



The role of civil society in promoting participatory democracy

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Abstract ;

Participatory democracy is today one of the most common concepts in the field of political science and even in the media, so it is often used in many political topics, especially regarding its relationship with civil society and its role in improving participatory democracy. We also find participatory democracy linked to several concepts such as governance and political participation, that is, all concepts related to democratic transformation, and it turns out that civil society plays an important role in improving participatory democracy, since it is the link between authority and citizens and improves democratic performance, which produces true participatory governance.

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Introduction

Today, participatory democracy has become a concept widely used by our governments on all in democratization processes and also for the improvement of governance, because with the rise of abstention political participation on all in elections today political regimes try to use other mechanism to involve citizens in decision-making processes especially at local level among these mechanisms have found the the participation and promotion of the role of civil society as a relay between society and the decision-making centre for which it is a real representation and also for better treatment of the demands of the population, This is why we ask the following question: how does civil society improve participatory democracy?

1. Conceptual approach:

A . Civil society:

The concept of civil society can be used today to mean a place for disputes or oppositions, or even social innovations. It can represent the opening of a democratic political system facing a crisis of representativeness. It may refer to political actors, economic agents, society at large, a class of development brokers (such as new non-governmental organizations—NGOs—in the South, for example), to employers' or trade union organizations, associative networks providing social capital, etc. (Pirotte, 2018)

The concepts of contemporary civil society seem imprecise, the conceptual trajectory of civil society is long enough to feed well-contrasted visions. This story has its origin in antiquity (Koinonia Politeia of Aristotle) in a reflection on the degree of civilization of a society, or more precisely on the level of refinement of its political organization. Civil society (Societas Civilis of the Romans) is thus civilized, well ordered by laws; it differs from the natural society of the barbarians. Confused in his first translations from Greek and Latin with the notion of city, state or government, it is then approached by the philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It designates an autonomous sphere but connected to the state, marked by the adoption of a freely agreed contract between individuals regarding the political destiny of society (Hobbes, Locke), a limitation of secular or spiritual powers by the existence of aristocratic mores (Montesquieu) or the pursuit of individual interests within a commercial economy (Smith, Mandeville, Fergusson). It is also the bourgeois society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft), or more precisely the society of bourgeois citizens, wedged between the state and the family sphere, based on a system of needs and representing both the foundation and the fulfilment of the law (Hegel). It is composed of a myriad of associations of all kinds favoring a limitation (control) of the central power perceptible even in the smallest

communities (Tocqueville). It is elsewhere the place of exploitation of man by man (Marx), of the ideological, institutional and cultural hegemony of the ruling class while becoming the privileged place of revolutionary action (Gramsci). It is also (and perhaps increasingly) confused with the idea of a third sector, composed of very varied associations whose lowest common denominator is the development of alternative practices, palliating market and government deficiencies. In the face of new demands for services and solidarity, civil society would become the place par excellence of solidarity economy or social economy. (Marc Poncelet and Gautier Pirotte, 2007)

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the notion of participatory democracy only gained any importance at the end of the 20th century – in the context of a form of weariness of a model that emerged from the revolutions of the end of the 18th century; which, however, does not go so far as to call into question the legacy of human rights –, it is not impossible to see in the history of institutions and practices that have been made traces of this desire

to allow more effective participation of citizens in common affairs. (Saint-Bonnet, 2020)

b- Participatory democracy:

The recent development of participatory democracy would seem to support democratic theories that have argued that people's participation is only possible at the local level. From Montesquieu to Rousseau, from Tocqueville to Weber to Dewey, many have pointed out that the cradle of democracy is in the near, at the level of the basic community, the village or the neighbourhood. The ban on direct democracy has long been justified by the impossibility of large-scale popular participation. The opposition between size and democracy, which is shared by most of the theorists and actors who set up the French and American republics, has remained anchored in the democratic unconscious. (Julien Talpin and Yves Sintomer, 2011, p. 6)

Robert Dahl sums it up well: "All things being equal, the smaller the community, the more responsible and competent citizens will be in controlling public decisions, but the less able the system will be to respond to their preferences." (Dahl, 1994)

In a nutshell, the direct participation of the people would only be possible at the local level, but since the main decisions are taken elsewhere, such participation might be

futile. The predominantly local development of participatory democracy in most western democracies over the past few decades would seem to be a perfect illustration of this dilemma. (Julien Talpin and Yves Sintomer, 2011, p. 7)

Participatory democracy focuses on the individual. It seeks to promote the power of individuals over their daily social actions, especially at work. It aims at the transition from the mass society, that of today, to a society of social individuals who would develop their psychological resources in the private dimension — which is only for them — but also in the social sphere. It is obvious that, at the individual level, private dimension and social sphere influence each other. Participatory democracy is based on the fact that, in Western countries, democratic potential exists today among individuals, but cannot develop without the forms of organization, cooperation and association which promote it. (Mendel, 2003)

c- Political participation:

As early as 1971, the definition of political participation proposed by the American political scientist Myron Weiner covered Any voluntary action that is successful or leads to failure, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, using legitimate or illegitimate means in order to influence policy choices, the management of public affairs or the choice of political leaders at all levels of government, local or national.

The political scientist Philippe Braud defines political participation as “all activities, individual or collective, likely to give the governed an influence on the functioning of the political system”. (Douillet, 2023)

Political participation is essentially a function of the nature of the state. Since we leave the framework of a simple state watchman of the night, to take the suggestive formula of Antonio Gramsci, to go towards a leading state bearer of public policies, seeking in this way in the effectiveness of its action the guarantee of its legitimacy, trust cannot be granted independently of the quality of the products it delivers (Patrice Duran and Fabien Truong, 2013)

d- Governance:

It can be defined as a process of coordination between actors, social groups and institutions in order to achieve defined and collectively discussed objectives. Governance refers to the set of institutions, networks, directives, regulations, standards, political and social practices as well as public and private actors that contribute to the stability of a society and a political regime, its orientation, ability to lead, and the ability to provide services and legitimacy. Specifically, four traits characterize governance: (Laurie Boussagnet, 2014)

Institutional polycentrism, which is the existence of a great institutional complexity that prevents us from distinguishing between a single place of power, decision-making and execution;

a blurred public/private boundary, with open decision-making processes towards civil society and the inclusion of private actors in political processes;

the emphasis on the procedural dimension of public action – the forms and instruments of public action are sometimes given priority over the very substance of public programmes;

a different relationship to constraint and authority, experienced and conceived in a more horizontal, cooperative and flexible way, with the development of less binding public policy instruments.

Governance is associated with everything. Governance covers both ethics in politics, control of political representatives, reform of international institutions, public-private agreements, management reform of public enterprises, etc. The term “good governance” – or elsewhere, of “goed bestuur” – refers to a miraculously plastic philosopher’s stone on which the most contradictory ideals can be placed. (Pitseys, 2010)

2. The impact of civil society on participatory democracy:

The positive impact of civil society on democracy has been a central idea since Tocqueville. Indeed, civil society is supposed to make democracy deeper, more accountable (accountable) and freer on the one hand, and the individuals who compose it more engaged, more civic and more dedicated to the public cause on the other. The articles we present in this dossier cover the conditions under which civil society develops, through a comparative analysis between Portugal, Spain and Italy. In particular, they cross-examine the temporal, geographical and sectoral frameworks within which civil society develops during the processes of democratization. (Pedro Tavares de Almeida, Rui Branco and Tiago Fernandes, 2012)

Participatory democracy is today meeting a surprising success on the part of political leaders and technocrats more accustomed to receiving from the people a vague mandate than to discuss with them. The adjectives are used to describe these practices, which were theorised in the past in terms of direct democracy – not so much in terms of self-management – and today are described as active, social, dialogical, opinion-forming, strong, associative, electronic, etc. The success of the concepts of governance and civil society is part of the same enthusiasm. Like any idea corresponding to a certain air of the time, the idea of participatory democracy undergoes appropriations, diversions.

Political leaders realize that fewer and fewer citizens believe their vote matters, that their voice counts. So they say they want to revive the democratic ideal through participation. If the idea is adopted by all, or almost all, the practical translation reveals the hesitations of many politicians. Participation is thus inscribed as one of the objectives of the city's policy in which it acts as an "obligatory recitative". (Bevort, 2002)

In addition, the implementation of participatory democracy mechanisms was intended to strengthen the link between representatives and the people in power, to increase the proximity between elected officials and citizens in the face of a rising "crisis of representation" and the growing mistrust of citizens towards the authorities. Here again, physical proximity would make up for the growing social distance between representatives and administrators. Participatory democracy has thus mainly taken the form of a democracy of proximity, in a double sense, geographical and communicational (Julien Talpin and Yves Sintomer, 2011, p. 13)

There are many reasons to support civil society, as American political scientist Larry Diamond identifies six reasons for supporting the emergence of civil societies in contexts of political transition and economic reform: (Pirotte, 2018, p. 73)

Civil society is a reservoir of political, economic, cultural and moral resources to control state power;

The diversity of civil society will ensure that the state is not in the hands of a small privileged group;

The growth of associative life will complement the work of political parties in stimulating political participation [...]; civil society will eventually stabilize the state because citizens have a greater interest in maintaining social order. Furthermore, while civil society can increase demands on the state, it can also increase the ability of groups to improve their own well-being; Civil society is a place for recruiting new political leaders; Civil society resists authoritarianism."

In this participatory democracy, civil society is structured around two major figures: the individual citizen, defined first of all by his or her status as a resident (whether he or she is the owner or not) of a district, a village, of a street, or that of the user of any service (public transport, school, health system...). The citizenship of members of a civil society involved in these democratic experiences is decoupled from nationality (with the exception of councils of foreigners) in the name of a principle of universal participation. This citizen is endowed with own competences (whether it is a profane or professional expertise), virtues (he is a democrat who sometimes ignores himself) and defects

(individualist, insufficiently socialized to democracy). The second figure is that of the local association which groups these citizens according to their place of residence (neighbourhood committee), a theme or even a particular and sometimes circumstantial objective. In this participatory formula, the local civil society is large. It simply excludes the local authorities (administration and elected). Civil society is a tool for making public policies more effective and fair, re-weaving social bonds within individualistic societies, and teaching citizens the foundations of democracy. (Pirotte, 2018, pp. 62-63)

3. *Participatory governance:*

Participatory governance is first and foremost a method based on thinking about decision-making processes. This method is based first on an understanding and analysis of two underlying dimensions: (Ospital, 2023)

The extent of participation: this dimension makes it necessary to reflect on the number and diversity of actors involved. The right balance between number of actors and diversity must be found. This balance is based on the search for complementarity among actors. We must avoid falling into quantitative research in the name of the representativeness of all diversities, at the risk of no longer being able to organize an efficient decision-making process. There are also questions about the timing and

frequency of the participation of actors. Finally, the extent of participation seeks to answer four questions: the legitimacy of the actors requested; their complementarity; their number; their availability.

The depth of participation: here the question arises of the degree of influence granted to the actors, or their level of participation. There are different degrees: simple consultation, negotiation, concertation.

The emergence of a strategic voter, electoral volatility or rising abstention have challenged this simplistic view of voting. In addition, the development of new social movements or the transformations of forms of communication make obsolete the centralization of analyses of political participation on voting alone. Participatory democracy is now our horizon, and our file will allow you to understand the issues, means and limits. (Martin, 2013)

Governance most often refers to a more flexible definition of the exercise of power, based on a greater openness of the decision-making process, its decentralization, and the simultaneous presence of several actors. Whether it concerns corporate management, administrative control, the establishment of participatory budgets or urban public consultation, governance today encompasses the most diverse types of organization and political intuitions, superimposed on the more traditional

forms of public action. Defining governance most often involves engaging in an inventory at the Prévert, for example “all activities of agents or social, political, economic, administrative groups that contribute through targeted efforts to direct, guide or control certain aspects or particular dimensions of a system or a socio-economy”. Governance seems to reflect no kind of unified paradigm, but a guidance technique characterized by the great diversity of its techniques and actors. (Pitseys, 2010, p. 214)

The participation of citizens in the consultative and decision-making processes of public organizations can, of course, be justified by democratic considerations, but also on the basis of substantive reasons, since “citizen knowledge” – or “layman knowledge”, as opposed to expert knowledge can be seen as an added value in the decision-making process. This participation can finally be justified by a simple pragmatic reasoning whereby the decisions resulting from a participatory process will be more widely accepted and, in this case, more easily implemented. who now expect to be consulted about the issues that concern them, and using a logic similar to that of public organizations, companies have gradually followed suit, putting forward various approaches calling themselves «participatory», based on the “strategic conversation” model (Lehmann 2013). This suggests that companies have come to

recognize the need to engage with their stakeholders in order to build social acceptability of their projects and purpose. (Yates, 2015)

4. Challenges of participatory democracy:

While participation has been institutionalized and now refers to the tools and practices integrated into democratic political systems, It continues to embody an ideal that criticises established forms of participation and inspires the creation of innovative mechanisms for participation. The issue of participation is undeniably at the heart of discussions on how democracy works, and the concept of “democratization of democracy” remains constantly at the centre of debates.

the principle of participation feeds on the one hand radical criticisms of representative democracy on the theme of dispossession: indeed, representation can be presented as undemocratic, insofar as it passes through a form of abdication of sovereignty, The latter being entrusted to representatives who deprive citizens of their right to participate in public affairs. The consecration of the autonomy of representatives vis-à-vis their voters (the representative link is not an imperative mandate), associated with the observation of non-representativeness and professionalization of the governments, thus feeds the 19th century anarchist and Marxist critics of representative

democracy. Criticism of the limits to representation-based participation also fuels the introduction of reforms within the framework of representative democracy. (Douillet, 2023, p. 20)

the relationship between social movements and democratization processes are Focused on already established democracies, sociologists of social movements have long neglected democratization processes. It was only after the turn of the millennium that more studies were conducted on the role of social movements in democratization processes and, conversely, on the consequences of democratization on the existence of social movements.

The results are not univocal: some authors propose the «model of a positive relationship between social movements and democracy», suggesting that social movements promote democracy as well by their nature of «challenger», by claiming transformations in the decision-making processes, only by their nature of «maintainers», by defending the democratic gains and thus keeping the regime «under tension» (Ibarra, 2003). For others, such an obvious relationship exists only in the opposite direction: «once democratization occurs, social movements (whether democratic or not) usually follow». Social movements, on the other hand, would only contribute under certain conditions and in a limited way to

democratization. (Olivier Fillieule, Lilian Mathieu and Cécile Péchu, 2020).

The “deliberative democracy” are the heirs of the “participatory democracy”. The «deliberative turning point» was intended to complete a participatory democracy whose effectiveness can only be achieved by improving the ability of social actors to argue. Participation is not a matter of course and putting the preferences of social actors to the test of public discussion is not easy, because engaging in a positive discursive confrontation presupposes the quality of arguments, but also that of a procedure to control the inevitable inequalities between participants. Since deliberation is a matter of collective action, it should not be forgotten that the processes of argumentation are dependent on collective operations which may alter their scope and possibilities for expression. The quality of the arguments does not de facto imply the quality of the deliberation process. From this point of view, the contribution of social psychology to the understanding of such mechanisms has proved decisive. Faced with such complexity, the author can only accept that deliberation is of limited application and frequently gives way to other forms of political action which do not exclude violence. (Julien Talpin and Yves Sintomer, 2011, p. 6)

Conclusion:

Participatory democracy for its realization it is necessary that the society plays an important role in the process of democratization and also for the improvement of democratic life, because the civil society that plays the role of reflections of the requirement of society that allows the government to make good decisions, this is why participatory democracy is a need for a strong civil society for which aid for good governance and also achieved participatory governance all this contributes to the smooth running of the democratization process and also to the improvement of the political participation so that there is at the end a real participatory democracy.

Civil society plays the role of relay between citizens and the political system it allows the smooth running of decision making and above all has the citizen's participation in local political life and also have an opinion on political issues and public utilities for the improvement of its daily life which will allow a good communication between the decision maker and the citizen.

The aim of improving participatory democracy is to arrive at participative governance that gives transparency to political practice and on all the decision-making process or the citizen will be at the center of the equation of the political system.

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