

ON PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND CITIZEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN EUROPE AND IN THE WORLD

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Abstract

Participatory democracy proves the active presence of citizens in social life and shows that people are not indifferent to the major problems that affect their daily life.

In general, citizen involvement has been strictly manifested in voting, but the last decades have brought a new image of citizen's involvement in the good course of society,

Realizing the transition from the democracy of elites to popular democracy, the citizen's involvement succeeded to transform the present society into a world of equals, thing that once was just a dream.

The current involvement of NGOs or of ordinary people, politically non-affiliated, in the life of society represents a new chance for many to manifest their attitude towards major social problems.

Keywords: *citizens, involvement, society, rights.*

Introduction

Democracies have developed a “sense of crisis regarding levels of civic engagement and their own legitimacy, prompting government initiatives to reform the institutions and procedures of liberal democracy to provide more opportunities for political participation and bring citizens back in” [1].

Democratizing the Union is of utmost importance in order to continue the European construction. In democracy, what is legitimate must first and foremost be clear and accessible. Unfortunately, the organization, the method and the discourse of the community are far (from meeting such a requirement A/N). The elections for the European Parliament have so far constituted an indicator for the interest of the European citizens in the European construction as well as an instrument to measure the efficiency of democracy along with the communication performance between the EU and its citizens.

Ever since 1979, the European elections have been marked by the emphasis laid on national stakes and lower electoral participation. This is exactly the reason why the European elections have been appreciated as “secondary elections” ever since the 80s.

Moreover, due to the fact that the voter's turnout has been more reduced than in the national elections, the political parties have so far obtained weaker results when compared to the national elections [2].

The new Treaty of the EU, The Lisbon Treaty lays the foundation (of the democratic system and of European governance A/N) of the two legitimacies, i.e. intergovernmental and citizenship [3], [2]. One of the actors that plays a significant role is the European Parliament (EP), a democratic institution whose spectacular evolution has also equalled the evolution as well as the consolidation of the EU democratic process from an elitist democracy to a representative one and subsequently to a current participatory democracy [4].

The popular belief has it that "the usefulness of democracy lies in the fact that it allows equal access of all its citizens to all deliberation and decision-making processes". Many see the importance of democracy through the perspective of its mechanisms. Therefore, it is the only one capable of ensuring equity among its citizens. In order to demonstrate the reasonable character of democratic procedures, Estlund points out that they have "the tendency of producing laws towards all citizens who have an equal say in a certain matter". This word is known as the vote. „Whether it is right or fair according to any other standard, (the result of the vote) has at least one important thing to say: everyone played an equal part in determining the result. The result is equitable in the sense that it was produced following an equitable procedure (...) Any procedure will be equitable towards its participants irrespective of them being smart, well informed or honest" [5].

The mere term of "consultative" is assumed to be quite deceiving since the popular beliefs on norms and institutions are commonly and reasonably well known. The periodic surveys and sociological studies unofficially validate both the opinions and the states of minds and when we ask the people about a matter we are well aware of its constant opinion; its opinion is no longer the source of inspiration for that particular decision, but the evidence for legitimatizing that particular resolution [6].

Voters' turnout was, in the past, a relationship that could be explained relatively simply as the relationship between parties and voters [7] The citizens do not have enough time and ability to process the constantly increasing volume of information and data

necessary to cast a vote well aware of and the process is also simplified by political apurtenance - "the parties simplify the process by offering extended information on the candidates' political platforms" [8] .

Electoral participation is only one of the 4 types of possible citizens' participation and it adds to political participation, civic participation and community participation. The referendums are and will remain special cases that cannot be included in the tendencies as long as they reflect moments that are completely personalised and utterly contextualized [9].

"Democracy is inconceivable without citizens' participation. Hence, despite the growing number of countries that have adopted democratic procedures, there is little reason for complacency – after all, it is not only in some of the newly established democracies that public engagement in politics leaves a lot to be desired. Many established democracies suffer from similar problems: turnout seems to be declining, parties find it increasingly difficult to recruit candidates and members, and local democracy is in danger of drying up due to a lack of interest by those living in the communities" [10].

If the legislative mechanisms result in reducing the intensity of the mechanism of the political parties to mobilize population, then even electoral participation (the only one that is above average, when compared to other participatory structures) will decrease significantly, thus causing Romania to have lower participation quotas in all chapters. The Romanian democratic mechanism is beginning to suffer and the issue of institutions being representative is increasingly severe [11].

Current manifestations of participatory democracy

Participatory democracy therefore emerges not as an alternative to representative democracy but, in fact, as an addendum to the latter, an important source capable of imprinting even more substance on it. Through participatory democracy, thus answering all democratic exigencies, the civil society will be involved in the implementation of public policies. Association represents the main drive that urges citizens to participate, a vehicle of shared solidarity and responsibility. Participatory democracy is viable when it integrates into a civil democratic tissue capable of freely associate a dialogue protagonist – dialogue represents the most important instruments of democracy – (and of conflict, as well) with

public administrative that in its turn obtains energy that is both fortified and renewed by participatory impulse.

The characteristics of participatory democracy brings institutional life closer to citizens' needs, contribute to optimizing the efficacy of the public sphere, consolidates and establishes a more direct relationship between citizen and the public administration. Just as the foundation of participatory democracy is a local one, we have all grounds to consider it as an important resource in the life of a community for its local development, civic education and social cohesion [12].

Inclusion and participation are equally important in the life of any community. Even in tighter communities it is impossible that all its members have the same role. When some of them develop leadership abilities and capabilities and when their activity will be recognized by the members of the community and will meet their support, we may than speak about a community leader. Since all the members of the community are not passive, but will stay informed with regard to the issues of the community and actively intervene in order to inform the leaders on community problems, we may say that the two notions, of participation and leadership are correlated, are closely interconnected and cannot be discussed separately. [13]

Participatory democracy has become an integral part of the European model of society and participation has become a citizen's right. The Lisbon Treaty consecrates the complementarity between representative democracy and participatory democracy and also confirms the three principles that lay at the basis of democratic governance in Europe:

- Democratic equality – citizens must enjoy equal attention from European institutions;
- Representative democracy – granting a more significant role to the European Parliament and more involvement from the national political parties;
- Participatory democracy – new mechanisms that enable the interaction between citizens and institutions, among which we would nominate the citizens' initiative [14].

Events such as Occupy Wall Street [15], The Turkish Summer [16], or The Arab Spring drew attention towards a common set of instruments, a set of social employment solutions, even though, in terms of agenda and finality they are entirely dissimilar. The simultaneous connexion via socialisation networks, the joint authorship, and the

motivational drive of the group are all significant in these cases. They all demonstrate the fact that at a global level the post (post)modern society seems to have suffered a profound mutation, one by means of which its citizens have the advantage of being more and more capable to form joint interest groups and advocate common cases, thus rapidly coagulating and dissolving communities of practices and interests. One of the most significant traits characterising these communities is represented by the tendency to transfer its practices from the virtual to the real world and the other way round, both being mutually supporting therefore cancelling all prior proclaimed borders and all limits enforced by hyper-reality [17].

The adherence of the Romanian society to this type of manifestation at the crossroad between the virtual and the reality, and its ability of producing its own causes/protest movements with effects on a global scale, thus joining the local communities and the diaspora from five continents, was initially demonstrated in the case of the protest movement „Salvați Roșia Montană” / “Save Roșia Montană”. Subsidiary, there is the interest and the motivation of a large number of NGOs and representatives of the civil society, concerned about the effects on the environment of a surface mining project initiated by the Canadian mining Company Gabriel Resources Ltd. In September 2013, the movement gained a new dimension when the Government of Romania initiated the proposal of a bill that gave green light to the Canadian company to expropriate the local community and to use cyanide in unprecedented proportions for the European continent. The proposal stirred protests both in the country as well as abroad where the Romanian communities from Germany, France, Canada, USA, Italy or Hong Kong stood united in spontaneous protests [18].

The Alburnus Maior association is an NGO based in Roșia Montană [19], Alba county, and represents the interests of those inhabitants from Roșia Montană and Bucium who are opposed to the Roșia Montană project and who refuse to give up their private properties for the sake of the mining project. The association was founded on the 8th of September 2000 and has been opposing the open cast mining project proposed by Roșia Montana Gold Corporation, out of social, environmental, economic and national heritage concerns. The project proposed uses cyanide and aims to be the largest open-cast mining undertaking in Europe.

The association has initiated and has been coordinating the campaign “Save Roșia Montană” which, over the 12 years of its existence, has become the largest social and environmental movement in Romania.

The “Save Roșia Montana” campaign has taken action in each stage of the authorization process of the mining project, emphasising the weak points of the project by relying on independent specialists. The public has been informed and encouraged to express themselves each time the procedure or the developing events so required. Thus, the SRM campaign has now gathered over 100.000 active supporters [20].

Conclusions

Democracy is inconceivable without citizens’ participation. People can participate and have the power to involve into decision making, which is a great advantage for simple citizens that did not have this chance decades ago.

Today, representative democracy it is not only about the right to vote, but also the right to influence decision making and examples given in this article show us a new face of modern society in which the citizen has assumed the role of decision maker, not only that of the tax payer or the “spectator” at administrative decisions.

A more profound involvement of citizens will be able to take place in the future if they have more knowledge of law, politics, administration or sociology ,which will ensure them to create a most accurate image about of a fair picture of the decision-making procedure.

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