Technologies of participation.

Democracy in the making, on site and at distance

Rationale and aims

This proposed special issue develops novel theoretical and empirical perspectives on public participation. It establishes methods of participation as an object of empirical analysis with regard to the processes of their making and their working in practice. The latter goes beyond a well-established *evaluative* perspective on public participation methods which, at least implicitly, assumes specific aims and functions of public participation (e.g. Fiorino, 1990; Renn et al. 1995; Rowe and Frewer, 2000). In contrast, this special issue sets out to sketch and illustrate an *empirical* perspective on public participation in a more fundamental (or anthropological) sense which does not assume to know *a priori* what public participation actually is or what it is good for, even less how it could or should be done. It does instead approach the making and enacting of methods of participation as a practice that deserves to be studied open-mindedly, for the sake of understanding its patterns and dynamics as they emerge in social interaction. This is comparable to the 'social studies' approach to scientific knowledge and technology, and it shares with it the methodological relativism of studying the negotiation of claims with regard to the right definition, function and design of public participation 'symmetrically', without stepping in and taking sides in these battles. In fact, methods of participation can be framed as a specific type of technology that is used for generating legitimate judgement rather than immediately achieving some kind of material effect and which is not ostensibly physical in matter – a 'social technology' or 'technology of governance', so to say.

The collection takes forward nascent constructivist and co-productive perspectives on public participation methods which emerge at the intersection between science and technology studies (STS), governance and public policy studies, political theory and geography. Forms of participation are viewed as situated configurations of practices, procedures, subjects (or participants/publics), objects (or issues), material devices, settings, and, not least, of concepts of the public and democracy (e.g. Irwin and Michael, 2003; Irwin, 2006; Lezaun, 2007; Marres and Lezaun, 2011; Marres, 2012). Methods of participation gain special relevance as

universal rules for the design of (elements of) such configurations. Studying the making, circulation and practical effects of participation methods thus offers a way to study the remaking of democracy, on site and at a distance.

We propose a carefully aligned set of papers to open up and advance this broader perspective. We position such methods as *technologies of participation.* These are defined as more or less formalized design rules for configuring the participation of citizens in processes of decision-making on public issues. In taking the social life of participation methods and their role as specific technologies of governance as an object of study (Law et al. 2011; Voß 2007a: 174-182) papers in the collection *follow the processes of their making, their circulation across different sites of theoretical and practical articulation, their entanglement with emergent practices of participation in political situations, and the way in which they contribute to create a specific reality of democracy which extends across different sites.*

Together the papers in this collection develop a new repertoire for the analysis of political participation. It builds on and extends the research that has been done on economic markets, over the last decade or so, by extending a constructionist perspective on science and technology to the realm of the economy and the performativity of economics, consulting, and financial engineering (Callon 1998; Callon et al. 2007; MacKenzie et al. 2007; Muniesa and Lenglet 2013). With a focus on methods of participation we explore the extension of a constructionist perspective on science and technology to the realm of politics and the performativity of social and political science, policy advice, public affairs consulting, and the engineering of public authority.

The approach moves beyond the two dominant existing modes of studying political participation which centre on: (i) evaluation studies of participatory mechanisms and design largely based on normative theories of deliberative democracy (e.g. Rowe and Frewer 2000; Fung 2003; Gastil and Levine 2005; Goodin and Dryzek 2006); and (ii) the analysis of these efforts primarily as new technocratic forms of domination, partly inspired by a Foucauldian perspective (e.g. Rose 1999; Cruikshank 1999; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Swyngedouw 2005). Papers in this collection displace this opposition by focusing on the production of participatory practices and accompanying expert knowledge. They are situated within a growing interest in this topic within the field of science and technology studies (STS) (Gomart and Hajer 2003; Irwin 2006; Lezaun 2007; Lezaun and Soneryd 2007; Chilvers 2008; Braun and Schultz 2010; Felt and Fochler 2010; Laurent 2011). Our collection goes beyond this work as it does not only study the performance of technologies of participation at

specific sites of implementation. By also tracing technologies through the course of their making and along the paths by which they circulate around the world it takes this work an important step further (for a similar perspective cf. Voß 2007b for economic policy instruments). This brings the work into view that goes into *connecting* localized sites of participatory practice and allows us to map the translocal spaces that are formed through these connections.

While the major contribution of this special issue lies in providing new theoretical and empirical insights into technologies of participation, their circulation and effects, most contributions within it will also reflect on the implications of this more reflexive perspective for future participatory practice in the domains of science, technology and the environment.

Provisional titles of papers

1. Editorial

2. Research article

   - Political experiments that matter. Ordering democracy from experimental sites.

3. Research article

   - Mediating public dialogue on science and technology: Expertise, technologies and ecologies of participation

4. Research article

   - Lost in translation: Czech dialogues by Swedish design

5. Research article

   - The innovation of 'citizen panels' as a method of public participation: The irony of anti-technocratic expertise and emerging forms of social technology assessment

6. Research article

   - Connecting inner and outer spaces of democratic practice

7. Synthesis paper (collectively authored by contributors)

   - Technologies of participation – an analytics of political ordering

8. Commentary

   - Constructing citizens and translocal assemblages of method

9. Commentary

   - Performing realities of democracy "in vivo" and "in vitro"

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