Capacities, Expertise, Empowerment—Rethinking the Anthropology of Participation
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Abstract
Often studied in the context of political developments and the alleged shift from representative democracy to participatory democracy, participation is discussed here in terms of changes in our anthropological coordinates. The exigencies and expectations of participation are found in many areas that go beyond the political sphere, extending from the business world and its quality circles to the production of self-assembly kits calling for the buyer's assembly skills. This extension of the field of participation is based on a certain number of anthropological presuppositions which ascribe to actors the capacities and competencies they are supposed to have, unless they are invited to enhance them through empowerment strategies in the event that they are failing or insufficient. This paper argues that evaluating people and the configuration of many recent social mechanisms tend increasingly to adjust to this new anthropological paradigm. Such is the case for political participation, new social policies, empowerment training, educational objectives, and development and health policies. Returning more specifically to political participation, the paper shows how these new anthropological coordinates reconfigure by redrawing the division between ordinary and specialized expertise and, in this way, the balance between spaces in which participatory democracy can take place and those that remain confined to technocratic expertise.

1. Introduction

For the past few decades, a good number of political theories informed by the work of Jürgen Habermas have unceasingly and increasingly touted the merits of participation and advocated participative or deliberative democracy as a replacement for or alternative to oft-noted, crisis-ridden representative democracy. There is no shortage of political programs calling for increased participation in a variety of areas ranging from urban planning to participative budgets while bemoaning the weakening of citizenship. Although public action is equipped with many participative mechanisms, their status raises issues of clarity, be it with regard to their credibility, their effective scope or how they are used by political decision makers (Blondiaux, 2008).

Much has been written about this rise in importance of participation in political thought and practice. This thinking often takes the form of questions about the crisis of politics and its ways of doing things. Little thought has been given to the socio-anthropological presuppositions of this turn of events. However, to justify the multiplication of these kinds of mechanisms, one can assume that a certain number of presuppositions about those called upon to participate are necessary: what is expected of participants, what kind of expertise are they presumed to have, etc? Indeed, this is the reasoning employed by Habermas (1987) in his theorization of the "essential assumptions of communicative action", which include the necessary recognition of the responsibility of the actors called upon to participate. Although Habermas's reasoning limited

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itself to the transcendental without really entering into a sociological analysis of the anthropology underlying the current efflorescence of participation, we can at least easily accept the idea that advocating a broadening of participation requires that one acknowledge that the actors called upon to participate have certain capacities and competencies. The latter are both cognitive—e.g., articulating arguments—and ethical—listening to others, grasping the difference between good and bad faith—as well as necessary for the occurrence and credibility of participative events.

Indeed, studies that have not focused on the transcendental but on the empirical dimension of real participative mechanisms have generally stressed the necessary recognition of the everyday expertise of actors and at the same time have questioned the clear distinction between expert and ordinary skills, as illustrated in *Agir dans un monde incertain* (Callon et al., 2001). In this paper, I would like to shed light on the links between the rise and banalization of the justification of participative mechanisms on the one hand and the congruent development of the anthropological coordinates of people invited to "participate" on the other. To be sure, I propose to conduct this investigation without denying the importance of the variable noted above with regard to the weakening of clear distinctions between specialized and ordinary expertise.

Adopting the hypothesis of an alteration of our anthropological coordinates as a means of grasping the rise of participation has an immediate implication: treating the issue of participation in an extended manner and not limiting it to the field of political participation, in contrast to the vast majority of studies on this matter. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the development of these anthropological coordinates only has an impact on the political field and no effect on other areas such as daily life, education, relationship to the body and the work world. In short, my discussion encompasses the general horizon of a development of invitations, solicitations, enjoinders and, indeed, obligations to "participate", "take part in", "be a stakeholder", "become involved", and "become active". In this light, political participation, which will remain the main backdrop of my discussion, will nevertheless appear as one facet of anthropological shifts calling for participation and involvement, the effects of which are felt in many other areas.

2. Able and Competent People, Simultaneously Fragile and Resilient, but Inclined to Autonomy

To grasp the anthropological shifts circumscribing the contours of the current understanding of agency, I will begin by taking a long view. The 18th century Enlightenment left us with anthropological coordinates that include what it means to be a human being in terms of the opposition between agent and patient, action and passion, reason and emotion, autonomy and heteronomy, capacity and incapacity, responsibility and irresponsibility, freedom and determinism, and so on. In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the prevailing anthropology argued that being the agent of one's own actions and a fortiori being a citizen presupposed identification with the first term of these opposed pairs (Genard, 1999; 2009). It is for this reason that certain categories of people were stripped of their rights and were not full citizens. Such was the case for women, who were viewed as being dominated by the emotional dimension of anthropology and who struggled for quite some time to obtain the right vote, to undertake university studies, to have a bank account and, even now, to have the same career opportunities as men. Generally speaking, this anthropology engendered a division of people into
"capable" individuals recognized as having rights on the one side and, on the other, "incapable" individuals—which included women as well as other obvious variants such as the insane, the economically dependent, etc.—were barred from having rights.

The hypothesis I wish to defend is that the interpretation of this same anthropological framework which situates actors within the oppositions mentioned above has evolved slowly. Rather than tending to divide people into those who are capable and those who are not, this interpretation sees individuals as lying between these opposed pairs. Individuals are thus simultaneously "capable" and "competent" and "fragile", "vulnerable" and potentially "suffering" while being "resilient". That is, they are able to take charge or regain control of themselves and are never completely without resources in coping with the vicissitudes of life (Genard, 2009). To be sure, from one person to the next, there are varying degrees of resilience. In this light, the capacity which, in certain respects, objectively identified people in the 19th century is now viewed as a presupposed and fluctuating quality that can increase or decrease and enhance itself or peter out, but also activate or deactivate itself when, for example, people are weakened and experience a loss of empowerment. This dynamic dimension of capacity and competency lies at the heart of the expression *empowerment*, which also includes "enablement", an even more dynamic.

These individuals are characterized by a fragility or vulnerability which can be viewed as constitutive but which for the most part manifest themselves in dealing with the vicissitudes of life because their potential for resilience—which can vary from one person to the next—can be difficult to activate. It is thus necessary that these fragile-but-resilient individuals be in a position to benefit from support, guidance or accompaniment in situations of vulnerability, helping them to rebuild their strengths, capacities and power to act so that they can count on empowerment mechanisms.

At present, it is difficult to measure these anthropological shifts, largely because in reshuffling the cards of these former oppositions, they might upset the once-obvious links between autonomy and emancipation. Because individuals are fragile and vulnerable and because they are pressured to become autonomous, the imperatives imposed upon them to be up to this challenge can be a source not only of emancipation, but also of suffering, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, problematic *rapport à soi* (relationship to oneself), etc. In my view, one of the contributions of care ethics is to very explicitly raise the issue of the potentially destructive impact of the autonomization and activation requirement. Indeed, within the framework of an anthropology of vulnerability, these obligations are all the more weighty inasmuch as they target weak beings. I will return to this issue.

3. **Fragile and Vulnerable, but Invited to Activate Themselves**

This largely and, in my view, descriptive vision of agency that situates it within the fragility-resilience ambivalence is in fact supported by a normative vision of this agency, which for its part is inherited from the Enlightenment and which strongly values the autonomy, activity pole. Indeed, it is these same "fragile", "vulnerable" citizens that are simultaneously called upon to be "active and responsible". Whenever these same citizens drop out and reveal their vulnerability for all to see, they are invited to "act upon themselves" with a view to taking themselves in hand (Vranken, 2006). Whenever they call for social support, the solicitude they will no doubt initially
receive because of their vulnerability will rapidly shift to an environment largely equipped with mechanisms for capacity building, empowerment, enablement or responsibilization (Pattaroni, 2007). These terms, which have invaded our semantic habits, each carry a dynamic dimension that is absent in terms such as capacity, ability and responsibility.

This anthropology tends in fact to stress grasping agency with what linguists call the actualizing dimensions of activity and sociology of action the dispositional dimensions of action—i.e., in linguistic terms, know-how and can-do, and in the more widespread terms of action theory, competencies and capacities. Herein lies the ambiguity of this anthropology which both presupposes and acknowledges agents' capacities and competencies on the one hand and, on the other, is willing to allow them to have a certain degree of fragility while at the same time holding them responsible both for maintaining these capacities and competencies and for what they enable or would enable them to do as a consequence of their dispositional dimension. In short, because capacity and competency are dispositional—"can do" and "can act" for capacities and, to use current operational definitions, "know-how" and "life skills" for competencies—, individuals are always potentially called upon to do more, to be held responsible for what they have done and, to be sure what they could have done or been but did not do or be. As noted by linguists, Chomsky (1965) in particular, "competencies" are always oriented towards "performance".

For my purposes, this distinction between "competencies" and "capacities", the dispositional dimension of which I noted above, on the one hand, and "performance" with its corresponding outcome dimension, on the other, is very important. Indeed, capacities and competencies, which are internal in nature, can only be verified if they are externalized in observable performances. Within the framework of "governance by indicators", which is used as much in public policy assessment as in management practices, it is performances that are the most directly translated into indicators as traces or symptoms of capacities and competencies. As such, the competency catalogues that frame educational progress and professional competency assessments are based on measures of attained or expected outcomes. A quick search on Google, for example, will suffice to note the structure of competency catalogues or assessments to realize that this pathway going from competencies and capacities towards the construction of concretely observable indicators makes it possible to verify them (Genard and Cantelli, 2010). Without developing this point within the limited confines of the present article, it is through this articulation with its performative dimension that the new dispositional anthropology moves into phase with governance by indicators, this new face of rationalization precisely aimed at assessing individuals.

4. An Anthropology of Potentiality: Developing One's Enablements, Capacities and Competencies

In light of the examples given above, the reader might well think that this article is above all focused on social support mechanisms. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Robert Castel (1981) chronicled the appearance of "therapies for the normal" in the 1960s. These therapeutic regimens were intended for people who could by no means be characterized as having a mental pathology, but who willingly sought out psychological support either for their malaise or angst, to simply work on themselves or for their "personal comfort". Today, this space is increasingly occupied by enablement "therapies" or, rather, training, illustrated by very popular empowerment
training sessions. This training has gradually taken the place of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) training and the Gordon Method which held sway in the 1980s and 1990s. In a similar vein, the current rise of coaching should also be mentioned, be it in the form of support to schools attended by well-off children or in the form of support possibilities offered to public- and private-sector managers.

These new anthropological coordinates centred on a dynamic understanding of the dispositional dimensions of personality are in fact part of the fibre of various social spaces. They cut across political stripes, even though they are aimed at divergent outcomes. I limit myself here to providing a few quick illustrations below, but which could be multiplied indefinitely. In education, for example, since the 1960s and 1970s, programs have been defined in terms of capacities: "The student will be able to..." can be read in every line and, more recently, the European Union encourages education systems under its authority to develop "competency catalogues". Continuing with the educational field, former "gifted children" have been renamed as individuals with "high potential". In the business sector, hiring and careers are marked by competency profiles or reviews that are strongly linked to employability. For its part, neo-management seeks to base itself on mechanisms, such as quality circles, that invite the participation of workers and employees whose skills are mobilized with a view to improving performance (Charles, 2012). As noted above, there is no shortage of social policies that have traded in former Social state mechanisms for mechanisms of capacity building and of enablement of the social State, now viewed as "active". In simultaneously serious and ironic terms, let me note that the Barak Obama's "Yes we can" election slogan was used to stir up crowds and printed on millions of t-shirts.

Obviously, it would be impossible not to mention the extraordinary present-day success of the concept of empowerment. It emerged out of American emancipation movements (African Americans and feminists) in the 1960s, and is currently found in managerial semantics and practices as well as at the heart of the justification of capability policies advocated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on the heels of work by Amartya Sen (Cantelli, 2013). In this connection, the notion of empowerment is very explicitly focused on an emancipative ambition fostering political and other forms of participation, stakeholders, and the implementation of participative mechanisms, themselves vectors of empowerment. The excerpt below from a Canadian website is well worth noting given its significance in terms both of laying out empowerment along the lines of what I call dispositional anthropology and its representation of emancipative virtues of empowerment as well as the links between them—the participation and anthropological coordinates of a "successful" person.

In fact, the process of developing empowerment enables us to go from a state of powerlessness to act on what is important to us (or the group) to a state of empowerment. The simultaneous development of its three components (each fuelling the others) around participation, the central vector, enables the development of empowerment. These components are:

- **Self-esteem** (or acknowledgement in the case of organizations), especially the acknowledgement of one's capacities,
• **Critical awareness**, that is, understanding that the problems experienced by people, groups and organizations also have structural causes upon which we can act, and

• **Competencies**, that is, the knowledge, know-how and life skills actors will need to participate and above all to be able to choose-decide-act for change.²

Going further in the normative spectre encompassed by the notions of empowerment and enablement, social critique itself was able to rewrite itself into the vocabulary of capacity. In this regard, Bernard Stiegler, evoking Sen, argues:

...but it is both public and private organizations that have lost all credibility—and so it goes because this society has led to a process of generalized incapacitation. Sen shows that mortality rates are higher in Harlem than in Bangladesh because in this very poor country, social structures have not been destroyed and because what Sen calls the "capacitation" of individuals and groups is still quite present. For our part, we are living in a time of incapacity—and we feel increasingly powerless because we tend to become structurally incapable...capacity reconstruction must become the priority of priorities (Stiegler, 2012).

This same emancipative and critical use of the concept of empowerment is noted in Nikkah and Redzuan (2009):

Empowerment can be defined as the process by which individuals, groups, and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals, thereby being able to work towards maximizing the quality of their lives. Empowerment is the ability of individuals to gain control socially, politically, economically, and psychologically through (1) access to information, knowledge, and skills; (2) decision-making; and (3) individual self-efficacy, community participation, and perceived control. In other words, it is a process of change by which individuals or groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives.

Through these simultaneously convergent and admittedly heterogeneous illustrations, I hope to have convinced the reader of the breakthrough of what I call potential or dispositional anthropology. If this hypothesis is borne out, it would call for a review of the hypotheses that witnessed the emergence in the 1960s and 1970s of an anthropology of authenticity, that is, an anthropology of the "expressive me" in reference to Taylor's (1998) thought. With regard to this emerging anthropology, it is less a case of being oneself or of expressing what one has as such, than of equipping oneself or enhancing one's dispositions so as to open oneself to action. Indeed, present-day enablement training is far removed from freeing inner-self spaces (primal shout and Reichian therapies) characteristic of the 1960s-1970s' work on the self model. The interpretative focus of this model is based on a presupposition of repression or diversion of a will that it seeks to free and to make it possible to act in an authentic and spontaneous manner, to use the Nietzschean expression, so that people can be what they are. Although in both cases, the

objective is to increase self-confidence, there are some important differences. In the earlier case, the objective is to find or recover oneself and to look inside oneself as a means of overcoming the various obstacles to being what we are. In the later case, the objective is focused more on self-externalization, that is, on enhancing one's capacity for involvement in the world, be it for instrumental ends in terms of employability and performance, as well as capacity for social contestation, or more generally to increase one's capacity for action in daily life. In other words, the second case is focused more on self-externalization in relations with others and the world than on gazing inwards. The current success of the term *assertiveness* illustrates this change. Indeed, people are increasingly "assertive", that is, they are sufficiently self-confident to accept others and to non-aggressively affirm themselves in their relations with others. The backdrop to this work on the self is built less on a "therapeutic" emphasis than on a focus on what I would refer to as "learning".

5. Being Motivated, Self-motivation, Struggling against Demotivation

This said, since these faculties are dispositional or potential which, as I noted, call for performance, they must be activated. Therein lies the complementary dimension to enablement, namely, activation or motivation, which no longer entails the actualising notions of "know-how" and "can-do", but the virtualizing notion of "want-to-do". Motivation and activation are thus the complementary counterpoints to capacity and competency building. Indeed, Lacourt's (2007) work carried out in public social action centres in Brussels clearly reveals the spontaneous forms of classifying people in active social States. These forms are presented in a double-entry table, one of which is a mixture of capacities and competencies, and the other focused on motivation. Similarly, in businesses and organizations, several strategies are implemented for self-motivation and to motivate personnel. Moreover, psychologists have no shortage of tricks and recipes for developing and maintaining a "positive spirit", the prerequisite of motivation. Indeed, one would be justified in thinking that the demotivation "scourge" in today's world is the embodiment of a "weakness of the will", the persistence and metamorphoses of which in Western culture were studied by Ogien (1993).

A contemporary anthropological figure emerges out of these comments. As I suggested, it is no longer that of Taylor's ethics of authenticity, nor that of Boltanski and Cahiapello's (1999) artist-critic or Giddens's (1994) and Beck's (2001) flexible individual. This figure is deeply marked by ambivalence with an acknowledgement of fragility and constitutive vulnerability on the one side and, on the other, the exigencies of activation and self-involvement and, to this end, calls for maintaining and nurturing dispositional capacities – mobilising, exploiting, accompanying and so on. On this latter side, there is thus an accentuation of the call for autonomy, though underpinned by the value accorded to dispositional capacities and competencies which one can mobilize if one has them, maintain if there is a danger they might wither, and enhance if they fail or are in short supply. Moreover, as a kind of response to this anthropology of empowerment, the most explicitly thematized perspective by care ethics, which is stressing the passive rather than the active side of anthropology, adopts a framework of vulnerability. As such, it also attempts to measure the suffering or harm caused by the autonomy and activation requirement, especially when it applies to predominantly fragile and vulnerable agents or in situations in which imposing activation could be harmful to those for whom it is intended and would thus become oppressive. In short, it is largely under the normative sway of autonomy, though nuanced by attention to
vulnerability and to the harm that is caused at times by the autonomy requirement, especially to those who can't take it anymore, are at the end of their rope, and towards whom there is a requirement of solicitude. It is precisely for these fragile populations that "humanitarian" mechanisms are being developed in a manner that is both complementary to and at a remove from activation mechanisms. As is the case with the Restos du Coeur,\(^3\) for example, these humanitarian mechanisms neither require nor ask for anything in exchange for what they provide whereas activation mechanisms increasingly impose conditions.

6. A "Potentialized" Environment—Seizing the Opportunity

It is one thing to adhere to a dispositional anthropology or to develop an "enablement", and another thing to find occasions for this enablement to be put into practice. My hypothesis is that, in addition to the anthropological shifts noted above, we are also witnessing two processes.

Firstly, we are witnessing the rise in importance of a conception of the world that is not an anthropology but, rather, a "cosmology" potentialized in terms of an environment described as being replete with uncertainties, opportunities to be seized, risks to be taken, and so on. In short, it is filled with "opportunities" and "potentialities" in a manner that is entirely congruent with the liberal market economy and, perhaps even more so, to the characteristics of connectionist neocapitalism. The current success of Gibson's (1977) concept of "affordance" is extremely significant in this regard. Affordances are an integral part of Gibson's ecological conception of action, in which they feature as "action possibilities" presented or offered by the environment. Moreover, these possibilities function as much as opportunities as impediments.

Secondly, we are seeing the implementation of mechanisms designed in terms of potentiality. These non-constraining, incentive mechanisms frame the opportunities which each of us will or will not seize, thereby participating in the potentialization of the environment. In the field of public action, many theoretical explanations of recent changes suggest a trend in this direction. Among these explanations, Morand (1999) discusses advances in laws related to public policies while noting the rise in what he calls the incentivizing State which operates via non-constraining avenues and which implements regulated mechanisms. These latter provide citizens with "action possibilities" coupled with the possibility of gains for people themselves (e.g., fiscal incentives, bonuses for insulating buildings) or for communities (e.g., waste-sorting initiatives), unless, as if often the case, the two converge. In his explanations, Morand discusses, for example, the multiplication of "recommendations", "guidelines stripped of obligations" or "the creation of institutions stripped of decision-making authority" (1999: 165-170). Moreover, he links this development with the extensively analyzed shift from a government-type regime to a governance-type regime. In the same vein, one could note Hannerz's (1980) and Joseph's (1998) work which invited urban planning to rethink urban design within the framework of serendipity – an expression which has also come to prominence – which includes the presence of unexpected opportunities that actors only need to seize.

By linking the anthropological shifts I noted above with these developments in interpreting the environment, we can speak in terms of the emergence of a "potentialized cosmo-anthropology" which is only partly explained by sociological hypotheses that see the emergence of a more

\(^3\) "Restaurants of Love", a French charity that distributes food and hot meals to the needy.
flexible (Giddens, 1994), liquid (Bauman, 2007) or connectionist or contingent (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) world. It stands in contrast to the stable, highly-institutionalized world described as much in terms of social structures by functionalist and systemic sociology as in terms of identities by sociologies of roles. Both of these sociologies dominated the theoretical landscape for the better part of the 20th century.

7. From Dispositional Anthropology to Participation

I would now like to extend these anthropological considerations by focusing more specifically on the relationships between the dispositional cosmo-anthropology described above and participation.

Once expertise—competencies and capacities—is in some way divided or dispersed across an anthropological continuum, the sharp boundary between experts and non-experts tends to blur in certain areas (especially those that might require ordinary skills, as we will see below). Let me say once again that such is the case in urban policies, socio-cultural policies, social policies and development policies, among others, which by no means prevents these spaces from becoming sites of struggle among different kinds of competency or between public competencies and technical competencies (Genard, 2005). Callon, Lacoumes and Barthe (2001) describe this site of struggle and draw out the hybrid forums in which ordinary people are able to enhance their capacities and competencies or simply to assert their value vis-à-vis those who are a priori acknowledged as experts. However, there are areas grounded on specialized skills which cannot be rivalled by ordinary competencies—e.g., monetary, financial or economic policies. These divisions, which obviously fluctuate or be contested, circumscribe spaces of participation for those that do not flourish in them and thus remain the prerogative of expert competencies.

To shed light on these relationships, it could be useful to examine Thévenot's (2006) regimes of engagement: familiar engagement, the individual level and public engagement. The distinction he makes here makes it possible to understand the sense in which competencies and capacities are not of a piece.

8. From Ordinary Expertise to Participation

We all have competencies and capacities which can be described as "ordinary". We are all "experts in ourselves" with regard to our daily activities, to those close to us and to our immediate environment. This expertise is in some ways maintained and nourished by the quotidian. It is precious and can and should be mobilized whenever its "objects" are at stake. In fact, in light of Thévenot's work, this ordinary expertise encompasses what could be termed "proximate territories" or "spaces of the familiar".

To be sure, the quotidian occupies a significant place in these proximate territories. It is for this reason that architects cannot do without the expertise of their clients in organizing and managing their day-to-day activities. Doing so lends value to work performed by independent architects versus the standardization entailed by "turnkey" work. One could say, rather, it requires "turnkey" work to adapt itself to the exigencies of this ordinary expertise by rewriting the terms of the standardization in a logic that both authorizes and fosters individual adaptations and
flexibility. In my view, it would be interesting to examine the rise of household do-it-yourself work with regard to this process of recognizing the value of ordinary competencies and capacities. Indeed, the home improvement industry completely redesigned the boundaries between and separation of professional and ordinary competencies. IKEA and home improvement stores acknowledge these capacities and invite us to use them, all the while offering us products to enhance them. The development of gardening, including vegetable gardening, is another example of this phenomenon. The times thus favour the rediscovery and reactivation of lost competencies and capacities which were once inherent in domestic space—e.g., cooking and, more recently, knitting, with the underlying hypothesis of the re-conquest of slowly atrophying competencies. The relationship to one's body obviously occupies an important place in this proximate territory. Advice-oriented media unceasingly advocate what could be called "listening to one's body", intended to create or awaken a sensitivity to oneself which has gradually become lost or weakened. Health policies now seek to base themselves on the responsibilization of people, that is, on their capacity to contribute to healthcare (Périlleux, 2007).

It must be noted here that this process of acknowledging ordinary competencies becomes at the same time a potential tool for diagnosing a competency shortfall, something that can perhaps best be exemplified in the area of children's education. One the one hand, this space is filled with tools for building or improving these competencies by way of advice-oriented media or literature. On the other hand, "failures" of children's education lead to processes of stigmatization of parents or to support mechanisms for parents deficient in or fragile with regard to typically "ordinary" educational competencies. A similar situation characterizes household finances with an array of mechanisms for managing over-indebtedness.

However, this field of proximate territories is not limited to the domestic sphere. The work world also has proximate territories, in which ordinary competencies intrinsically lined to this familiar environment are developed and mobilized. Neo-management implements instruments, such as quality circles, to integrate ordinary competencies related to practice and familiarization with a proximate environment in the work world. In a similar vein, if we extend what is meant by familiar environment to the neighbourhood scale, residents' ordinary expertise with regard to their neighbourhood is a potential asset for urban policies at this level.

9. Is Citizenship an Ordinary Competency? Capacitating Citizenship

If we turn our attention to Thévenot's public engagement regime, we enter another area in which we find what could be called citizenship competencies. The acknowledgement of these competencies is in some ways inherent in Tocqueville's (1992) notion of a democratic regime, although he had already noted that this regime was prey to demobilization and apathy.

By observing the development of analyses of participation, we can schematically note a first period characterized by analyst enthusiasm, especially through Habermasian interpretative lenses, for an anticipated shift from a waning representative democracy towards a deliberative or participative democracy filled with promise. This optimism was clearly based on the presupposition that the citizens called upon to participate had the necessary qualities to do so. Habermas is often criticized for the illusory nature of this ideal speech situation because of
positional inequalities of the agents concerned. As such, the rational value of the "best argument" highlighted in Habermas's transcendental theorizations overlooked the relative strengths of those defending one point of view or another in concrete discussions.

Following this somewhat euphoric period, the 1990s gave way to largely critical analyses that insisted for the most part on the illusory nature of these participative mechanisms that occluded forms of power such as those described in the Foucauldian notion of "governmentality". These criticisms draw out the force relations operating within these mechanisms which reproduce traditional force relations under the cover of equality of access to speech. Over and above force relations stemming from social positions, other analyses focus more directly on competency differentials among the actors involved in participative processes (Berger, 2009; Berger et al., 2001).

In my view, it is from this perspective that the appearance of demands for citizenship training must in part be understood. In particular, this training has been introduced into school curricula and integrated into changes to cultural policies intended to train "active, responsible citizens", an expression that has become a commonplace in which the tension between engagement requirements and assuming responsibilities plays out. It thus sums up the dual pressure weighing on citizens: they are invited to participate but also to act in a civil- and civic-minded manner.

Within this space of citizenship, which carries with it the new anthropological coordinates, the contours of which I attempted to sketch above, there is thus a call for acknowledging citizenship competencies and for amplifying the possibilities for their actualization. In short, there is a call for the development of participative processes vis-à-vis representative democracy, the very principle of which is to undervalue or at the very least to prevent the actualization of these competencies. At the same time, however, and still in light of these new anthropological coordinates, there is a call to exert a dual pressure on citizens. This latter takes the form of a sort of obligation, pressure or enjoinder to participate and of pressure for ongoing training in and maintenance and enhancement of these citizenship competencies in addition to the responsibilization of public authorities with regard to these same competencies. A variety of phenomena support these new anthropological coordinates: the development of citizen's information practices, the multiplication of possibilities for them to express their points of view, citizenship training for future citizens – children within the framework of their school curriculum and immigrant populations who want to acquire citizenship, citizens who for one reason or another have been stripped of their civic rights or citizens whose behaviour displays a "responsibility" deficit, be they "uncivic"-minded drivers or parents overwhelmed by educational responsibilities, etc.

This said, acknowledging citizen competencies does not exclude the boundary between ordinary competencies and expert competencies which I noted above. In other words, rather than seeing a shift towards deliberative or participative democracy, we are witnessing a divide between a participative democracy confined largely to the territories of ordinary competencies – that is, those in which competencies related to proximate territories are mobilized – and a democracy that remains linked to representation and expert competencies in the other spaces. It is thus both

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4 It should be noted than many criticisms are misguided inasmuch as they overlook the fact that, for Habermas, this situation was a guiding ideal and by no means an empirical reality.
trivial and necessary to insist on the fact that defence policies, monetary policies, economic policies, pension policies and so on are very largely insensitive to advances in participative democracy. However, one of the present day's important political issues concerns the movements within the tensions between shared competencies and expert competencies and between public competencies and technical competencies.

Moreover, there are relations of reciprocity between participation and empowerment. Participation is not merely viewed in terms of acknowledging citizenship competencies, but also, and in a kind of circular manner, in terms of activating and forming these same competencies at the same time as this participation calls for the implementation of training mechanisms and accompaniment for their operation. This kind of empowerment equips the actors invited to participate with the necessary capacities and competencies to ensure that participation is effective and not illusory. At the same time, participation is itself conceived as a means of empowerment in constituting "active and responsible" citizens. The foregoing could explain the trend towards the instrumentalization of participation, the objective of which is not to create a space of co-decision making and even less to transfer decision-making spaces, but simply towards inviting citizens to become involved as a means of "activating" them.

10. Specialized Expertise and the Spectre of being "Jettisoned"

As I noted above, the capacities and competencies required in many areas are no longer viewed as ordinary capacities and competencies. They are specialized competencies which, for their part, are neither shared nor "naturally" maintained and thus quickly lose their edge, which explains the importance of permanent, ongoing training, for example, as well as the enabling mechanisms proposed by social policies characteristic of active social States. Specialized competencies, the teaching of which is clearly identified in school curricula and which, as I noted above, because of pressure from the European Union are increasing, being systematically developed within the framework of competency catalogues. As such, diplomas and degrees are viewed as guarantees that graduates have the duly itemized and indexed competencies required for performing their job.

In light of the foregoing hypothesis, the territories of specialized competencies, especially those found in Thévenot's space of individual-level engagement, only open themselves with great difficulty, if at all, to participation, with the exception of mechanisms that seek to integrate the resources acquired by actors in their proximate territories, as is the case with quality circles and small-scale urban planning participation. However, the largely prevailing tendency in these areas is essentially a constant pressure to maintain, renew, improve and continually assess competencies. This pressure weighs heavily on "experts", that is, those who have a specialized competency at some point in time and who are therefore required to maintain and improve it, stay abreast of their competitors, etc.

Because they are specialized, the acquisition processes of capacities and competencies leads quite directly to a division between those that have them and those that do not. The horizon of competencies and capacities acts like an identity marker making it possible to judge people's worth on what Thévenot views as the individual plan and what I refer above to as "governance by indicators". Actors are constantly measured and assessed in light of their competencies and
capacities. Should there be a shortfall in this regard, they will be punished or at the very least invited to make up for this lag or inadequate adaptation. Through performance validation, competencies and capacities serve as measures of individual adequacy or worthiness, as is their competency profile when they are hired by an organization. Indeed, we can expect that the competency catalogues that circumscribe their basic training prepare them for this kind of evaluation.

In this light, maintaining competency levels is particularly taxing because those who must undergo this process live under the permanent spectre of being evaluated and then being jettisoned or eclipsed by younger people, more competent people, better motivated people, better trained or educated people, or by those who have the courage to take training sessions throughout their lives.

By Way of a Conclusion

I hope that the foregoing discussion has convinced the reader of the relevance of examining the issue of participation through the lens of a shift in our anthropological coordinates and by this token ceasing to think of participation by limiting it to the area of political participation, as was generally the case in earlier times. By enacting this shift, the enjoinder to participate is part of a global phenomenon based on an anthropological conception according to which human beings should clearly be viewed in terms of the tension between autonomy and vulnerability, and more particularly within the normative framework of activity and performance.

The 19th century legacy of dividing people as a function of capacities objectively defined once and for all is being replaced by a dynamic division in which capacities and competencies must be constantly maintained, enhanced and demonstrated. In light of calls to perform well and to participate, people are constantly inundated with appeals that require them to remain fine tuned but which also constantly expose them to the risk of dropping out or the demonstration of their insufficiencies. Social or other support typical of the 19th century, which was paternalistic in nature with its attendant potential for mistrust, has gradually adapted to these new coordinates, oscillating between accompaniment and responsibilization pressure.

It is within this framework that the omnipresence of the participation imperative emerges – participating as a citizen, as a social welfare recipient, as a patient, as a student, as a worker, and so on. Only those spaces governed by specialized competences can justify the withdrawal of those only having ordinary competencies. To be sure, the latter will certainly be invited to lend a hand in ensuring the success of what those with specialized competencies have decided for them.

REFERENCES


