

RIDING PARADOX: LESSONS LEARNED FROM ITALIAN PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING EXPERIENCES

Terri Mannarini¹

University of Salento, Italy

Abstract

In this paper, some of the psychosocial aspects of participatory policy-making in Italy are analyzed, with specific attention given to the relationship between internal agents (IAs) and external agents (EAs). Based both on a review of the documented Italian case studies in a variety of policy areas and on direct experience, three major issues are addressed: conflict, power and exclusion. It is argued that the majority of the problems that pertain to the relationship between IAs and EAs can be attributed to two comprehensive underlying dimensions that characterize all participatory policy-making processes, namely, the paradoxical nature of institutionalized participation and the tensive nature of social relationships. Implications for community work are discussed.

Keywords: participatory policy-making, conflict, power, exclusion, community participation

Montar las paradojas: Aprender de las experiencias de las políticas públicas participadas en Italia

Resume

En este artículo se analizan algunos de los aspectos psicosociales de la participación de los ciudadanos en las políticas públicas, con especial atención a la relación entre los agentes internos (AI) y agentes externos (AE). Sobre la base de una revisión de estudios de casos documentados italianos, en varios sectores de la política pública, y sobre la base de la experiencia directa, se enuncian tres temas principales: conflicto, poder y exclusión. La tesis es que la mayoría de los problemas relativos a la relación entre AI y AE se puede reconducir a dos dimensiones latentes que caracterizan a todos los procesos participativos en las políticas públicas, es decir, la naturaleza paradójica de la participación institucionalizada y la naturaleza tensiva de la relación social. Al fin se discuten de las implicaciones para el trabajo de comunidad.

Palabras clave: política pública participada, conflicto, poder, exclusión, participación de comunidad

¹ Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Terri Mannarini, Department of History, Social Sciences and Human Studies, University of Salento, via Stampacchia 45, 73100 Lecce, Italy. Phone: ++390832294706. Fax: ++390832294723. E-mail: terri.mannarini@unisalento.it.
<http://www.regione.toscana.it/cittadini/diritti-e-cittadinanza/partecipazione>

An interest in policy-making and community participation has been at the heart of the community psychology discipline since its inception. Because of their emphasis on social change and social empowerment, community psychologists' attention both to innovations in policy-making processes and to the effects they generate in the everyday lives of people is not only desirable but also necessary to some extent. In the same vein, citizens' adoption of an active role in shaping policy meets the expectations of the types of democratic and lively communities that appeal to community psychologists. The benefits and the positive outcomes associated with participation have been highlighted by many scholars in the discipline, suggesting the following: citizen participation plays a relevant role in workplaces, health programs, urban planning interventions, and certainly in the creation of public policies (Wandersman & Florin, 2000); citizens' contributions to the collective identification of problems is desirable both for people and institutions (Montero, 2004); active participation provides people with meaningful aims and goals (Cantor & Sanderson, 1999) and increases social well-being (Keyes, 1998); and finally, participation, as a transformative concept, is the basis for all the processes aimed at improving the environmental, social, and health conditions of a community (de Castro-Silva & Cavichioli, 2013; Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Wandersman (2009), after conducting projects on neighborhood associations and community coalitions for decades, noted that participatory processes improve the success of policy and social interventions. However, the debate over the connections between participation and empowerment is intense, and it is acknowledged that a certain level of ambiguity exists when putting participation into practice (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000). Indeed, as suggested by Arnstein's (1969) seminal work, participation can range from passive forms, in which people have no control over the processes and the outcomes, to active and interactive forms, wherein community members have control over both the processes and the outcomes. Since Arnstein put forward her theory, increasingly complex theories of participation have been advanced (see Burns, Hambleton, & Hoggett, 1994; Wilcox, 1994) that acknowledge that different levels of community participation are acceptable in different contexts and settings. This progression recognizes that power is not always transferred in participative processes. In a more extreme perspective, Kothari (2001) suggested that participation has become a 'new grand narrative', a myth that researchers should demolish, and a theory and practice that should be rescued from the pitfalls of rhetoric. This position highlights that every participatory practice is based on an implicit theory that, in turn, is

grounded in a certain conception of society, power and social change (Ciaffi & Mela, 2006). In the same vein, such an argument confirms that the concepts, goals and expectations related to participation can vary considerably between the agents involved in a participatory community process (Rodríguez-Ferreira, 2009).

At the institutional level, the incorporation of citizens' voices in the policy-making process is one of the major innovations introduced in what is generally referred to as the "third wave" of democratization (Huntington, 1991). This shift is the result of two concurrent social processes. On the one hand, there is the increasing aspiration of a variety of groups and, more generally, citizens to access the decision-making processes. These aspirations are, in some cases, fueled by a refusal of the mechanisms of representative democracy, but more often they signify the need for voice and control over the public sphere. On the other hand, political institutions, especially those directly involved in government and administration, tend to increasingly favor the involvement of citizens in policy planning as they see, in the expansion of decision-making processes, a means both to contain the deterioration of citizen-government relationships and to fight the institutional tendency to adopt inward-looking strategies. The most frequent justifications for citizen involvement invoke more than one rationale (Korfmacher, 2001; Burton, 2003) and invoke political, democratic, ethical, pragmatic and social reasoning. The political justification concerns the need of many government institutions to regain credibility and be trusted by citizens. The democratic rationale stresses citizens' right to participate in the decisions that concern public or common goods, given that citizens are the owners of these goods. The ethical motive emphasizes that participation is intrinsically positive and, therefore, that its promotion and growth is desirable irrespective of any specific purpose. The pragmatic justification highlights that shared decisions are more widely accepted and perceived as more legitimate by the parties involved and that citizens are more committed to such decisions, thereby reducing the likelihood of post-decisional resistance and conflict. Moreover, the pragmatic rationale acknowledges that citizens have a valuable knowledge that can contribute to high-quality decisions and bring innovation to the institutional functioning. Finally, the social motive is based on the belief that citizen participation is likely to contain, and possibly reverse, the decline of social capital by activating community networks and spreading social trust.

In consideration of such justifications for community participation, during the last several decades, many governments have attempted to increase different forms of participatory

governance, entailing cooperation between state institutions and civil society (either as single individuals or organized groups), aimed at managing public affairs. Hence, there has been a rise in the direct involvement of citizens in the formulation of policies in a variety of sectors, from the environment to public health, social services and urban renewal. Some of these participatory experiences have been documented in excellent case studies, some of which resonate deeply with professionals, scholars and policy makers. One prime example is the participatory budgeting in Brazil (Wampler, 2012), one of the earliest and most well-known cases of participatory policy-making, which has also recently been adopted on a regular basis by Peru's government (McNulty, 2011). Additional noteworthy and varied examples of participatory reforms can be found in many developing and developed countries (see for example, the case studies reported in Amerasinghe, Farrell, Jin, Shin, & Stelljes, 2008; Wampler & McNulty, 2011); additionally, there are case studies from India (Isaac & Heller, 2003) Australia (Bishop, Vicary, Browne, & Guard, 2009), South Africa (Botes & van Rensburg, 2000; Hicks & Buccus, 2008) and Europe (Lindgren & Persson, 2011). Despite the growing number of participatory practices around the world, and most likely because of this growth, an extensive comparative review of this heterogeneous and scattered set of cases is lacking and seems unlikely to be conducted in the short-term. The absence of comparative analyses poses significant obstacles to the evaluation of such experiences and in the identification of advantages and drawbacks of participatory policy-making, especially given the influence of the contextual factors and cultural specificities that permeate the different participatory experiences across continents and countries. Due to this peculiar state of the art, analysis of a single aspect of community participation, such as the relationships between the internal agents (IAs) and the external agents (EAs) involved in participatory policy-making, becomes more difficult. However, the aim of this paper is to address this specific issue through the analysis of a set of participatory policy-making experiences that occurred in recent years in Italy.

Participatory policy-making in Italy

Since the European Commission, in the 2011 *White Paper on European Government*, launched a strategy for opening up the policy-making process and getting citizens involved in shaping EU policy, the Italian government has started to include the general principles of participatory governance in its regulatory framework. This shift, which is still in the making and has to confront resistance from the political Italian class, has mainly concerned government institutions at the local level (i.e., municipalities

and regional administrations). Urban regeneration, welfare and the environment are the policy areas that have been most affected by this change. Specifically, after the Italian national government adopted the Agenda 21 program on sustainable development, one of the most noticeable outcomes of the United Nations Rio de Janeiro 1992 conference on Environment and Development, the environmental sector was the first in which local administrations employed participatory practices. Almost at the same time, following input from the European Commission, new legislation was established for urban renewal policies, which required municipalities to involve citizens in consultation and co-planning. The EU supported and funded many of these interventions with specific programs. Finally, in 2000, new national legislation was introduced with completely new rules for the design and the implementation of local welfare services. This reform established the creation of local coalitions, which are formal, multi-sector collaborations within which representatives of diverse community institutions and organizations (e.g., municipalities, public health services, no profit organizations, schools and departments of the judicial circuit) work according to an organizational structure, to plan, implement and evaluate the local welfare system. These local coalitions fall into the category of "governance hybrids" (Himmelman, 2001) insofar as they mix non-governmental and governmental decision-making power in representing diverse stakeholders.

To completely describe the general framework of participatory policy-making in Italy, one more legislative initiative has to be mentioned. In 2007, the regional government of Tuscany promulgated a regional law that set rules for the promotion of participation in the form of regional and local policies. This law, as reported in the institutional website¹, was "proposed as an innovative instrument for encouraging and promoting new forms and new methods of participation, by means of the construction of new participatory institutes, shared pathways and rules for discussing large and small community issues, and the evaluation of possible solutions by means of dialogue and comparison, within an established time-scale, in the preliminary phase prior to the actual decision". By virtue of this law, Tuscany is, at present, the most interesting natural laboratory for studying participatory policy-making processes, and it is also a primary source of documented case studies.

Conflict, power and exclusion

In this paper, I analyze some psychosocial aspects of participatory policy-making in Italy, with specific attention to the relationship between IAs and EAs. In the following, I refer to IAs and EAs according to the definitions proposed by

Montero (2012): “Internal agents are those community stakeholders and leaders, and any other person being part of a specific community demonstrating her or his interest in working in community programs [...] External agents, those who are not part of the communities where they are going to apply a policy, as said, are public officers (professionals, technicians and even desk workers) working for the government. NGOs’ experts or employees, who are specialists working both for the government, through contracts, or for private institutions. Also the people coming from Academia: researchers, instructors working in specific projects and, their students, plus social workers, health workers and, volunteers; interviewers; people making political or generic publicity and propaganda”. I rely both on a review of the documented Italian case studies in a variety of policy areas (Bassoli & Polizzi, 2011; Florida, 2012; Garramone & Aicardi, 2010; 2011; Mannarini, 2004) and on the direct experience I accumulated as an academic and practitioner involved in two case studies (Mannarini, 2012; Mannarini & Fedi, 2013). Almost all the issues that will be addressed as unique to the Italian context have been identified in the international literature on community development, community coalitions or deliberative democracy. I will argue that the majority of the problems that pertain to the relationship between IAs and EAs can also be found within the IAs’ reciprocal relationships with one another and that these difficulties can be attributed to two comprehensive underlying dimensions that characterize all participatory policy-making processes: the paradoxical nature of institutionalized participation and the tense nature of social relationships. This approach, while acknowledging the importance of the IA-EA distinction, to some extent reduces the analytical capacity of such a distinction in the understanding and evaluation of participatory processes aimed at shaping public policies. I will focus on three types of problems that revolve around the main themes of conflict, power and exclusion.

Direct and indirect conflicts

The emergence of unsolved or unsolvable direct conflicts between the parties involved in participatory policy-making practices has been highlighted both in the literature on community coalitions (Chavis, 2001; Himmelman, 2001) and in the more recent literature on the Italian experience of local welfare participatory systems (Cataldi, 2011). These conflicts concern both the relationships between the stakeholders involved (i.e., between IAs) and the relationships between IAs and EAs. When conflicts arise between community stakeholders, they are mainly triggered by the difficulty in meeting different needs, acknowledging different legitimate rights and composing different interests. I will refer to these

types of conflicts as horizontal conflicts to emphasize that they pertain to peer-to-peer relationships. In participatory policy-making processes, these conflicts are more likely to be ignored than recognized and treated. The result of this tendency is that conflict interferes, almost always negatively, with the collaborative process that actors are supposed to be mutually engaged in. What is more alarming is that in some cases EAs – especially public officers – who should serve a guiding function also refrain from managing the conflicts, thereby allowing frictions to continue to grow. Such a tendency reflects the common belief that conflict is the manifestation of a pathology of the social relationship, while, as I will argue hereinafter, conflict is intrinsically part of the social relationship. Vertical conflicts pertain to the relationship between IAs and EAs and can occur for a variety of reasons: different emphasis on process or product (i.e., different goals); EAs’ paternalistic attitudes (Botes & Van Reuteberg, 2000); or mistrust by IAs of the institutional role represented by EAs. In using the adjective “vertical,” I assign a different status to community stakeholders and the other agents insofar as EAs have greater responsibility in the process and the outcomes. Indirect conflicts crosscut both IAs and EAs. Indirect conflicts refer to conflicts that are external to the participatory setting in which agents interact but that exert an influence on the participatory process and on the relationship between the agents involved. A recent instance of participatory decision making in Tuscany (Florida, 2012) provides an excellent example of how the climate in a community torn by a divisive issue (specifically, the construction of a pyrogasifier) can affect the relationship between IAs and EAs. Not only did the ongoing conflict in the community, between those who were in favor of the pyrogasifier and those who opposed to it, impede dialogue between the different views represented in the participatory setting, but this conflict also led the stakeholders to erroneously perceive the EAs who were responsible for the implementation of the policy-making participatory process (i.e., group facilitators and experts) as non-neutral. As a consequence, IAs sheltered themselves behind a defensive position, refusing all EAs’ suggestions to discuss alternatives and divergent opinions. As shown by this example, direct (horizontal and vertical) and indirect conflicts can be interrelated and difficult to untangle, as one conflict is often the cause of the other conflicts.

Power imbalances

The status differences mentioned above for vertical conflicts between IAs and EAs are intertwined with power differences, and like other types of conflicts, apply both to the relationships between IAs and EAs and to IAs’ internal relations. Especially in the case of governance hybrids, such

as those created in Italy for the design and implementation of the local welfare system, power imbalance is one of the factors that contributes most to the marginalization of the non-profit organizations (Gasparre, 2011), perceived by both IAs and EAs as the weakest among all community stakeholders. As effectively noted by Himmelman (2001, p. 278), in a totally different context, “those representing more powerful institutions, agencies, or organizations in these sectors usually establish the power relations within coalitions, and therefore guide/influence which specific issues are addressed and what particular operational processes are utilized. This often results not only in reinforcing existing power relations, but also in restricting efforts by coalition members who want to expand democratic governance and accountability”. Power imbalances have many faces. A reflexive analysis of a participatory community intervention that I was involved in as a practitioner a few years ago highlighted multiple variants of power imbalances (Mannarini, 2012) that apply to the relationship between EAs (e.g., professionals/academics and institutional figures) and IAs (e.g., community stakeholders involved in the participatory policy-making and uninvolved community members). Power in this context refers to EAs influencing or manipulating IAs. This dynamic of influence can be subsumed by the concept of dominance, the capacity of conditioning IAs’ behavior and having control over the context in which IAs operate. Dominance is about deciding who participates (this specific point is addressed in detail in the next section) and who is responsible for the agenda setting (Culley & Hughey, 2008). In communicative terms, dominance is about the amount of speech produced, the introduction of content and the ability to direct and control the other party’s communicative interactions (Linnell, Gustavsson, & Juvonen, 1988). In this perspective, EAs that have the task of leading the decision-making process, or simply coordinating IA actions and discursive interactions, have the power to shape the actual process beyond their intentions. As highlighted by two recent experiences of juries in Italy, this unintentional influence can be exerted even when EAs are merely group facilitators and stakeholders gather together with the sole aim of deepening their knowledge on a community issue or exploring alternative solutions to community problems (Mannarini & Fedi, 2013).

On the reverse side, power is also about IAs having a voice in the decision-making process (i.e., the capacity of IAs to influence EAs such as government institutions). In general terms, the global impact of participatory action on policies is hard to assess, as it is highly dependent on the context in which the actors are embedded. It has been argued that, in many cases, the involvement of IAs is merely tokenistic and that community

stakeholders and citizens do not really affect strategic decision-making (Burton, 2003); however, one could argue that participatory processes are neither useless nor crucial on average (Bobbio, 2002; Font & Blanco, 2007; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). A review of eighteen Italian participatory policy-making experiences (Bobbio, 2007) highlighted such mixed effects. On the one hand, the review showed that government institutions are not always willing to involve community leaders and stakeholders in decision-making processes because they are afraid of losing power. On the other hand, the review noted that the participation of nongovernmental actors to some extent influences administrative procedures but, above all, activates community social capital, revitalizes community networks and prevents community conflicts. Along the same line, a recent study (Allulli, 2011) suggested that substantial effects of community participation on policies can be expected when two conditions are met: the availability of highly institutionalized participatory tools and the presence of community coalitions able to mobilize citizens. Overall, it seems that citizens’ power more often consists of providing recommendations, with no guarantee that the recommendations will be adopted and implemented in a given policy; only in rare cases will recommendations be used for actually “making policy”, and citizens will, therefore, rarely be formally empowered as part of a decision-making process (as in the participatory budgeting experiences) (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006).

Selective participation

Elaborating further on power, the degree of inclusiveness and accessibility of the participatory policy-making process stands out as one more relevant issue. Findings on this topic are controversial. A recently published report on one EU policy-making process concerning chemicals (Lindgren & Persson, 2011), a process in which more than 600 stakeholders representing over 40 countries took part, indicated that, contrary to expectations, the opportunities to participate were “quite evenly” distributed among the various actors. Other studies on different participatory policy-making processes suggest that the opposite is often likely to be the case. Inclusiveness is connected to the degree of representativeness of the actors involved and, thereby, to the degree of legitimization of the decisions that are taken. It has been noted that EAs tend to allow only selective participation from community members (Botes & van Rensburg, 2000) and, further, that EAs themselves are likely to belong to privileged or high-status social groups and cannot be regarded as representatives of the community (Jewkes & Murcott, 1998; Regonini, 2005). Several reasons can impede equal representation by IAs and EAs (Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). One reason is that a

group or a stakeholder may not have the necessary resources to make its 'voice' heard. Alternatively, it may happen that some IAs do not have sufficient credibility to ensure their interests are considered legitimate by policy makers. In addition, it should be noted that participation has certain requirements, in terms of argumentative, cognitive and communicative ability (Mannarini, 2009), as well as time requirement. Because these skills and resources are unevenly distributed in the population, a self-selection effect may also occur. The recruitment of IAs can be distorted either by effects of self-selection or inadequate outreach activities. As a result, a variety of groups and stakeholders may not be included, either due to their own choice or because they do not have the opportunity to participate. Inclusion is a complicated and delicate issue. Based on the principle of affectedness (Hilson, 2006), all IAs affected by the outcomes of a decision should be involved in the decision-making process. However, because the inclusion of all IAs is not feasible at the empirical level, the debate concerns the methods used to select IAs. All the available methods (i.e., random, theory-driven and "open door") present both advantages and drawbacks (Bobbio, 2005). As a paradoxical result, when the open door method is adopted (i.e., no filters are established for participation), those who are more educated and already active in the community's social and political life are more likely to get involved (Freschi & Raffini, 2008). As such, even when EAs want and try to be inclusive, they cannot help but exclude some individuals; voluntary participation has its costs, and it is more the expression of specific community groups' and social categories' interests than the manifestation of "ordinary" citizens' commitment.

A look beneath conflict, power and exclusion dynamics

As attested to by research in diverse countries, conflicts, power imbalances and exclusion are some of the perverse effects of participatory decision-making processes. In my view, the quasi-systematic occurrence of such effects across contexts and actors can be explained by considering two basic features of the participatory policy-making processes: the institutionalization of participation and the inescapable dialogical tension built into any social relationship.

Institutionalized participation as paradox

When a spontaneous behavior such as participation is dislocated from the sphere of personal ties and from the context of community groups and associations and is thrust into the institutional setting, paradoxes are bound to arise. The difference between the type of participation that occurs as a consequence of an internal and

unconstrained motivation among individuals who spontaneously join other individuals on the basis of common goals, values or visions, and the type of participation that occurs as the result of the action of an EA, who purposefully exhorts community actors to collaborate in a policy-making process, was established a long time ago (see among others Meister, 1969). This difference can be better defined as an opposition, so that the very concept of institutionalized participation is considered to be an oxymoron. Institutionalized participation is plagued by the contradiction of being, at the same time, both an opportunity for voices to be heard and opinions to be expressed and a constraint to "what" and "how" actors can do, say or even think. Some have argued that the recent proliferation of the discursive production of participation in the political sphere has resulted in the normalization of the most radical instances (Fischer, 2006). Moreover, discourses have the power to define the identities of participants; as long as participants can accept being defined as "citizens", "users" or "beneficiaries", they can also accept directing their behaviors and thoughts accordingly (Cornwall, 2002). This has led some to harshly criticize top-down forms of participation (Young, 2001; Levine & Nierras, 2007). However, even without agreeing with such a radical view, one cannot deny the paradoxes generated by the institutionalized forms of participation and driven by a dual logic (Quaghebeur, Masschelein, & Nguyen, 2004); such forms of participation are caught in the dilemma of supporting bottom-up processes (e.g., emancipation and self-determination) while at the same time of fulfilling the needs for production, efficiency and effectiveness (Arieli, Friedman & Agbaria, 2009). This dual nature of the institutionalized participatory practices is mirrored in a series of dichotomies that permeate its processes, outcomes and relationships and is at the basis of many of the perverse effects set forth above. The first set of questions concerns the different perspectives adopted by IAs and EAs: How does one reconcile the need for timely products with the unpredictability of the process (including "hitches" represented by conflicts)? How does one guarantee both innovation in knowledge/high-quality outcomes and respect objective constraints? How does one provide for both the efficiency and empowerment of IAs? How does one use the expertise of EAs to support IAs without dominating them or treating them in a paternalistic fashion? How does one increase IAs' participation while, at the same time, having to exclude some of them? There are no unambiguous answers to these questions, which are familiar to most experienced practitioners. As with all paradoxes, those specific to participatory decision-making or policy-making practices also cannot be solved. At best, paradoxes

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can be addressed by excellent EAs constantly seeking balance.

Relationships as dialogical oppositions

Almost all the difficulties that arise in the relationships between IAs and EAs (e.g., miscommunication, manipulation, lack of shared meanings, diversity of interests and goals, mistrust and prejudice, conflict, domination and exclusion) are rooted in the relationships themselves. More precisely, they are rooted in the ambivalent nature of relationships. Every time community stakeholders, community leaders, public officials, practitioners, NGOs activists, academics and similar participants gather together in a coalition, program or participatory policy-making process, opposite tendencies can be observed simultaneously: tendencies towards agreement, consensus and sharing *versus* tendencies towards divergence, separation and disagreement; and

tendencies towards socialization, affiliation and horizontality *versus* tendencies towards hierarchy, dominance and verticality. This tension between acceptance and refusal, understanding and misunderstanding is built into social relationships, so that the various manifestations of this tension can be detected in almost all the examples of participatory democracy. In proposing this conceptualization, I assume two basic tenets of the dialogical approach to social knowledge proposed by Marková (2003). The first tenet posits that the relationship between two subjects (abstractly defined as *Ego* and *Alter*), no matter who they concretely are and what their role is in a given situation, is dialogically oppositive (i.e., it is caught between two opposite forces, one towards inter-subjectivity and reciprocity and the other towards independence and separation).

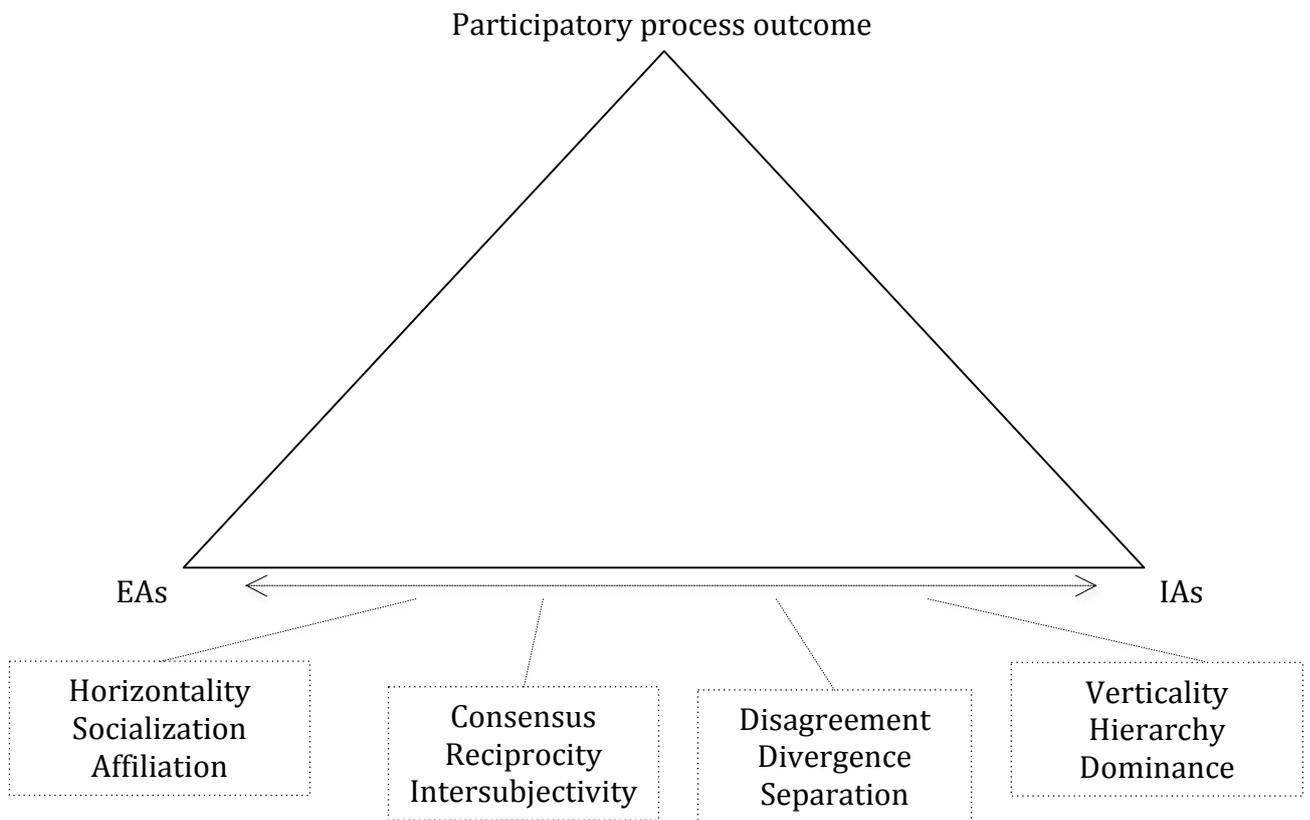


Figure 1. IAs-EAs relationship

The second tenet posits that the dialogically oppositive relationship of the *Ego* and *Alter* generates social knowledge (i.e., collectively shared knowledge and social practices). Figure 1 is an example of how the Ego-Alter triangle can apply to the relationship between IAs and EAs in participatory policy-making. Following this line of interpretation, conflicts or lack of cooperation among actors are neither unexpected nor surprising. On the contrary, it is the unverified assumption that

cooperation is the natural correlate of participation that has to be questioned. We face here one more paradoxical aspect of institutionalized participation: legislation requires actors to cooperate, regardless of their power, role, interests and position, but cooperation is neither a shared prerequisite among actors nor a condition that can be taken for granted, nor is it something that can be achieved because of a prescription. Hence, cooperation is the short

circuit that can develop in relationships between IAs and EAs.

Conclusion

The involvement of citizens in participatory policy-making is becoming an increasingly frequent practice in many developed and developing countries. The reasons for such a shift and the benefits that can result from the dissemination of participatory democracy are easily deducible and attested to by robust empirical evidence. However, every light has its shadow. In this article, I emphasized the problematic nature of the participatory processes, with specific attention to the relationship between IAs and EAs, and suggested for increasing our understanding of the difficulties faced in participatory policy-making, which have been documented in the scientific and gray literature. I suggested that the adverse effects (e.g., conflicts, power asymmetries and unintentional exclusion effects) that arise during participatory processes assume a new and different meaning if they are framed in light of two fundamental characteristics of participatory policy-making: the institutionalization of participation and the inescapable ambivalent nature of social relationships. The key-point of this line of reasoning is that if community psychologists, practitioners, academics and, more generally, EAs involved in community organized participatory processes acknowledge at the onset that such processes entail intrinsic contradictions and paradoxes that are built into institutionalization and relationships, then the adverse effects common to participatory processes will no longer seem adverse; on the contrary, they become expected phenomena, normal manifestations of the participatory process. I can now explore some key learning points and highlight what we as professionals and academics involved in participatory psychosocial interventions could actively consider. As a general premise, we could accept that paradoxes have no solutions and, hence, that we must address contradictions with all our reflexivity. In particular, we could reflect more carefully upon the contradiction between the logic of empowerment and the logic of effectiveness and consider how the logic of effectiveness might lead

to the construction of a normative participatory setting. Once we accept that social relationships are internally damaged, we could stop trying to fix them according to an ideal model of social harmony. Instead, we could take advantage of relationships' tense nature to strengthen inter-subjective forces and strive to no longer view cooperation as a starting point, but rather view it as one, maybe even the most important, result to achieve. Building cooperation requires that the actors involved, IAs and EAs alike, identify a common ground. Defining a common ground, which in the realm of policy is equivalent to defining a public space, has become increasingly difficult as social systems and communities have grown in complexity and internal differentiation. Nevertheless, the following key-questions could orient community work: How does one build a common future starting from the plurality and diversity of claims, interests and identities? Put in psychosocial terms, how does one prevent identities from degenerating in autistic conflict, biases and prejudice? How does one reconcile individual motivations and the defense of collective goods? How does one build shared symbolic and socio-cognitive universes?

The raw materials to work with are the fluid oppositions built into relationships and the wide range of differences and asymmetries that connote actors and their relationships. We could also acknowledge that differences and asymmetries can make cooperation an arduous task and result in inequality and exclusion, but that they can also have positive effects in terms of knowledge innovation. A fruitful learning process can develop when IAs and EAs, insiders and outsiders, and experts and lay people gather in a participatory process. Indeed, the learning potential is likely to be amplified by the heterogeneity of participants, and participants' differences and asymmetries might serve to trigger the learning process (i.e., increasing alternatives and reframing problems). Formulated in these terms, also differences and asymmetries generally considered as undesirable might paradoxically be used to achieve a beneficial goal.

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Received: 05/07/2103
Accepted: 16/11/2014