

Bartels, K. P. R. (2012). Communicative capacity: How public encounters affect the quality of participatory democracy. Glasgow: University of Glasgow.

Main research question: How do **public encounters** affect the quality of **participatory democracy**?

Line:

A fundamental change in the meaning of **democracy**. Although policy making in complex networks of agencies and some degree of citizen participation in decision making had already been part of modern government for decades (Rhodes, 1988), that system ultimately still relied on the primacy of policies. Now, however, democracy had come to mean something else: i.e. the influence of non-elected individuals and agencies was no longer seen as undemocratic but rather as key ingredient for democracy (Hoppe, 2011, pp. 167-168).

Elstub (2010): distinction between three generations of debate (on participatory democracy):

First generation:

radical alternative to representative democracy (+ direct participation of citizens and other stakeholders in public policy processes).

Second generation: (zie ook Habermas): decision making only truly legitimate if it is based on deliberation. The 'deliberative turn'.

Which ideals could guarantee the resolution of intractable problems in a world defined by difference (Mouffe, 1992, Benhabib, 1996)?

= a normative debate: two basic views:

procedural view: requires ideal procedures.

substantive view: need also guiding values.

In response: critiques: + value pluralism. Taking difference as a starting point. "Dealing with difference should not reduce it but bridge it."

Mouffe (2000): Theory of radical pluralism.

This normative debate continues until today. But:

Third generation: shift from a normative to an empirical level. "How to achieve....deliberative theory in practice" (Elstub, 2010, p. 291).

Empirical literature: far from conclusive how participatory democracy works in different contexts.

Question arisen: What is the added value of public encounters for participatory democracy?

Crucial: these policies do not question the system of part. democr. or the value of participation itself, but rather, the added value of citizens and public professionals coming together.

Debate: difficulties in closing the gap theory/practice

Literature on public encounters growing but: not on the encounter itself.

Narrative / storyline:

public encounters portrayed as a key ingredient for development of strong democracy
-> in practice: weaker version than intended

added value was questioned
thin democracy to strong democracy -> a fundamental change in the meaning of democracy (the influence of non-elected individuals and agencies not longer seen as undemocratic but: key requirement for democracy (Hoppe).

-> public encounters

empirical research: in practice

at best: add on to traditional government

result: question the added value

How we might meaningfully study public encounter?

Look at **communicative capacity** (only broadly defined, different fields different meaning + confused with other terms).

But distinct phenomenon: "resident staking part in public decisions and activities that affect the quality of their lives in their direct environment (area, neighborhood of community), and doing so regular contact with local professionals working in that area" (Fung & Wright, 2003).

It differs from: the types of local civic conduct captured by theories of social movements or community activism.

Main driver: of this conceptualisation of participation + adjective 'community'
Refers to participation in a certain geographical location, or to the participation of a collection of people with some kind of shared cultural heritage, social ties, interests of experiences. In both sense, this modern usage is particular, historically bound and influenced, normative view on what community is, was, and should be (Delanty, 2003).

Main source of inspiration: communitarianism (philosophical stream) which "sees the community as the site of moral norms and obligations, of responsibilities as well as rights (Taylor, 2003, p. 39) and believes it to be a superior alternative, or "third way", to the state and the market for solving modern public problems (Etzioni, 1995; Giddens, 2000).

Main criticism: unrealistic and optimistic depictions and expectations of 'community' (Little, 2002; Amin, 2005).

Valuable locus for examining the nature and added value of public encounters in concrete contexts?

Concept of **public encounter**

Start: Charles Goodsell (The Public Encounter: Where State and Citizen meet, 1981).

Signaled: the pervasive influence of encounters with public professionals on the daily lives of citizens.

Traditionally: Max Weber main point of reference: regulated by formal responsibilities and moral obligations (Weber, 1922).

Initially: studied as / focus on consequences of bureaucratization (field of organization studies. More recently: digital encounters. Anthropology and political science: bureaucratization and corruption (Miller et al., 2001).

Alternative models: attacking the traditional model of bureaucracy. Not debate on public encounters per se.

Lipsky (1980) study on street level democracy concrete situations and problems, coping mechanisms, became hallmark of many empirical analyses -> ongoing debate on discretion. First problematic (democratic control). But positive view (creative, deliberative and informed judgement (Wagenaar 2004) -> inspired analyses of the narratives of front line professionals -> public encounters not a mere matter of service delivery but vital element of democratic governance. In this view: public encounters: nurturing personal relationships and constructive communication. Equally empowered

No recent study uses the concept of public encounters.

The understandings of public encounters seems to be locked in individualist ontology in which people are seen as separate beings and 'public professionals' and 'citizens' form fixed social positions (Stout & Staton, 2011)

Alternative: relational ontology: people are intrinsically connected in ongoing interactional processes in which they constantly and inescapably 'interweave' into something different by the very process of meeting (Follet, 1919, 1924).

This renders it futile to look at an encounter in terms of "I" and "you"; it is the "I-Thou" (Buber, 1970), encounter (Anderson et. Al., 2004).

Relational approach: "what public professionals and citizens are able to do is the product of the quality of the ongoing interactional process through which they encounter each other" (Stout & Staton, 2011)

Particular qualitative process:"with the particular texture of contextual interaction or contact and a kind of mutual learning through activity and interaction that such contact provides...which exists as a relational possibility in concrete settings (Campbell Rawlings & Catlaw, 2011, P. 51)

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Findings:

demonstrate: the quality of part. dem. depends not just on the ability of citizens and public professionals to manage the substance, but more fundamentally the process of their communication.

Link met SI (?): public professional and citizens can enhance the added value of their encounters by not only focussing on how to link their participatory institutions to local problems (substance) but rather on the ways they communicate about the work in progress (process) of their setting.

Communicative capacity can lead to workable institutional designs if local actors are willing to start seeing institutional design as an ongoing work in progress (p. 157).

Further research:

Ethnographic research could be used to conduct micro-analyses of the communicative practices local actors use when they meet each other.

Concept 'process' deserve more exploration.

The concept of process has for long been the focal point of process philosophy (Rescher, 1996) and has recently entered debates in public administration and public policy (Cook & Wagenaar, 2011; Stout & Staton, 2011; Wagenaar & Cook, 2011).

Application of the concept of process in methodology and empirical analyses is still relatively young.

Need: deeper understanding of the implications of process for social reality and our knowledge of it.

+ Central challenge for future research on participatory democracy, as well as policy making and politics more in general, remains the design and application of "methods that enable the analyst to register ...the give-and-take between the initial expectations and preconceptions of the individual subject and the way the world talks back to him" (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 62).