Default Participation. Utopian and Dystopian Populism Challenging Research and Knowledge in Public

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›Participatory‹ approaches to decision making in science and research, in urban planning and architecture, in design, in the arts, in curating, and in education are often praised as democratic and enriching, as tools that allow marginalized groups or silenced audiences to give voice and to counter privileged speakers. Concurrently, ›participation‹ is criticized as a naïve means that devaluates well-proven professional findings, that wrongly individualizes political and social issues as subjective sensitivities, that hides conflicts instead of debating them, and that blurs responsibility and accountability on all levels.

Considered genealogically, the history of ›participation‹ always evolved within a twofold dynamics, all over the world especially since the 1960s: On the one hand, pursued more broadly as a demand for »participatory democracy« (Pateman 2012), the New Social Movements and NGOs criticized established formats of parliamentary democracy as non-representative, questioned hitherto ways of administrative decision-making as non-inclusive, and denounced claims of scientific authority as being a powerful tool to shape the world, but lacking grounding in people's everyday life. Here, grassroot efforts to organize things at one's own on a more local level, instead of being ruled by far-away bureaucratic institutions or elected parliamentary representatives, met with dreams of a utopia where society might unfold as an undisputed, immediate collectivity. On the other hand, in parallel, mainly as a try to cope with the global economic changes after the Trente Glorieuses and with the postcolonial condition, entrepreneurial concepts like new public management aimed to transform the public administration of the modern state, including the municipal level, into providers of commodities for consumer-citizens whose preferences have to be met (but not educated or questioned), that at best would leave a profit by involving civil society via ›participation‹ as well as private companies in meticulously calculated projects (Yliaska 2015).

It is because of these contradictory paths, that ›participation‹ became a passe-partout that is able to unlock very different desires. In the EU these debates already changed the constitutional setup, since article 11 of the consolidated Lisbon Treaty (that in 2007 complemented the Maastricht treaty from 1997) is regarded as implementing a turn from a representative to a participatory, deliberative democracy (Saurugger 2010). Public funding increasingly demands ›citizen science‹ not only as one possibility among others, but as a fixed quality factor for research at all. Considered together, the general heeding of ›participation‹ and its incremental implementation in law or in rules of procedure alike do not always and not only yield intended effects like democratization and transparency. They also became a fertile ground for spontaneous or strategic populist rejections of expertise as ›elitist‹ or ›asymmetric‹, as well as for populist confusing of the relationality and preliminarity of all scientific findings with ›perspectives‹ or ›opinions‹ that were all equally considerable, thus misusing the mode of mindful critique for shattering and malapropism.

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Both articulations of ›participation‹ reckon without the dimension of time and devaluate experience: Here, the more romantic, utopian, anti-hierarchical variant hopes to get rid of all past havoc by creating ›situations‹ and ›serendipity‹ that would not need any preestablished checks and balances that have been developed over time. Too, the more authoritarian, dystopian, controlling version separates skills and knowledge from experience as a factor that needs a lot of time to grow, thus counting on reservoirs of creativity that are thought to be available at once if only a competition or an invitation to participate asks for them.

These phenomena are not new and have been researched critically in many fields, among them are: the history of participatory approaches in all disciplinary fields of the sciences, the arts, architecture and urban planning and the humanities since the nineteenth century and again since the »participatory turn« (Jasanoff 2003: 235-238) or as an answer to the »participatory imperative« (Jedermann/Leko 2008) (Bippus/Wolf 2022, Mahr 2014, Oswald/Smolarski 2016, Quet 2014, Vetter 2011); the development of a relational analysis of figures like ›lay person‹, ›volunteer‹, ›amateur‹ or ›expert‹ and ›authority‹ (Lengwiler 2008, Braun/Schultz 2010, Timm 2017); the critique of the global dissemination of ›participation‹ as a top-down tool of power in development policy since the 1960s (Cooke/Kothari 2001, Hickey/Mohan 2004); its instrumentalization in governance concepts in general (Thorpe/Gregory 2010, Rose 1999) and in architecture and urban planning or rural development in specific (Dzudzek 2016, Sutter et al. 2020); the vicissitudes of ›participation‹ in curating (Boersma 2023) or social work (Widersprüche 2021, 2022).

Of course, this is not an exhaustive or representative list of research on such problems. Critical analyses of ›participation‹ hitherto mostly have been debated separately in each field, like sciences and humanities, art/s, curating, education, architecture and urban planning, heritage, development policy. However, the *Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften* with this debate wants to initiate an exchange among the expertise and experiences of colleagues from different arenas: What are your experiences with ›participation‹? Where did the spontaneous or formally institutionalized legitimacy of participatory approaches generate doubtful results in your field of expertise? What strategies of dealing with default participation did you create? How do you respond to cover up versions of ›participation‹ by privileged speakers and powerful institutions? How could a mode of critique be regained, when allegedly ›everybody‹ is invited to take part while others, e.g. long-standing critics, are framed as disturbers? What can we learn from the research that history and philosophy of science / humanities did on participatory approaches in the past?

Our debate begins with a statement by Markus Miessen (2010) who over a decade ago, concomitant with Claire Bishop's (2012) seminal work on ›participation‹ in art, unpacked the aporia of ›participation‹ in architecture and urban planning. He suggests »crossbenching« as a tactics that might circumvent its populist appropriation and renew a situational (if not situationist, as some artists called it in the 1960s) momentum. Anthropologist Christopher M. Kelty answers by first analytically disentangling ›participation‹ and the public sphere, to then point out how the mechanical algorithm of social media soldered them, to the detriment of participation by humans in the first place and on the spot. But where and how could an experience with the capacity to evade emerge here at all? On the basis of his anthropological research in Mexico City, Raúl Acosta ascertains that neither streets nor bikeways are built aside of the confinements of political representation or alleged participation (since also the cycloactivist groups are structured with leaders and also pursue their projects by first scouting them out among themselves and then inviting the inhabitants to participate). However, the *Bicitekas*

against expectation have been very successful in transforming urban mobility in a megalopolis, and this was because they were able to connect the urban-local ground with the supranational level of climate action politics sidelong municipal political representation. Perhaps this ability to unexpectedly draw together resources from very different levels of political and parliamentary bodies could be a promising focus to compare cases as well as concepts of ›participation‹ to learn more. Sociologist Serhat Karakayali tracks such paths from migrant worker's wildcat strike in the German car industries in the early 1970s, into the formally constituted participation of industrial relations by works councils, from where a sort of spill over lead to a momentum of a strong solidarity by one of the powerful trade unions against federal laws that block off migrants from suffrage as the basis of citizen's participation until today. With a view from Switzerland and their research on participation within the context of direct democracy, Nico van der Heiden as a political scientist and Chantal Magnin as sociologist open up the debate to reconsider the variety of legal settlements of decision making in times when forms of parliamentary representation fail to legitimize it broadly. In fact, we can observe a new interest to constitute ›participation‹ as direct democracy. For example in Germany from the very heart of representative democracy with its division of powers, namely Lübbe-Wolff (2023) as a former constitutional judge recently asked, whether we should fear direct democracy or better sound it out anew as a possible form to deal with the deep crisis of political representation. From there, anthropologist Marcin Brocki looks at his discipline's history of ›participatory‹ methods and wants to question its pervasive mission within the »discourse of solutions«, as Greenhouse (2011) characterized this type of social engineering with ethnography. He pinpoints how good intentions of democratising research, flanked by the governance imperative to ›apply‹ scientific knowledge in any case, more and more turned out to be a narrow consensus-epistemology where scientific knowledge is mistaken as something that had do please everybody. Dirk Thomaschke (history) inquired a ubiquitous form of popular historiography by devoted amateurs and their detachment from critical amateurs like the History Workshop movement (that however, since the 1970s evolved towards a service ethics within official and professional memory politics, see Wüstenberg 2009 on the German case). He tries to overcome an approach, that insists on professional standards of creating confirmed historical knowledge in assessing vernacular practices of doing history – especially, but not only with Germany's Nazi past at stake. This allows to see the characteristic perspective on history and society, that such historiographies are creating, more clearly, without simply criticizing their obvious scientific failings or, on the contrary, naively overestimating their participatory meaning. Cooperating with committed locals and concerned communities is on the agenda of museums all over the world today, together with the critique from new museology this recently even lead to a fundamental revision of the institution's self-description by the International Council of Museums. Museologist Carolin Krämer undertook and investigated ›participatory‹ projects in museums. She exposes, that crossbenching in curating could mean to be aware that ›participation‹ is not a neutral tool from nowhere that may magic away the museum's hierarchy, be it only utilized properly, since also the professionally privileged actors in this institution are subject to its power relations. So, could naming and designating be the charm to evade default participation and to avoid populist invocations of it? See Christopher M. Kelty's smile at the end of the debate, sitting on another bench, not that of the crossbencher or referee, but that of the substitute: as soon as substitutes ›participate‹ in the game, it will absorb them. However, other than in sports, where stadium or bowl define not only the rules of the game

but also quantify the number of substitutes for each match, the thing that we call society relentlessly makes laws and rules and invites to ›participate‹ howsoever some people, and softly or brutally exludes many others – but never is able to limit the number of those who are benched. Not to mention those actors that modern thinking disqualified from the social game as ›nature‹ and who since some decades rewrangled themselves in again, in the appearance of climate or as a pandemic.

Crossbenching, Publics, and their Assemblies

Markus Miessen

»The crossbench politician tries, in fact, to avoid taking sides by following a clearly individualistic position. I always insist that to act politically is to act as part of an ›us‹, to act from the position of a ›we‹. Your position in that sense could be compared to someone intervening from the outside – a role that is similar to somebody who wants to mediate a conflict.« (Mouffe 2012: 64)

The last twenty years have seen a huge increase in the methods and protocols with which architects and urbanists have attempted to participate in (geo) political spatial conditions that did not use to be considered part of their job description. Simultaneously, interest in architecture and urbanism has increased massively in a plethora of fields that used to be clearly delineated – geography, sociology, political philosophy, urban policy, artistic and curatorial practices – which suggests a movement toward a refined understanding of the importance and difficulties of engaging directly in the production of space – in a more holistic way than before. To investigate what has been referred to as »critical spatial practice«, its vocabulary must first be described. The notion of ›practice‹ already has many possible interpretations.

The term ›spatial‹ is often understood to describe something that happens in space. However, within the context of spatial practice, its scope is far more concrete. In this context, spatial means something that not only happens in three-dimensional space but also has a certain scale and effect on space, such as a policy or other legal or nonlegal framework. Something that is spatial always has an underlying structure to it, something that allows it to exist, that governs it formally or informally, a core that produces a setting for a condition and situation. Spatiality, in this regard, should be understood as a set of relations between humans, ›things‹, and (built) structures – the built environment. It is this relationality embedded in the term that makes it political. Hence, political interventions are, by default, interventions in spatiality – that is, in relations rather than what is generally understood as ›architecture‹. This force field of relations, according to architect and researcher Eyal Weizman, is »not only a neutral, abstract grid […] but itself a dynamic and elastic territory […] that is shaped by but also shapes conflict.« (Weizman 2014: 9)

The most indeterminate component of the triad term discussed here is ›critical‹, which refers to when a person interrogates an existing practice or protocol and consequently maps out how to proactively alter, bastardize, augment, or develop this existing reality. In order to reach this decision, one first needs to gather information – studying, evaluating, and understanding the potential decision's repercussions. To decide entails forming conclusive thoughts, even if they are

only temporary. When we are critical, we make a judgment, we determine which route to take. Sometimes such decision-making can be simple, though it is most often complex and requires a long and careful process of reading a situation, analysis, or dispute. But who validates this criticality? Who is in a position to determine and filter the critical? The ›critical‹ in critical spatial practice needs to be understood as an operative concept. There is a plethora of approaches that comes to mind when considering spatial practice and the practitioners who have informed it since the 1980s – when the notion of everyday practices, the production of space, time codes as complex social and spatial constructions, and the exploration of interdisciplinary intersections were investigated by protagonists such as Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre. In the context of a relatively conventional understanding of architecture and urbanism, such theories – which stressed the productive activity inherent in everyday practices – caused huge debate, as many architects tend to concentrate on imaging, designing, and delivering stable conditions of certainty while often not considering the social and political consequences of their work. In the context of such a normative practice, bringing the everyday to the fore threatened a practice based on designing certainty.

While Lefebvre often wrote about the social relations of and within the processes of spatial production, de Certeau constructed an important distinction in the realm of spatial practices between notions of ›strategies‹ and ›tactics‹. According to him, strategies are intrinsically produced by and located within institutional frameworks, propelled by the reified power structures and environments that they constitute, whereas tactics are employed by individuals who act within the actualities of territorial environments and sociopolitical force fields defined by the aforementioned institutions.

Critical spatial practice is interested in the *condition* of something – to alter the condition(s) that one encounters in the everyday. As opposed to traditional or normative architectural practices, which are mostly concerned with generating new designs and physical additions, spatial practice more frequently engages with acts of subtraction and revision: the alteration of conditions, which thus tweaks the very parameters of their existence. Spatial practice does not attempt to set itself apart from architecture or urbanism in a necessarily antagonistic way but simply offers and projects a more complex alternative in terms of its own approach to a given situation. In this way, it also proposes and promotes a more agonistic form of practice, one that values and nurtures the coexistence of different approaches and potentially conflictual beliefs in a common *space*.

The setting up of such scaffolding and meaning for practice implies that each individual contributor to a project needs to take a position, which always has consequences. Only when a border – a clearly distinguishable field of operation – is acknowledged can it be broken, transgressed, worked against, or (mis)used. By deliberately producing such agonistic fields of encounter, critical spatial practice nurtures and exploits misunderstandings and a proactive outlook on the value of failure as a starting point for experimentation. Investigating the field's recent history, there have been countless projects that deal with complex narratives of ›the political‹ within ›the spatial‹, narratives around political congregation and the question of what constitutes ›a‹ or ›the‹ space for and of politics, and what I would like to refer to as ›cultures of assembly‹.

Using the productive conflict between consensual and dissensual modes of practice as a driving force to develop individual projects, critical spatial practice tends to think through the terms of ›curating content‹ and ›staging conflict‹ in order to develop methodologies as well as tools that help define socio-spatial frameworks that can be tested against reality – ranging from transient and informal to highly structured and

formal. These changes in scale (physical) and intention ([in]formalities) produce fertile grounds for speculation: If physical space (design) does not, at times, matter, what constitutes the elementary components of a spatial condition? Does decision-making take place only within the designed rigidity of the courtroom and the parliament, or does it also emerge in the informal corner of the corridor, between meetings, with coffee and a cigarette? And, if so, how can such processes or spaces be addressed through design?

We are currently, as we have been for the last fifteen years, experiencing a point of transition within participatory practices: within politics, within the Left, within spatial practices and – foremost – within architecture as its visible and most clearly defined product. Participation, both historically and in terms of political agency, is often read through romantic notions of negotiation, inclusion, and democratic decision-making. However, it is precisely this often unquestioned mode of inclusion that is used by populist politicians as a mode of campaigning. Hence it does not produce critical results, since criticality is being challenged by the conception of the majority. Instead, it will act as a catalyst for imagining a conflictual reading of participation as a mode of practice, one that opposes the consensus paradigm of the democratic facilitator; one that has to assume, at times, nonphysical violence and singular decision-making in order to produce frameworks for change. Imagine a conception of participation as a way to enter politics – proactively and consciously forcing us into existing power relations by intent – as opposed to a politically motivated model of participation, which tends to propose letting others contribute to the decision-making process. The latter, we might think, is habitually stirred by the craving for political legitimization. The former may be of interest not out of disbelief in democratic principles per se, but out of sheer interest in critical and productive change. One could argue that this model inhabits a certain opportunism. It challenges the widespread default that majority equals judiciousness while arguing for a proactive citizenship in which the individual outsider to a given inbred political structure can become a driving force for change: forcefully entering an existing discourse rather than opening it up to the floor. Remaining within the arena of the democratic, let us instead bastardize participation into a form of nondemocratic practice, an opportunistic model of interventionism, in which interference is made possible owing to the fact that existing protocols of internalized political struggle are no longer followed. What is the alternative to a conventional confrontation based on the nostalgic notion of the barricade? How can one propose an alternative, embedded practice engaging in spatial projects dealing with social and political realities? What could such polyphonic practice potentially be? I would like to introduce such practice as ›crossbenching‹.

Crossbenching delivers a contemporary and critical take on inclusiveness and, more concretely, on the way in which we (spatially) organize today as ›publics‹. How do we gather, physically or virtually, and where and when? How are matters of urgency being discussed today, and what constitutes a democratic setting? Spatial planning is often considered as the management of spatial conflicts. The city – and indeed, the progressive institution – exists as a social and spatial conflict zone, renegotiating its limits through constant transformation. To deal with conflicts, critical decision-making must evolve. Such decision-making is often presupposed as a process whose ultimate goal is consensus. Opposing the politics of consensus, critical spatial practice shall foster micropolitical participation in the production of space, and ask the question of how one can contribute to alien fields of knowledge, professions, or discourses from the point of view of ›space‹. Like the original meaning of the Latin word *conflictus* (fight), spatial conflicts represents a clash of interests in using space. The future spatial practitioner

could be understood as an outsider who – instead of trying to set up or sustain common denominators of consensus – enters existing situations or projects by deliberately instigating embedded conflicts between delineated fields of knowledge. Instead of aiming for synchronization, such a model could be based on participation through critical distance and the conscious implementation of zones of conflict. Within such zones, one could imagine the dismantling of existing situations in order to strategically isolate components that could be (mis)used to create friction. Crossbenching should be read as an open framework of departure. It may start to create the friction necessary to both stir debate and move practice forward. If this had a single objective, it would be to develop a common understanding of the point from which we can start to disagree: a theory of how to participate – without squinting at constituencies or voters but by instigating critical debate and, at best, change. There may be two arguments here, one polemical and the other conceptually constructive, both driven by pragmatic optimism and at times developed through concrete situations and projects, which Simon Critchley would call »situated universality«. (Critchley 2007: 42)

Responses

Publics and Participation

Christopher M. Kelty

The ideas expressed in the short piece by Markus Miessen are from another era. They come from provocations Miessen has written about in *The Nightmare of Participation*, and later the book *Crossbenching*. I'm not being dismissive by saying this – Miessen himself says that »we are currently, as we have been for the last fifteen years, experiencing a point of transition within participatory practices.« In 2023, we are on the other side of this threshold. We now live with the interference wave of populist-authoritarian assaults on traditional representative liberal democracy and the failure of that same representative liberal-democracy's response to a global pandemic and climate catastrophe. The consensus around liberal democracy which created the forms of participation that Miessen refers to has been broken. It's been broken by Brexit-Trumpist assaults on the one side, and by the bankruptcy of the liberal consensus of the late 20th and early 21st century on the other. We must view participation from the other side of this threshold. What kind of problem is participation now?

It is also impossible to ignore – whether you see it as the cart or the horse – the concomitant rise of advertising-driven social media platforms over the last 10 years. The question of viewing participation from the other side of this threshold is also the question: What is participation before and after the rise of social media?

Social media as it has evolved in the last 15 years, is a weird mutation of representative democracy. By elevating inclusion, often misidentified as participation, it transforms the qualitative critical spirit of the public sphere into the quantitative logic of the assenting majority. To understand this, I think it could be helpful to distinguish between two things about which I have written one book each: participation (Kelty 2019) and the public sphere (Kelty 2008). The two are often confused: the public sphere is understood as the site

of participation at the same time that participation is understood to constitute the public sphere.

A simple point of distinction is one of size. The size of participation is limited to roughly the area of the ancient Greek public square. This means it is limited also to the number of roughly similarly shaped humans that can fit in that space and the distance a voice can travel unaided. Whether you are Aristotle or Arendt, this ›space of appearance‹ is the true space of politics in which people participate unmediated and among others. It is above all a qualitative, human, collective experience. It remains the basis of every form of governance in existence, with crucial differences of course.

18th century revolutionaries in America found the size of participation to be a problem: it is impossible to govern a society of colonizers spread out across a space thousands of miles long and wide; to do so leads to elitism and factionalism. Such a form of participation could govern such a people only undemocratically. At that scale, there could be no participation, only representation. Ever since, participation has been an affair only of town squares, community centres, cafes, plazas, and parks. Representation, by contrast, replaces participation as its larger solution. This differentiation is the source of the institutions of voting and procedural control, modern constitutions, the balance of powers, and the recognition that representation must be somehow controlled by the people who no longer participate directly.

It was the invention of representative democracy, in an attempt to address these very problems of the space and scale of participation, that gave birth to the public sphere. It was an inevitable byproduct of addressing the problem of the size of participation. In a system where representatives – elected, chosen, elevated – participate on behalf of others, there needed to be a mechanism for transmitting this experience from the subjects to the representatives. The genius of representation was that it replaced popular participation with the public sphere (and left participation in the agora to representatives), but allowed this ersatz participation to be large at the same time. But being, speaking, writing or protesting in the public sphere, is manifestly not a form of participation – it is a form of representation. And what one does, precisely is to represent oneself. This peculiar extension of representation into the soul of the individual, separating the self from the speaking subject who represents it, is the very story of liberal individualism. To represent oneself is to be distanced from oneself. The self that has passions, desires and interests, is represented – in public – in order to make an appeal, form an opinion, critique or debate ideas of how to be governed by others.

Publics are necessarily dependent on representational media. They are technically and infrastructurally provided by entities entrusted to make them function as publics: newspapers, radio, the post, television, telephones; but also the architecture of cities and the production of space in them. To be effective these providers themselves need to be restricted or enabled by the State to ensure that publics can come into being and effectively play the role they are intended to play in representative democracy.

It should surprise no one that the shape of social media today has profound implications for the function of the public sphere. Social media platforms have, in the space of 15 years, destroyed and consolidated all other channels of the public sphere, including the internet itself – once imagined to be a robust bulwark against such control (see, e.g., that first book I wrote). It has inverted the production of urban space: the social media map precedes the territory now. While a variety of academics chatter about surveillance capitalism and the assault on privacy, it is clear that the most devastating effect has been the assault on the public, not the private, sphere.

But if you are an optimist, you could simply say that what has happened is that the public sphere is

now dramatically larger. Just as the invention of liberal representative democracy in the 18th century required the expansion of the public sphere beyond the agora, so too this must be driven by the vicissitudes of globalization and the internationalization of democracy. Now the voice of the citizen can reach everyone. Now the critical spirit can soar over the oceans.

If the public sphere has gotten larger, participation has by turns gotten smaller. The opportunities for participation are everywhere: in a gallery, a workplace, a community centre, a design meeting. Small participation, today, is also about small things: potholes and exhibits, neighbourhood budgets and reviews of the environmental impact of a new building. It is not bad as such; in fact it saturates society. Participating now happens in every domain, not just that of the State. Democracy, understood as this form of participation, becomes a way of organizing all of life: home, school, work, temple etc. The power of participation today is confined to small problems.

One does not, generally, get to participate in large problems: the decision to wage war, the plan to expand an industry overseas, the organization of a massive infrastructure project. The ever-larger public sphere is where such things are discussed and protested, not in a space of appearance, and certainly not in the spaces of appearance that really matter: the parliament, the law firm, the back office, the judges' bench. Small scale participation is a source of a certain kind of virtue – learning how the system works, perhaps – but it is also a site of regular co-optation used to legitimize decisions that are ultimately made elsewhere, and do not effect most of the things that truly matter to democratic governance.

As instances of participation and the public sphere diverge in size, they simultaneously seem to diminish the ability of either to control power.

Miessen proposes a kind of heroic character to address this issue: the gadfly, the shit-disturber, the hacker, »the individual outsider to a given inbred political structure [who] can become a driving force for change«. This hero does his work not through participation but through representation. He brings the large-scale public sphere into the spaces of small-scale participation. Critiques circulating in the larger public sphere are used to disrupt the small space of participation.

There is something here. Most academics who study participation seem to want to ›scale it up‹: to make it possible to take it everywhere and to all places or all sizes. But Miessen's proposal seems to want to scale down the public sphere, and use its critical, disruptive power to challenge these instances of participation.

However, something is not square here. The public sphere of today produces a kind of political subject, and a kind of political speech that is inappropriate to the small scale – to participation. Participation would require an experience of a kind different from that of the public sphere and this divergence is perhaps what we should be exploring.

The public sphere once operated according to a logic and a form not so different from the experience of participation. It was an agora, after a fashion, a space of appearance where expertise and deliberation, debate, dispute, argument, and emotion, even a dash of communicative rationality, produce the concepts and critiques, the resistances and the alternative futures that constrain power.

But the public sphere was also a kind of collective intelligence. In a way, the public sphere has always been an algorithm: processing the writings and opinions and cries and anger of individuals as it circulates through both public and private realms, through coffee shops and community centres as much as through mass media and advertising. But it was always more than a mechanical algorithm: it was made of humans.

Social media, of the form we have today, transforms the qualitative criticality of the public sphere into the quantitative logic of the majority. Unlike the

exclusively human algorithm of a public sphere, it combines human and machine into an inscrutable oracle. Like the priests who translate the ravings of Pythia, algorithms combine the human and the nonhuman, and the output is often inscrutable and obscure. The forms of social media we have today reward the heroic participant who conquers this algorithm. To go viral: this is the space of appearance today. To be heard, it is necessary to represent oneself, critically, creatively and individually, in the way most likely to activate the algorithm: an algorithm that is manifestly designed to make visible only that which is most liked by the largest number of people – the quantitative logic of the majority. Participation, meanwhile, becomes ever smaller. Is there, in fact, participation after social media?

Participation Overload? Disjuncture between Aspirations, Misuses and Fatigue of a Symbolic Practice

Raúl Acosta

»It was the best participative process I have taken part of« Alicia told me in her living room. She was referring to the series of activities that government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activists set up in support of a new road safety law that was eventually approved for Mexico City. In a series of workshops and discussions, urban dwellers, local businesspeople, technical experts, government officials and other individuals defined issues that should be addressed in the upcoming law and regulations. Alicia was proud because the legislation she and other activists had been campaigning for over the last few years was finally going to be approved. I could not but wonder, however, if such participatory process was as fundamental as she made it out to be.

With this text, I argue that expectations of democratic legitimacy that are woven into participatory processes for urban policymaking need to be situated within the specific contexts in which they take place. After a long-term anthropological study of the Mexico City mobility milieu, my analysis is that tools designed to include a variety of viewpoints and help improve policies in the megalopolis are often formulaic and corroborative. That is, they are habitually used with standardized methods that are not related to the topic at hand, and as complementary processes that serve to legitimize decisions that were already made. The fact that such approaches take place in the name of participation is due in part to the lack of experience in democratic procedures in Mexico. During most of the twentieth century, a single political party held power in local, regional and national level, while claiming to hold democratic elections. Such simulation of democracy obscured processes and further confused populations about possibilities and degrees of involvement and influence. Although Mexico is an extreme case of simulated democracy, the conceptualisation of such situation may be relevant to examine less extreme circumstances.

At the heart of my argument is the realisation that in Mexico democracy occurs by naming processes as such. Trust in democracy often relies in such discursive dispositifs or apparatuses through which practices are framed. So, if institutions and organizations perform certain tasks that they all collectively refer to as democratic, then the whole setting is defined as democratic. The same occurs with participation. If institutional actors refer to certain

activities as participatory, then they are deemed so. Those involved in such simulations fail to notice the vicious circle that is produced by perpetuating them without critical assessments.

Democracy is not linear nor can it be taken for granted, as John Keane (2009) argued in his exhaustive history of the concept and practices that bear its name. As a notion, it comprises a series of practices, institutional arrangements and principles through which decisions about common affairs are negotiated and managed. But anthropological studies of how democracy is interpreted and performed in different corners of our world have shown its slippery character. In some instances, for example, it has been assumed that a higher number of NGOs in a place reflects more mature democracy. In others, consideration of an ›empowerment‹ of some populations is crucial, but it is sought after through formulas that tell people how they can be empowered (Cheater 1999). Participation is similar in that it has been paraded as a novel governance tool often without ensuring a pedagogical process for individuals and institutions involved to learn and make adjustments.

Cycloactivism in Mexico City: The activist I name Alicia is a leading figure in Mexico City's mobility milieu. She is one of the leaders of the longest-running cycling advocacy group in the city: Bicitekas. As a confident, articulate, sharp witted and dynamic woman in her late forties at the time of fieldwork, she is well known for creating new campaigns and strategies to promote cycling in the city. In its 25 years of existence, Bicitekas has been a key organization for the gradual transformation of Mexico City's mobility landscape. When it started, the megalopolis had no cycleways and the cyclists who dared to ride its streets needed to do it defensively in a very hostile environment. Back then, Bicitekas was one of very few collectives advocating for cycling in the city. The situation has now fundamentally changed: hundreds of kilometres of cycleways have been built, alongside other types of infrastructures like mass cycle parking houses, and dozens of cycling collectives have sprung up. The change is also visible on the streets, where thousands of cyclists can be seen every day of the week, either commuting or on leisure rides. This has somewhat normalized an activity that used to be considered marginal.

Mexican cycloactivists caught my attention because in a relatively short time they managed to garner significant political influence without being part of the traditional power play in which other activists are usually immersed in. The single party regime that prevailed nationally and locally during most of the twentieth century relied on a strong web of clientelism and corporatism. As electoral democracy has opened up to new political parties, such practices remained as well-known tools that were used in electoral competition. But cycloactivists did not play into this logic by avoiding being identified as aligned with a single party or institutional actor. They have gained ground in Mexico City's public sphere through their own campaigns and by effectively collaborating with NGOs, development aid agencies, and international financial institutions. Crucially, they have benefited from the heightened measures through which supranational organizations seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in cities, which has brought external resources and technical experts to the scene.

Activists' demands and involvement in public debates about mobility policies and projects have been crucial in shaping the transformation of the city. They have also helped substantiate a discursive need for civil society participation in urban governance schemes that NGOs, foreign development agencies and international financial institutions insist on. The experiential character of cycling has helped the movement recruit new activists and gain legitimacy through the increasing number of cyclists on city streets. The highly performative and creative style of

public interventions that cycloactivists have engaged in have also ensured attention to specific campaigns and demands they have engaged with.

My examination of the mobility milieu, however, led me to identify more clearly who are the actors whose participation actually has any influence. I have come to realize that although they use the language of participation, cycloactivist groups tend to reproduce strategies through which the various levels of government and political parties build a following as markers of their political weight and legitimacy. That is, cycloactivist groups invite people to »participate« in their public interventions and performances to support certain demands or campaigns that had been previously decided by a small group of activist leaders. These are usually those who have more experience and symbolic capital (especially social and cultural capital, through their personal networks and knowledge). Participation in this sense is therefore considered as membership of group demands.

Diane Davis argued that the chaos and disarray that Mexico City has become over the last few decades is due to the single party's prioritization of corporatist and clientelist exchanges over the public good (Davis 1994). This meant that major pieces of infrastructure were built to gain favours instead of as part of long-term plans. In Davis' view, the centralization of power in the single party resulted in such practices becoming the rule in the various scales of government offices (local, regional and national) rather than the exception. With the opening of democratic competition among political parties and the involvement of other non-governmental actors in public affairs, the narrative has accommodated similar corporatist and clientelist networks but with the language of participation and civic engagement. The question, therefore, remains: is there still a simulation of sorts?

Legitimacy of a symbolic practice: Participation has a good name. Its incorporation in several international policymaking guides and white papers has helped spread its appeal among public administrations. Mexican government bodies and private enterprises include it in the description of their own processes to gain legitimacy from its use. The thinking dictates that if a decision is reached through a participatory undertaking, then it would not only reflect the wants and needs of those taking part in such activities, but also be validated by such involvement. But its inclusion without a context in which there is a pedagogical process to learn and improve runs the risk of rendering it meaningless.

Baiocchi and Ganuza (2016: 2) echoed the significance of Hillary Clinton's naming this era as the »participation age«, while also warning of the corrosive effects against expertise and elected officials. In their volume *Popular Democracy: The Paradox of Participation*, Baiocchi and Ganuza explore the implications of participation as a symbolic practice through which corporations and governments seek to gain legitimacy without altering the status quo. Whereas it is usually framed as an inclusive and positive exercise to involve more people in decisions they would not usually be part of, there are nuanced forms of hierarchy and control that elude the most simplistic uses of the term. A case in point is participatory budgeting.

In a similar fashion to thousands of cities and local governments around the world, Mexico City has incorporated participatory budgeting to decide small public works in neighbourhoods. As is the case elsewhere, such exercises are not only limited by the reduced percentage of the budget they are allocated, but also crucially by the manner in which locals get involved. In urban contexts where most dwellers lack enough resources to live comfortable lives and spend most of their time working and commuting, few people have the time and energy to take part in meetings to decide whether to build more play areas for children or bicycle parking spaces. A group of key institutional actors behind the wave of participatory

policymaking and projects is made up of international NGOs. These organizations serve as brokers between the various scales of intervention in policymaking from the macro (international financial institutions, foreign aid agencies, national governments), the meso (regional governments, local NGOs and civil society organizations), and the micro (local activist groups and other neighbourhood institutions like schools). In my project, two international NGOs based in the United States but with offices around the world, provided technical expertise that complemented activists' demands and complaints. They also helped them develop a diplomatic language through which they could more easily gain attention of large corporations (to fund certain campaigns), international institutions (to seek collaborative projects), and government offices (to influence policies and projects).

The participatory exercise mentioned by Alicia at the start of this text was one such dynamic, in which a project that had been pushed by activists and NGOs, with help from international financial institutions and foreign development aid agencies, was adopted by the Mexico City government. What Alicia referred to as the participatory process itself consisted of an exercise at the end of a longer process, that served to rearrange issues that had been already considered but whose inclusion gained more context and relevance thanks to the participatory exercise. The process included a series of meetings in which numerous individuals took part in workshops to define concerns, aspirations, and demands regarding the central topic of the law. The idea was to use such input to inform the specific aims of the various articles and bylaws of the legislature. But what did it mean to participate in such event? In a visit to the Mexico City Lab, an office in the city's Ministry of Environment, I was given a copy of the book that the government had published about the process. It includes several texts and many photos of the workshops. Most of the book, however, was dedicated to explain the contents of the law and to situate it as a novel piece of legislature in Mexico. The participatory process was a section at the end to provide proof of inclusivity and legitimacy. Overload or misuse? Participation is one of those words that can mean different things to different people, depending on their ideological baggage and their priorities. For Mexico City cycloactivists, it is a label that ensures a process through which the government hears the voices of those who are going to be affected by a policy, a project or a public work. But, crucially, it is also a way in which they have ensured that their vision of a future Mexico City reaches further than their inner circle. The former is related to established formal procedures through which opinions are incorporated into law-making and policymaking. The latter is rather a less restricted process that entails simply for some individuals to intervene in the public sphere in order to shape debates and imaginings of what is possible or desirable for the city. One common aspiration of activists in Mexico City is to be able to inspire others to think of possibilities that they had not before considered. This, several told me, is where change starts.

But participation is often relegated to the formal standardized procedures, where framing and terms are so limited that any decision reached will not achieve major change. If to this one adds the lack of practice and imagination of democratic processes (like respecting dissenting opinions or seeking to build consensus), then the results can be disorienting. As other pieces in this debate show, however, there is a wide variety of forms and goals of participatory processes. What they all have in common is the search for legitimacy that incorporating other voices provides.

Participation as a Mode of Conflict

Serhat Karakayali

Participatory research, participatory art, participatory planning, and many others: the idea of dismantling or weakening the asymmetries built into the corresponding institutionalized practices in each of these fields has been celebrated for quite some time. Markus Miessen voiced his radical critique of this procedure for the field of architecture a decade ago in his book *The Nightmare of Participation*. The core of his dissent seems to be that participatory procedures erase conflictuality, that participation is a consensus machine. Miessen proposes a sort of inverted participation highlighting the productivity of conflicts. However, from a sociological perspective neither participation nor consensus necessarily indicate the absence of conflict. In this sense, Miessen has a point in emphasizing that conflict doesn't require barricades at all times.

It might be useful to distinguish between the specific fields of action in which the use of so-called participatory procedures is demanded, negotiated and implemented: participation in educational institutions is discussed differently and its scope is also limited with different logics than, for example, in the field of industrial relations. Also, the concept of participation in political decision-making processes in democratic societies must be viewed separately from this. Here, the term comprises the totality of practices by which citizens decide collectively. This includes the act of voting as well as activities in the framework of organizations such as NGOs or political parties, up to participation in demonstrations or other forms of protest and objection. Thus, even those practices that we claim to be at the core of a democratically constituted polity are limited by their very nature. Two aspects characterize the containment or relativization of the processes of collective decision-making. First, they are generally institutionally predetermined forms of political expression whose effects (or power vector) are structured, limited, and embedded. Different practices exhibit different degrees of mediatedness and impact, voting and demonstrating each have different direct effects on shaping the polity.

On the other hand, the semantics of participation refer to the individual citizen, whose participation in such procedures is also perceived as passivating because it is in fact anything but individual. Rather, it involves procedures in which a vast number of people are involved and where the individual will cannot be reflected directly in decision-making processes. In addition to the various mechanisms of the separation of powers, the formation of compromises must also be taken into account, since participation in the political process is rarely a seamless transfer of a unified popular will to the state. However, the historical decline in institutionalized forms of political representation in many modern democratic societies, such as voter turnout or party membership, shows that participation in decision-making processes not always was experienced as passive. There are different interpretations of the causes for the drawback from representational or parliamentary forms of participation, one prominent being the assumption, that the success of neoliberal restructuring in state and society as a whole has restricted the scope of politics to such an extent that the even more marginalized sections of the population in particular can no longer see any point in participating in elections. Indeed, it seems that the decline of these forms of participation via political representation has been accompanied by the rise of field-specific forms of participation located in various institutions. Those, however, do not refer

to the general polity, but to communities of a much more local nature, usually within or around a single organization or institution. Both the collectives and the conflicts that shape them, as well as the mechanisms of decision-making, are different in each case. Mostly, however, they are areas or spheres in which the logic of democratic decision-making does not apply. These might be democratically legitimized political or administrative bodies executing legislation or economic organizations such as corporations, where a majority of people work.

A rather large chunk of modern life takes place through such organizations, where individuals operate as members (when we work for them, for example) or as clients, whether we are involved as patients, customers, visitors, students etc. Unlike the sphere of political and parliamentary representation, in which the purpose of action must always remain subject to negotiation (to a certain degree), organizations pursue specific purposes, be it the production of car tires (at a profit!), the education of an academic workforce, the review of building applications, or the publication of news, and so on. Along the sociology textbook, members of an organization pursue its purpose by performing their actions within predetermined roles. Thus, thanks to their functional principle, organizations expect precisely no interactions from their members that relate to the structure or purpose of the organization and ›recognize‹ only clients and members, except democratic organizations, which are themselves machines for synthesizing individual wills. Members and clients are constituted as non-citizens in fundamentally different ways: While the agency of members is hierarchically distributed (from janitors to directors), clients are equally constructed as laypersons, as the mode of operation is derived from the purpose and decisions are based on functional or technical expertise.

In short, organizations find it difficult to integrate procedures that run counter to their internal logic. They shield themselves from claims to participation when participation cannot be framed in a way that is at least indirectly relevant to the organizational purpose. In our research on how civil society organizations deal with issues of migration-related diversity (www.zomidi.de), for example, it became apparent that internal actors who advocate for participation often refer to the organizational purpose at hand, for example, by criticizing the fact that the usual mechanisms by which the organization responds to changes and problems in its environment have proven inadequate and threaten the organization's existence. To the extent that this organizational purpose itself remains unchanged, the involvement of its members can also be hedged in. The key is whether members are merely heard, or whether they also have (albeit limited) decision-making power. In the weakest version, participatory processes serve as feedback in the service of self-referential improvement.

Another form of participation has a little more muscle. It began around 1900 and exists today in many European countries: industrial co-determination. In Germany, the right to co-determination in the workplace was enshrined by the Weimar Constitution's article 165 and by a national law in 1920 and continues to shape the working world after its reintroduction in post-National Socialist Germany. Apart from co-determination in the coal and steel industry, where co-determination is far-reaching, it is more clearly limited in other sectors: For example, although half of the members of supervisory boards must be representatives of labor, in a stalemate the right to make decisions falls back to the owners. Similar rules of participation can be found at German universities: Here, all status groups are involved in decision-making processes, but no majorities against the group of professors are possible in the most important committees, since the statutes define an unequal representation in these bodies that privileges professors.

Together with the institution of the works council, the laws of co-determination regulate the degree of democracy in a profit-oriented company. Works councils' rights range from the simple right to be informed by the management about economic decisions to the much stronger right to obstruct personnel decisions or to shape the working day (break regulations and shift models). While this institutionally anchored form of participation goes hand in hand with genuine decision-making powers, at the same time it is also only a limited sharing of power. In the sense of Miessen, one could object that here, too, a consensus is ultimately simulated where in reality irreconcilable interests confront each other and merit conflict. Indeed, works councils channel conflicts, give voice to employees' grievances and intervene in the business activities and thus ultimately increase a company's productivity. The recent history of migrant labor in West Germany may illustrate this point: As more and more migrant workers were employed in West German industries in the 1960s, numerous conflicts arose at the workplace level that emanated from the specific social situation of this group, as they more often worked in the lower-paid and less secure jobs: their residence status was precarious, the vacation arrangements did not suit their needs, or the company dormitories were in poor condition. When these conditions led to conflicts, works councils, which were staffed by German workers, showed little solidarity, gradually resulting in migrant workers taking industrial action outside of collective bargaining agreements. However, trade unions worked to develop strategies for integrating migrant workers into union and co-determination structures. An important milestone was an amendment to the Works Constitution Act, which came into force in 1973 and for the first time granted foreign workers the right to vote and stand for election to the bodies of workplace co-determination. To this day works councils are the only democratic body in Germany, where representation is not restricted by national citizenship.

Since then, the number of migrant works councils has risen steadily. In the metal industry, migrants are now represented in these bodies in proportion to their share in the industry, as a study we recently conducted again showed (Karakayali et al. 2017, 2022). In retrospect, this expansion of the participation model could be considered a successful pacification action: The workers' and employees' concerns and interests are now heard and, if necessary, flow into corresponding changes in the labor process, without the need for the now legendary large strike actions by migrant workers as those in the 1970s. Is co-determination just another instrument to stabilize the asymmetric relations within such organizations rather than to challenge them? If we look at the further historical course, a more complicated picture emerges, because migrant workers were anything but pacified.

Rather, integration into the institutions of co-determination and the trade unions provided them with different modes to articulate their perspectives and interests. Carstensen (2022) and Riedner (2022), for example, have shown the central role that migrant workers played, both conceptually and with regard to its implementation, in one of the largest industrial conflicts less than a decade after the reform of the Works Constitution Act: the campaign for a 35-hour week in the early 1980s, organized by Germany's major trade union, the IG Metall. The campaign's main goal was partially achieved by implementing settlements for a working week with less than 40 hours in some sectors. Moreover, thanks to the major role migrant unionists played in the campaign, the union's democratic conventions established for the first time in German history formal bodies of representation for migrant workers within the union while simultaneously pushing union leadership to adopt resolutions critical of the repressive federal Foreigners Laws.

The dynamics that participatory practices can unfold depend, as this example illustrates, on whether the collective of the organization can also constitute itself beyond the realm of a given organizational field. The institutionally deep anchoring of co-determination owes much to the collective bargaining power that has developed historically over generations. What distinguishes this form of participation from that of voting to shape the power in a parliamentary representation, as well as from more narrowly defined participatory projects, is its ability to yield mechanisms that function along an organization's particular logic and simultaneously transfer these processes and their outcomes to broader issues of social and political conflict. What can be learned from this specific form of participation that might be transferable to other domains? Participation in the strong sense can be achieved when mere organizational member or clientelship can be formed into a collective with respect to the particular organizational purpose, but with the capability to transcend the organizational realm and connect with conflicts in the broader social arena. Against this background, participation must be understood as a medium of conflict, one that is carried out not against, but through an alignment with the specific logics of an organizational field.

Decisions with Participation? Absolutely. But Only Properly.

Nico van der Heiden and Chantal Magnin

Participatory processes often go wrong. There are no discussions in which arguments can unfold. There is often no consensus about which arguments are the best. As a result, these arguments cannot prevail, as it should be according to the normative idea of a deliberative democracy. Instead, a few (to put it exaggeratedly old white) men prevail without hearing any arguments and without really having dealt with the matter. Socially marginalized groups do not even participate. Different opinions are moderated away before they even become visible. Stakeholders involved in the project (e.g. experts, investors) are either not present or do not make their interests transparent or do not contribute with their knowledge. The desired outcome is fixed from the beginning and the procedure only serves the authority to give the project a bit more legitimacy. Participatory budgeting is carried out to make citizens instead of elected politicians limit public spending due to scarce resources. This is no way to improve political decision-making in a democratic polity. But are these procedures – just because they often fail in practice – doomed to fail per se? We do not think so.

It is worth analyzing citizen participation more in-depth, both conceptually and empirically: Who initiates the process? With what motives? With what goal? How is the process designed and what are the framework conditions? How long does the participation last? Who is invited? Who participates effectively? What happens with the results?

If these questions are examined, two patterns of participatory processes can be identified: On the one hand, there is a (by political decision-makers) top-down organized process to ex-post pseudo-participatively legitimize decisions that have already been made. The participatory process is intended to produce the desired result as quickly as possible (i.e. without much discussion and without financial expenditure and loss of time), which is then exploited for political campaigning (›I'm doing what the population wants‹).

Unfortunately, there are various empirical examples of such processes (Kübler et al. 2020).

We can note with an ironic smile that such processes often go wrong since they counter the initiator's aims. Participatory projects are very difficult to control and often (and luckily) do not produce the desired result. Spatial planning changes in the interest of big companies or large taxpayers have been shattered by a participatory process (van der Heiden and Krummenacher 2011). It is interesting to look at how such a result is handled: Do the decision-makers take the result seriously and revise their decision because otherwise they risk their re-election? If so, even such a poorly set-up participatory process would have its advantages. If decision-makers do not and ignore the outcome of the participatory process, then there is a real danger that people will be scared off and the trust in participatory processes (and even in democracy as such) will suffer (e.g. Magnin 2017, Kübler et al. 2020).

Let us look at the second pattern: Political decision-makers are unsure about what is best for the population when it comes to a project. They organize an independent, broadly based participatory process in which there is time for all arguments to be exchanged and for uncomfortable positions that challenge the majority. The handling of the results within the political decision-making process is made transparent from the very beginning: Who decides what afterwards and when? The broad population participates in the process and engages with different arguments. Free speech applies, arguments are mutually heard and weighed up. There is respectful contradiction. There is a lot of contradiction, even (or especially) from people far from institutionalized forms of politics.

There may not be a consensus at the end of such a participatory process but there is a clear majority position. The minority is respected and has been able to significantly contribute to the process, which in turn leads them to accept the majority position. The decision of the participatory process flows transparently into further political decisions. And yes, the politicians will also boast about the process in this variant and exploit it politically in their favor.

What does that mean in terms of Miessen's position? Yes, there is a need for conflict in the participatory process. Yes, there is a need for contradiction in a participatory process when things seem to be decided from the beginning on or are pushed too quickly towards a decision. Consensus cannot be the goal from the beginning. Yet there remain open questions for example on the issue of sustainability: Can citizens have an interest in reducing resource consumption and thus foregoing wealth? Is it not in the interest of many not to forego anything even if it harms the environment? Will the conflict that is fought out over different interests and the weighing of arguments in this case really turn out in favour of the common good? These are questions that are at the core of democracy as a political system. They do not only concern participatory processes. Without trust in citizens, there can be no deepened democracy. This applies to decisions made by the majority, especially in the case of concerns brought forward by citizens in the form of initiatives and referendums. The majority can be mistaken, misinformed and have no regard for others. But if this were the case, wouldn't the direct democratic instruments that already exist in individual countries or regions have been abolished long ago?

Conflicts are necessary so that interests and positions become clear. But the political process cannot come to a standstill here as the concept of crossbenching somehow implies. At some point, a decision must be made as to whether a project will be pursued or not, whether an area will be spatially developed or not, or whether a wind turbine will be built or not. Perhaps it is our specifically Swiss perspective that make us advocate the direct democratic path here, but decisions that are broadly supported seem better to us than those that are made only by elected politicians in a parliamentary representation

and officials in public administration. No, direct-democratic decisions often do not meet the requirements of participatory processes and they do not correspond to the idea of crossbenching, but they do make the decision-makers constantly fear the ›majority‹. If a direct democratic process is preceded by an open participatory process, this seems to us to be an appropriate decision-making mechanism for many policy areas. In this way, additional considerations can be introduced through the participatory process, conflicts can be discussed, and any compromises can be included in the proposal that is put to the vote.

Nevertheless, we would like to express two reservations from our experience with participatory processes:

1. Participation is difficult if the topic is very technical or technically difficult to understand: it cannot be demanded that everyone becomes an expert before they are allowed to participate in a project. In direct democratic systems, people are allowed to decide even without knowledge, but the discourse in participatory processes must ultimately be a political and not a technical one. Participatory projects on overall revisions of zone plans (as an example from spatial planning) are therefore difficult, while those on a concrete new high-rise building are possible.

2. The outcome of the participatory process must be genuinely open and must not be restricted from the outset, e.g. by overriding law or private financial interests operating in the background, to such an extent that it stifles any discussion at its core. Participatory assemblies can hardly be controlled in this respect. It is not possible to say during the participatory process that a certain outcome is not debatable (e.g. a new high rise building that it not compatible with overriding law as one possibility of an area development). During the participatory process, people will still talk about the high rise building if they are convinced that it is the best solution and nobody has told them the limits of the participatory process before. Both decision-makers and the population must be informed early in the opinion-forming process about the stakes and limits of the process. Once the opinions have been formed, it is no longer worthwhile to carry out a participatory process and objections in the process are no longer heard.

These two points are exemplified by what we consider to be the most difficult example of participation in Switzerland in recent years: In the context of the search for a site for the repository of radioactive waste, the Swiss Federal Office of Energy conducted participatory processes in all potential areas (Alpiger 2019). On the one hand, this topic is highly political, but it is also very technical concerning the implementation. The participation processes were therefore more often information or almost educational evenings for the population, which was not appreciated. In addition, the framework of participation was set so narrowly from the beginning (for example, the location of facilities on the ground were to be discussed but almost nothing else) that this was not accepted by the population: They simply wanted to discuss whether they wanted the repository in the area or not. And opinions had long been made.

Anthropology is not about Satisfying People, Making them Feel Better, or Fixing the World

Marcin Brocki

Markus Miessen addresses a problem far beyond his professional field, as it is also present in anthropology, namely the problem of participatory research and the associated superficial democratization of knowledge production.

For decades, many anthropological authorities have accustomed us to thinking of anthropological research as a form of collaboration in which a necessary component is an intimacy with the researched, a thread of cognitive kinship that results in an ›honest‹ relationship, an honest partnership. The »researched/informant« becomes a ›partner‹, an ›active actor‹, entitled to be fully involved in the analysis.

This begs the question, what is to be the product of such a morally informed interaction? As Douglas Holmes and George Marcus put it, the result is not a scientific knowledge of the others' knowledge, but unspecified »inter-narrations«, »interconnected discourses« (Holmes/Marcus 2005: 1105) where the researcher is trying to guess what the informant is thinking and ›instinctively feeling‹. In this way, contrary to their intentions, the informant is exoticized and the whole enterprise is coated with an aura of impenetrable mystery.

The project of ›collaborative ethnography‹, as expounded by Marcus and Holmes, is filled with vague, very general formulations, and because they occur as the basis of the whole argument, one gets the impression that it is not scientific, but has instead the form of a parable. As a parable, it is intended to express a simple moral ›truth‹: only the researcher who seeks to equalize the participation of the researcher and the researched in the research process, thus the ›collaborative‹ researcher, does well. What is evident in this project is the desire to give scientific prestige to ›collaboration‹, which in no way fits into a scientific framework, since, by signifying the superficial democratization of the research procedure and analysis, it is in fact an attempt to mix up the order of knowledge of the researcher and the researched, on unspecified terms and for an unclear purpose, which not only does not serve to understand both the Other and the Self through the Other, but actually makes this understanding impossible.

In the ›action anthropology‹ project launched in the 1940s, Sol Tax (1958) had a similar idea of ›participation‹, but his project ultimately failed too. The anthropologist was supposed to follow the goals formulated by the local community, although the role he was supposed to play in the »bottom-up project of change« was not entirely clear – as he was supposed to »give« the freedom to make changes to locals and at the same time be an active agent of change. »Anthropology in action« became action in the name of anthropology for cultural change. The interventionist nature of researchers' actions was supposed to be a way of democratizing knowledge. It is, however, only seeming democratization, about which more below.

A well-known project of this type is Luke Lassiter's ›collaborative ethnography‹ (2005). He believes that anthropology should be integrated into social change projects, on a fully participatory basis with the subjects of change. He also believes that there is an asymmetry in the researcher-researched relationship, which can be described as a violation of the principle of reciprocity. Following Robert Borofsky, he reiterates that we have a debt to repay to those we are researching (they and their culture are a gift), and the form of repayment

should be our support for issues important to this group. Without any special explanation, he believes that cooperation with the researched, which is broad in its scope not only in terms of the topics jointly addressed but also in terms of the joint production of an ethnographic text, not only does not threaten but fosters ›strict scientism‹. According to Lassiter, ethnological knowledge should be negotiated with the informant, i.e. that the researcher draws the informant into his or her game for an unspecified period of time, in the name of completely external to the informant's expectations of what the process of communication in general and this particular one is for him or her, in other words, drawing him or her into the ›game‹ in the name of his or her own goal and on his or her own terms ignoring the micro-world of the researched. Is this democratization? At the end of this plan to involve the informant, there is nothing – the researcher, after all, cannot know in advance what such interaction will lead to, and the supposition that it will lead to the generation of shared knowledge (what would it be?) is an unfounded desire that need not at all be shared by both. It fails to take into account the fact that communication, particularly intercultural communication, presupposes a very complex interplay of expectations and predictions based on the deep cultural experience. Without taking it into account, there can be no question of involving anyone in anything, so ›writing together‹ cannot be called research, as it is at best a variation of hegemonic practices, of turning the subject into an object and manipulating it for one's own needs and purposes.

As the failure of the Sol Tax Meskwaki project demonstrates, stepping into the roles of community advocates in the absence of full recognition of the impact of such an involvement on the locals in the longer run, conceptualizing and initiating, and coordinating indigenous activity programs (which can be described as appropriation of activity), suggesting cultural and historical themes without first recognizing what is really important to the community, ends up in a kind of ›social engineering‹, where the anthropologist acted as a therapist and his actions were ultimately meant to ›cure‹ the organizational and psychological dysfunctions of his ›patient‹, i.e. the community under study. A more patronizing research stance could hardly be imagined.

Nowadays, in addition, the neo-liberal academy with its emphasis on practical results of education supports the development of applied research. Knowledge has been combined with the provision of practical solutions to social, economic, or political problems, and so engaged and activist anthropologies that blur the boundaries between researcher and researched, have begun to flourish in anthropology. As a consequence, the canon of mandatory subjects and readings started to change, and since application dominates over theory, the canon in general becomes very narrow. As a canon is the condition for the existence of a community of competence, its disappearance may lead to the disintegration of this community. The process described has only begun, so serious losses in anthropology are not yet visible. However, it should be expected that the urgency brought about by the pressure to apply anthropological knowledge, which is in conflict with what is defined as reliable scientific knowledge, the necessity to follow the rapidly changing landscape of issues to be solved immediately will contribute to the shallowing of competence, and even to the shallowing of expectations from competence. This will also be compounded by the disappearance of the intellectual culture and authority of scholars – in practically oriented anthropology, fieldwork alone becomes authority enough to present its results as scientifically significant (the fetishization of ›terrain‹ has actually already begun), and the theories explaining these results and the painstaking work of verification may be treated as ballast unnecessarily slowing down the application process. The promotion of opportunism, of adaptation to this neoliberal path, affects

anthropology doubly: firstly, by derailing the idea of reliable scientific work; secondly, by excluding one of the most important elements of its practice, that is, critical distance from one's own culture, including professional culture - for criticism is punished here, conformity and adaptation are rewarded. Charlatans today are therefore mostly scholars attuned to the system, adept at navigating it, because the system does not reward competence, only the ability to navigate, thus transforming scholars into ›obedient clerks‹.

Michael Herzfeld said in an interview that by making the decision not to engage with the issues relevant to the group under study, we are deciding on something with irreversible consequences because we might disappoint our informants. We are satisfying those who have more power than our interlocutors, be it the local authorities or the state government, and in this sense, we are supporting one side while seemingly supporting neither (Herzfeld/Kościańska 2006). The concepts of ›disappointment‹ and ›satisfaction‹ play a key role here. I think this is a very dangerous path for anthropology: anthropologists try to ›please‹ the legislature by taking steps to make applied and engaged anthropology the cornerstone of the discipline, and by promoting it like a product in the media, which they also want to ›satisfy‹ by formatting content so that it can ›satisfy‹ the mass audience, and before that, at least some of them, like Luke Lassiter with his collaborative ethnography project, try to ›satisfy‹ the informant by negotiating the final results of the research with him/her.

Anthropology is not about satisfying people, making them feel better, or fixing the world. Nor is it to record only what our informants are willing to be recorded. The task of anthropology, of science in general, is to deliver reliable knowledge, which is sometimes against the will and knowledge of the ›informant‹.

Ortschroniken and *Heimatbücher.* A Supplement or a Challenge to Professional History?

Dirk Thomaschke

It is a tough challenge to find any place in Germany who does not have one. From every village and small-town district to even the smallest hamlet with a few dozen inhabitants, *Ortschroniken* or *Heimatbücher* abound all over Germany's historiographical landscape. In particular since the 1970s and 1980s, almost all municipalities across the Federal Republic financed and self-published such accounts of their history and, since the 1990s, most communities in East Germany followed suit. Though the total number of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* can hardly be overstated, one must not be mistaken about the number of books for each community: *One* book is enough for one place. In the eyes of their authors and their readers, *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* stipulate the history of their place once and for all. These local historiographies do not see themselves as part of an on-going discourse open for constant revision, change of perspectives or re-evaluation – the first important difference to academic scholarship.

Instead, these books sell with a very defined scope: a definite history written by the community for the community – and hardly anyone else. They are products of passion – the passion from one or more long-time inhabitants of the village with or without any considerable literary and historiographical edu-

cation; and they are the results of a meticulous and tenacious research process – many years, sometimes even generations, of collecting, compiling, recording and writing down a variety of sources. *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* usually comprise nearly everything that was found, no matter how small the detail, no matter how irrelevant to anyone outside the community. For instance, many authors indulge in long lists and catalogs of houses, families, and names or diverse and eclectic timelines of everyday events.

For many people *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* are the only contact with historiographic literature at all. And in sum, these publications are nothing less than a mass phenomenon in German memory culture. So, is this anything but a success story? A story of the engagement of the lay and amateur public with history – in reading, writing and research? And even more, in the sense of the grassroot movements of the late 1970s and 1980s (*Gräv där du star, History Workshops Movement, Neue Heimatbewegung*), a historiographical self-empowerment from below? A resolute emancipation from a condescending and aloof academic establishment?

Indeed, it is. And exactly that is the problem often overlooked or actively ignored by most historians dealing with memory culture and local history in Germany. Because one thing did not happen: lay and professional historiography did not converge in the process – gradually and steadily, as was promised by the social movements of the late 20th century. Yes, the History Workshops, the socially critical factions of the movement, did, but not the huge bulk of everyday lay historians writing and reading *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher*. Regarding this largely idiosyncratic genre of history writing, both worlds remained apart or maybe drifted apart even further.

Some might object at this point, especially all the dedicated historians working in the field of local history, publishing manuals and handbooks, sometimes co-writing *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher,* or offering practical training courses which are well attended by lay authors. Nevertheless, the common perspective applied by professionals remains inherently asymmetrical. Almost all published articles reviewing the state of local lay historiography in general and the quality of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* in particular ask normative questions. That is to say: To what degree do these books follow scientific standards and practices? To what degree do they distort the historical reality, defined by academic history, or not? To what degree do they even euphemize or harmonize the past, especially the National Socialist past? Do they propagate a wrong view on history and society in general? All these questions eventually come down to a rather narrow conclusion: How much more education and correction work has to be offered or even proscribed? However, this approach does not lead to the core of *Ortschroniken* and Heimatbücher as a historiographical participation phenomenon. We remain without a reasonable answer to the question, why hundreds and thousands of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* are published, reissued and cherished by the locals that do not satisfy any academic ethics; why legions of amateurs attend classes and trainings and do write scholarly inacceptable books nonetheless. We wonder why the gap between critical local history and *Ortschronik* writing remains ever large, even widens.

Instead we should ask ourselves: What do we really understand of the dissemination, the popularity, the influence of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* on memory culture; what do we really understand of the motivations, the intentions and the world views of the authors and readers of such books from this normative standpoint? Taking a normative stance is not wrong in itself. Nevertheless, it should be self-reflected, and it should take into account the reality of the phenomenon that is devaluated. Therefore, I suggest to step back for a moment and analyze first, how *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher*

actually see the past and by which perspective they filter all the well-meant professional advice, criticism and knowledge. I have undertaken that in a comparative study comprising several hundreds of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* from all over the country. The first remarkable result of this research is that these publications form a quite uniform literary genre, although most authors hardly know more than a handful of other comparable books from the neighbouring localities.

The second most important observation is that *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* adhere to a quite consistent view of the historical – and the present – world, governing the selection and the presentation of historical facts as well as the self-image of the writers and the audience and the production process of these books. Though hardly ever formulated as an explicit program, this perspective can be described as a relatively sharp demarcation between ›village‹ and ›environment‹. In spatial terms, this differentiation corresponds to a narrow and homogeneous space, limited by the village's chorographical boundaries and containing an allegedly homogeneous social community (*Dorfgemeinschaft*). This sphere of everyday history is sharply delineated towards a rather diffuse, almost naturalized ›political environment‹. In temporal terms, the demarcation corresponds with two separated historical timelines. The first one is constant, hardly fluctuating and ›anthropologically stable‹; it deals with community life and its daily necessities like farming, family and friends. In the historiography of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* it seems to be substantially detached from the second timeline, that is the history of politics and society. That timeline is characterized by inconsistency, unforeseeable ruptures, and the power to periodically breach or even destroy the first timeline from the outside (with the history of National Socialism and the GDR being typical examples of this). In social terms, this difference is analogous to a difference in historiographical responsibility. While the local authors claim an almost exclusive authority over the first sphere, the outer sphere – ›big history‹ – is usually delegated to anonymous, professional ›researchers‹.

One thing has become clear already: This pattern of perception might not be outright divisive, but it is certainly not suitable to lead to a closer integration of local and national history (nor of amateur and academic historiography). Instead of writing the history of their community *into* the history of the nation, *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* are much rather working in the opposite direction: writing their history *out* of the history of the nation.

In doing so, *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* do not try to complement, replace or emulate professional local history. That leads to the sobering conclusion that more of the same – more training, more education, more critique – will not bring about a higher ›quality‹ in the writing of *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher*: since the genre processes virtually all historical information through the filter of the village/environment dichotomy and since it is so successful with its readers not *despite* this fact, but *because* of it.

Nevertheless, *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* can and should be criticized by professional historians – *but from the outside*. That is to say without denying the essential difference between the vernacular and the academic way of writing history. In fact, such criticism of lay and amateur historiography is dearly needed, considering that the prevailing world view among these authors, as sketched above, seems to be susceptible to a number of problematic social currents and political ideologies – namely political apathy, or on the contrary: hostility towards politics and the ›state‹ in general, even conspiracy narratives of different kinds. Although *Ortschroniken* and *Heimatbücher* writing must *not* be identified with these phenomena – let me be absolutely clear on this – a lot more work on the origins, the mechanisms, and the effects of local memory culture has to be done.

And it has to be done without any normative preconceptions of how locals should remember their past. We need to know more about such widespread forms of lay activity that continue to thrive on their own and all over the country – beyond any official participatory processes.

Creating Consensus without Content. Snapshots from Museum Practice

Carolin Krämer

In the beginning wasn't the word but the flipchart. And that's where the trouble is.

The demands for an implementation of participatory formats in museums are as diverse as their endorsement and critique. Some curators deem a message wall for the visitors to fulfil the demands of participation in a completely hierarchically narrated exhibition. And at the other end of the spectrum there are claims not to play the museum's book but to transform the entire institution towards a »playing for the rules of the game« (Sternfeld 2012, translation CK) within the hegemonically constituted field itself. Between these two poles, there is much that is labelled as ›participatory‹, whereby the specific formats rarely show the courage to create open spaces of discourse, to outperform curatorial sovereignty of speech and to reveal power structures that constitute the exhibitionary field.

Where I was part of supposedly participatory formats – for example, as an invited expert in a »citizens' dialogue« that should reorganise a city museum, as a project manager in the revision of a local history museum and in art education – the interplay of the interest groups involved led to the fact that the discussions remained rather abstract, content-less and non-binding. But this undermines the actual benefit of the approach. In my view, participation is less about generating factual knowledge (e.g. the annual bird count as one of the famous cases of a simplified idea of ›citizen science‹) or about achieving a consensus on action (financing the swimming pool or a city park). Whatever the intention was, participatory formats are about the denaturalisation of hierarchies, patterns of thinking, pedagogical concepts and the like. Overall, participation is about embarking into a self-reflexive process. It is obvious that such a political, never completed and experimental procedure initially triggers unease for all those involved, including myself in the examples mentioned above. Working in a setup that demands not to follow but to dismantle this very setup is always disconcerting. At first glance, the critique that this shifts the discussion away from content and that it does not yield results, i.e. results that meet previously set purpose, is understandable. However, I would like to counter that, without a discussion of the »conditions of the force field« as Markus Miessen names it, we will never achieve results that are useful for society, but inevitably only at empty shells, and furthermore I argue that the one must always precede the other. But what does that mean in a given situation?

1. Recognize one's own institution as hegemonic and issuing multiple constraints: In the case of the citizens' dialogue that I attended, an effort had been made to invite a representative sample of the local population. But since any forms of relationship-

building, establishing contact by introducing the institution and the planned procedures had been dispensed with, in the end only those dared to speak (to top it off, in a conference-like setting!) who always do so in the museum space.

2. Disclose the structural determinants of the process, but also of the museum field in general: If the working methods, (political) dependencies, parties and individuals involved, and the professional standards of the field under investigation are not made transparent to all participants equally, how should it be possible to act, reflect and practice on equal terms? And how can the specific competences and knowledge of all participants be recognised? Misunderstandings and conflicts of interest are inevitable.

3. Put formats first that increase the agency of new participants in a field they are unfamiliar with: I have proposed the concept of »curatorial literacy«. (Krämer 2020) It focuses on media literacy in relation to exhibitions. How else could somebody be supposed to articulate their own demands on museum work if they literally lack the words as well as some good or bad curatorial practice examples to do so? A silencing or solidification of a hierarchy between ›professionals‹ and ›amateurs‹ in the field can be just as much the unintentional result as the banalisation of issues often feared by academics.

4. Use time, processuality and a broad concept of knowledge as framework: The steps and perspectives mentioned in the previous points need time. A flipchart must not be the starting point, but rather a comparison of pre-concepts, wishes and demands, the development of a common language for the subject matter and the work of contact making to build trust. All this can be abruptly cut off by rash decisions and output-driven approaches. This is what happened to me in my cooperation with activists of a local heritage association: Since I considered the functions of their museum to be sufficiently defined by the (old) ICOM definition, I never asked what function it should actually fulfil for the local people (as a social meeting place, place of remembrance).

5. Take courage to openly put (curatorial) theses up for discussion: The consequences of what I often see in current exhibitions mostly follow this pace: no clearly articulated theses → no provocation → no ›affected‹ persons → no productive conflict → no questioning of existing structures and persons → no transformative approaches. Nevertheless, I don't want to claim that participation only makes a difference if it is not invited but fought for. When Markus Miessen introduces the figure of the »crossbencher«, I'm following his arguments well, because it is precisely in conflicts that abstract variables such as power become evident. Being sick of handling moderation cards for their own sake, we do need more of explicit curatorial presence to make structure and power tangible for those whom we invited do debate it.

6. Do not misunderstand moderation as a balancing tool: Of course, it is useful to ask people who know how to do it for moderation. However, taking the idea of a »crossbencher« seriously means to inform this person: They should think in processes instead of pursuing so-called results, be willing to stir debates and to endure, and have the ability to reinterpret conflicts as tools, be aware of their own position and power in the game and also have a basic knowledge of the conditions of the field being worked on.

7. Show courage and be flexible to think the matter at stake from the beginning: If participation offers a chance, then only through the inclusion of new perspectives and the denaturalisation of practices and routines. This procedure may lead you to a radical questioning of everything in the museum. Those who forbid themselves to do this from the start, often by insisting on personal routines and supposedly immovable professional maxims, are giving away this opportunity. A comparison of the results that a more courageous questioning of the

institution's basis with the supposed constraints will be met later in every project anyway.

Taken all these experiences together, they can also be articulated with much fewer words into two questions, however, into two questions that I have never been asked sincerely in the context of participatory museum projects: Why are we, why is every one of us here today? Where are we here, actually? The answer to these questions could then find its way on a flipchart that would remain in the background until the end of the event.

However, before this happens, those colleagues who invite people to the game should ask themselves a third question in advance: Why do I want to use a participatory format at all? If the answer to this has something to do with funding guidelines, expansion of data free of cost to compensate an insufficient budget or appeasement politics as a reaction to an already ongoing conflict, then there are two possibilities. Either they just don't do it (unlikely), or they openly communicate these constraints and aims as parts of the game and wait to see what happens. Maybe they will even get some unexpected support for a more reserved use of the term ›participation‹ or a strengthening of their position as scientists, curators, educators? Maybe not, who knows. Whether it's called participation or not: It anyway remains a process between people in a field that does something to all of them.

Benched

Christopher M. Kelty

There is a secret society of people who pursue participation. Among us there is only a nod, a smile in the eye that says, »I, too«. No one knows of this collective's existence, even the people who are in it, until the moment that they pass another member. For some, that moment never comes. They assume no such group exists. The association has no roster. There is no handbook or by-laws. They do not meet. There is no hall or den or burrow, not even the minimal empty space in which two people might meet one another.

The community is bound together by a mix of exasperation and wonder. Exasperation at the repetition of the same, involved in every analysis of participation. How can there be another book, another project, another whole discipline of people pursuing participation who are, despite differences of language and dress, nonetheless exactly the same as you? Wonder because this recognition is like collecting a beautiful butterfly: look here, this one has a subtle red in its orange and black wings that look exactly like the orange and black wings of every other butterfly we have collected.

Members are inducted at the moment they decide to pursue participation. For me, this moment came when another person, not a member of the society, innocently asked me »What is the history of the idea of participation?« Rather than ignore the question, or fake it, I joined this secret society. It happened as I drank weak coffee from a styrofoam cup and sat on a folding chair in the basement of the community hall and for a nearly infinitesimal moment, I forgot that I was now a member and I became the society itself. Every member has a similar story about participation in the association: a story of anger, frustration, irony, or impatience. It is never enough, but it is also too much; it never really works, but it is our only hope; it is too soon, but already too late. It is not what I meant, but it is obvious. Every non-member, such

as the person who asked me that question, has no such story. At any given moment, there is always one member of the organization who could be elected its leader. This never happens though because the collective never meets, and also, there are no rules for the election of a leader. Nonetheless, this person always exists, and many members know who it is, by their work. Sometimes it is a group of people. They each have symbols associated with them: a spiral, a cube, a ladder, a burning flame, a tyrant's sceptre, an empty space between two, or four, benches. The symbol often circulates as a kind of proselytizing machine, attracting more members to the society but without ever revealing its existence. Nonetheless, one cannot become a member through this proselytizing machine; one can only become a member by deciding to pursue participation. A curious fact is that people who are proselytized but do not join are referred to as ›embers‹ rather than members, in the official documentation.

Members never act in the name of the society while they are members; they are barred from speaking about the work of the organization. For this reason, there are more people who have never joined, or who have been kicked out of the association, than there are people who are members. Only when they have been kicked out do they insist on speaking for it, but by that time, their claim to represent the institution or its departments is unsupportable, since their relationship has been terminated. The only people who believe them are the people who are not part of the group, which as it happens, often includes many other people who have been kicked out of the collective. These are not the same as the people who have never joined the society, and often, it means that people who have been kicked out of the association end up speaking about participation to people who have never joined, without the permission or approval of those who have, and on this subject they find a remarkable and inexplicable agreement about participation.

It has happened more than once that Governments and Corporations have sought the consultation or advice of the society. The collective never provides it, on principle. When members are asked to explain participation, they can only do so through a gesture of renunciation, lest they be kicked out. This gesture consists of an elaborate tracing of the negative space of participation – all the things that it is not, or that it should not or cannot be. This gesture outlines participation, but it is not the positive work of a member, rather it would be only the after-image of his or her or their renunciation of the pursuit of participation, which is what justifies their membership in the society to begin with. As such, consultation and advice is never provided. Non-members and ex-members, however, are not barred from explaining participation, and do so prodigiously.

Not all members are equal in the organization. There are two types of members of the society. Those who play and those who are on the bench. Because this is a society that pursues participation, and not a society devoted to participation in itself, nobody plays. Playing would be grounds for expulsion from the association. The people on the bench, who wear red shirts, are said to ›ride the pine‹. The risk that they may play never comes unless it is clear that members of the society start to participate rather than simply pursuing participation. When that happens, people on the bench risk playing, which risks being removed from the society. Some cannot resist, with obvious consequences. Normally, however, those on the bench lose themselves in a collective reverie that operates in time and space as a perfection of the pursuit of participation. One must be ever-ready.

In writing this exposé, I will surely be removed from the group; in fact, I expect a letter to arrive at any moment, signed by all the participants. I do not feel any regret, however, for I enjoyed my time in the collective; I felt sincerely that I pursued participation, and that I was, in a way, inescapably bound to my fellow members for those ten years or so that I attended no meetings and silently, knowingly, acknowledged my compatriots when we passed. I will miss them, though we never met. Others will join, of that I can be sure.

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