

REPORT

Beyond a Minimal Democracy

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Table 5

Participatory Practices at Scale: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

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Overview

Participants from various fields, including academia, sociology, political studies, international studies, and arts & culture, introduced themselves before delving into the discussion. The initial focus was on stakeholders' interests in participation processes and their understanding of scale in determining mediation's responsibility. The group also discussed concepts such as participation, community, territory, and local vs global civic action to formulate recommendations for building participatory practices.

Current Situation and Challenges

The discussion began by acknowledging the potential of participation to empower people and construct their collective identity. However, participation processes are often complex, time-consuming, and resource-intensive. Limited resources and motivations of both people and organizers can hinder political participation. The public often perceives that their inclusion in decision-making has little impact on policies, leading to a need to strengthen trust in democratic systems and the value of public participation. The concept of participation as a bridge between citizens and the public, with the potential involvement of third-sector organizations, was emphasized.

The perception of scale, particularly in thinking globally and acting locally, was discussed. Participants agreed that people find it easier to relate to decisions impacting a smaller, relatable scale than a global and abstract one. Defining what 'local' means and identifying local-global connections and impacts on opinions or votes proved challenging.

The concept of 'local' was explored further, considering its connection to territory and community. Stephen Shalom's participatory political system suggested a representation of local voting councils, each with 25 to 50 individuals. The sense of territory and community belonging was identified as crucial for empowering citizens to address local issues.

The group recognized that citizens may feel engaged with issues but lack the tools and knowledge to act. Communities play a vital role in disseminating information, initiating dialogue, and facilitating citizens' awareness. Transparency and neutrality in participatory processes, monitored by neutral organizations, professionals, and practitioners, were deemed essential for gaining citizens' trust.

Recommended Steps

1. Ensure that issues discussed in participatory processes are locally visible, concrete, and tangible to enhance citizen involvement;
2. Foster a sense of community belonging to drive local participatory action;
3. Establish structured participatory and collaborative institutionalized practices between citizens and public administration;
4. Identify independent and neutral organizations to monitor participatory processes at different levels;
5. Empower citizens in monitoring, evaluating, and setting the agenda for participatory practices;
6. Establish formal guarantees throughout the entire cycle of public policies within the implementation of participatory processes' results;
7. Redefine time and identify its limits in local participatory processes;
8. Utilize participatory processes to increase dialogue and trust among stakeholders controlling local issues.