bonding and to enhance their sense of belonging to Dutch society. Where Rayner describes his case-study in Costa Rica as a 'best practice' example of 'real', 'authentic', bottom-up participation, Rana criticizes the extent to which, in her case, participation has become a state-led affair, promoted by the Dutch government. And where Rayner shows how participation can effect meaningful change, stimulating participants to imagine the political differently, Rana argues that in her case, participation politics, while intending to bridge social and cultural differences between 'autochtones' and Moroccan minority youth, in practice these projects reinforced these same differences.

Martijn Koster's article in turn, problematizes the possibility of distinguishing between spontaneous bottom-up initiatives and rigidly formal top-down policies. Drawing on research on urban renewal in the Dutch city of Utrecht, Koster shows the extent to which deregulation and informal practices have become new techniques of governmentality. While he demonstrates that this type of 'top-down informality' functions as a technique of rule, he maintains that it can still harbor transformative potential and enhance the agency of those who participate. While Rayner describes antagonistic forms of participation – the creation of road blocks, protests, strikes – and Rana focuses on participation practices that take shape through formal policy, Koster describes how participation also finds expression in more mundane, informal practices such as neighborhood barbeques, collective clean-up actions, and the communal consumption of coffee and cookies. His ethnographic focus also brings into view another person who is central to practices of participation: not the politically minded protester, or the politician, but the average citizen, who acts as a broker, mediating between citizens and the state.

In addition to these more ethnographic articles, this issue also includes two essays from non-anthropologists, each of them engaging with current calls for 'more participation' in the Dutch public debate: from a criminological perspective, Henk Elffers engages with the oft-heard call to include citizens more directly in crime prevention and repression. Disentangling and historicizing different forms of citizen participation in police work, Elffers' conclusion is that 'citizen participation' in preventive police work has already existed for a long time, and should not be extended to the domain of repressive policing. In her essay, Josine Blok, a professor of classical history, engages with current calls to engender a more participatory civil society by reintroducing the classical Greek system of allotment, a system of assigning governance positions through random selection. Drawing from her own extensive research on Classical Greece, Blok warns that in ancient Athens this allotment system only worked by virtue of a very specific social and cultural landscape.

Offering very different perspectives on current calls for citizen participation, the authors in this issue invite us to pause and reflect upon both the assumptions and consequences of the participatory paradigm. In their explorations of the various dimensions of citizen participation projects, discourses and practices, they show both the potential and the pitfalls of the rush to embrace this paradigm.

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