Conflictividad social: categorías, concepciones y debate

Institutions, movements and local development. Participatory processes in the neo-liberal society

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1. Introduction

Between the end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI, participation has reasserted its vital role in relation to the willingness and ability to plan in terms of local, national and transnational policies.

The rediscovery of decentralization as a key factor of government choices on the one hand, and the redefinition of the role of experts as nonexclusive actors of social progress on the other recalls the mass movements of the '70s and '80s, which aimed at extending direct democracy and strengthening the role of citizenship. The advance of neo-liberalism and globalization have gradually weakened the intense democratic activity of that season, upsetting the system of relationships that ruled the production environment, and outlining a

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different scale of values within society, mostly oriented towards individualism and consumption.

The social movements that took their turns one after another in the last decades, particularly in western societies, have suffered the negative effects of neoliberal policies, with the consequent weakening of their ability to rise against increasing inequalities and exclusion processes. In his in-depth analysis of the metamorphosis of the social question, Robert Castel explains the expression "negative individualism" as the result of a privatization process of the risks of exclusion and vulnerability, along with the reduction of aggregation and political mobilization opportunities (Castel, 1995: 2004)[2]. At the same time, the downgrading of representation demonstrated by the underrating of the political system contributed to generating a major crisis of the historic democratic order, defined by Balibar as "de-democratization" (Balibar, 2012). Within this *frame* of redefinition of the political, social and economic landscape, characterized by less aggregation and a clearer idea of governments' inefficiencies, a new paradigm of public action comes out, focused on the rediscovery of the thaumaturgic virtues of participation.

To that effect, an important step forward is the introduction of the concept of "governance"[3], which emphasizes the role and function of local intermediary parties (*stakeholders*), able to overcome the standstill situation and to promote citizens' involvement, on grounds of the complexity and proximity of the emerging issues. These actors, who can be referred to under the articulated and confused label of "civil society", are identified as "low threshold" representatives of particular interests. This change in western democracies from a vertical government perspective (*government*) to a horizontal perspective (*governance)* defines the new trends of public agencies, becoming the *sine qua non* criterion for more effective and efficient actions.

During the 80's, this change in participation also occurred to a large extent within the main international organizations: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union programs regarding a variety of institutional actions, related to urban regeneration, welfare redefinition, reconstruction of socio-economic policies, sustainability policies, struggle against mechanisms of exclusion.

As a result of this democratic line of thought, a wealth of neologisms have come out in succession: "people-centred development", "state-society synergy", "participatory democracy", "grassroots development" are just a few among the most used and best known (Penderis, 2012). More specifically, during the 90's, some analysts promoted heated debates on the institutionalization of participation by those supranational agencies (Hickey, Mohan, 2004; Williams, 2006).[4]. In particular, they underlined the implicit relationship between the consensual rhetoric on participatory practices and neo-liberal interests (Penderis, 2012).

The institutionalization of participation as an example of *democratic renewal* (Sanderson, 1999) has sparked off an intense debate over the most proper ways to preserve a dynamic balance among the fight against poverty, widening of citizenship rights and economic growth, while taking into account the "information and project resources of the policies beneficiaries" (Balducci, 1995).

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[2] The famous sentence attributed to Margaret Thatcher "there is no such thing as society" is a very clear example of the change of the neoliberal paradigm.

[3] About the concept of governance, see Le Galés (2002).

[4] In 2001, the World Bank's "World Development Report 2001/1: Attacking Poverty" puts forward a vast project called "The Voices of the Poor" aiming at representing the visions of the poor directly within the development policies (World Bank, 2001).

In particular, the numerous supranational and national programs adopted show in fact that the participatory mechanism can be activated without a careful consideration of the fact that it will fit into a pre-determined structure of inequalities and power that can determine its positive or negative outcomes. As Pizzorno points out, each person brings, at least potentially, into their participation experience the differentiation and inequality factor of their position within the private interests system (Pizzorno, 1993: 89).

This analysis highlights a sort of de-politicization of collective actions that creates a common ground for political actors in general and the community to act according to the principles of the new power configuration (Alietti, 2005). As a consequence, the merely political and conflictual process that could arise from the confrontation of preferences and choices is labelled as the remaining of ideological differences, a disturbing element if not one that causes divisions (Hogget, 1997; Stevens, Bur, Young, 1999; Cleaver, 1999). According to some experts, this is a limited review of de-politicization. For instance they underline that participatory development does not involve any pre-determined *outcomes*, and this may generate unintentional effects, such as opposition spaces and situations that create the opportunities for a re-politicization (Williams, 2006: 565). Unforeseen tensions are undeniable, and they deeply modify the procedures and goals that were initially assumed, however, the main purpose remains unchanged, i.e. the delegitimization of conflict as a means of empowerment, that can be replaced by the acceptance of participation.

Furthermore, the neo-communitarist principle of this strategy, with its exaltation of the role of civil society and of the supremacy of social cohesion, properly reflects one of the strategies of the dominant global neo-liberalism (Jessop, 2002)[5]. Ignoring this problematization involves the risk of a rhetoric that does not lead to any institutional and political practice of re-distribution of the decision-making power, for the purpose of the actual exercise of democracy. Power, its specific nature and its different facets and levels (international, national and local) essentially appear to be hidden (Cooke, Khotari, 2001).

In the wake of Gramsci's well known categorization, there is a hint that the participatory paradigm as such may be the ground for a cultural hegemony, meant to preserve the status quo, rather than becoming a concrete opportunity to claim and support the demands of new civil, social and political rights. Other issues which need careful consideration arise. Firstly, the combination of hyper-localism and technicism of participatory projects. The local scale can rightfully be seen as the main scope of intervention, nevertheless whenever the impacts of socio-economic macro policies are disregarded, as well as the impacts of weak public institutions reducing the political chances of emancipation, this *rescaling* turns into hyper-localism (Alietti, 2005).[6] Secondly, the definition of the technical and operational aspects of such instrument, which is by its very nature guarantor of neutrality, is often a challenge. As a consequence, foreshadowing this "participation technology" ideally and operatively reflects a depoliticization strategy. In other words, there is a tendency to treat participation as the working project's technical method, rather than a political *empowerment* methodology (Hickey, Mohan, 2005: 242).

The problem, which will be discussed in the following paragraph, is to develop participatory mechanisms that are not just a sum of factors, but rather a multiplication, the results of which feed a real transformation process. We will try to understand whether a re-definition of institutional and public practices may include in fact, not only in words, the value and expression of social and political participation, beyond the specific features of the

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[5] For a detailed analysis of the bond between participation and neo-liberalism, on Jessop' model, see Moini (2012).
[6] On the debate about the scale of interventions and local dimension see Moini (2012).

intervention. The purpose of this work is to theorize a different institutionalization process of participation, which may contribute to support and guarantee the bottom-up individual and collective mobilization capabilities, recognizing their specific nature and more general input into outlining the alternatives and effects of neo-liberal socio-economic macro policies.

2. Participation criteria and levels

The first step to be taken is defining what we mean by participation. As stated by Ceri (1999), a reflection on this term reveals a lack of conceptual clarity, due to its widespread use in social sciences and in politics[7].

The distinctive historic, social and cultural features within which it occurs and its possibilities of application to a wide range of areas involving collective action call for a proper theoretical approach, in order to reflect its multidimensionality. When talking about participation, we risk muddling up the different levels of social reality we refer to, in other words we risk failing to analyze the whole of specific features that determine the meaning we want to assign to the term. Echoing Ceri's analysis (1999), from a sociological perspective, the dimensions of social participation are so many and such that associating rather diverse phenomena just *on the basic idea that participation equals sharing the same experience with someone else* is not enough.

What makes a difference between action models based on a specific shared experience (such as the cooperative, solidaristic and/or ritualistic action) from a proper participatory model is that the latter is capable of envisaging and actuating a change in socio-political conditions, upon which the asymmetry of power relations is based (Ceri, 1999), and of creating a wider space where priorities, strategies and decisions can be shared or negotiated, taking into account different interests and visions of the world.

Under this perspective, participation acquires a clear "political" meaning, emphasizing its social ground, coordination and attitude to shift the balance of power, using different tools from those typical of representative democracy or participation into politics in the strict sense of the word. The question now is the possibility and feasibility (and to which extent) of the key objectives in the new asset of social and development policies. The efforts made to address this question, have helped analyze the different levels of participation, metaphorically represented by the rungs of a ladder, the bottom which being a non-participatory situation and the top the actual involvement. The first ladder proposal was made by the American planner Arnstein in 1969 and counted eight levels, starting from non-participation levels (therapy and manipulation), going through some merely formal levels of involvement, up to *empowerment* which included citizen control, delegated power and partnership.

Delegated power affects the participants' potential to exercise veto rights, assuming a real authority over any decisions, a necessary pre-condition for the next *step* towards the direct control of citizens on all the different stages of the project (idea, plan, direction) (Donzelot, Epstein, 2006). In her general considerations about the ladder, the author focuses on possible roadblocks posed by powerholders as a resistance measure against power redistribution (racism, paternalism) and, on the "have-nots" side, limited socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge-base (see Penderis, 2012). Arnstein's participation ladder has long been a reference point in the debate on participatory practices. More recently, after criticizing its excessive

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[7] In social sciences it is not unusual to encounter other similarly foggy concepts. Ironically one of these is the concept of community, widely used, often going along with the topic of participation, and equally ambiguous.

simplicity and failure to discuss the possible spheres of influence and *decision-making* areas in which citizens could be involved, other authors have suggested a different, wider and more complex kind of ladder (Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett, 1994)

Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett's proposal is based on the same premises as Arnstein's regarding the different distances between one rung of the ladder and the other, and also regarding the ideal-typical reality of the model being considered. Beyond wider rungs and the relations between spheres of influence and decision-making arenas, the real difference is a better characterization of the control dimension, which becomes the determining variable of participation quality. As a way to broaden the levels of the new ladder, the participatory model is considered a value in itself whenever control over strategies of choice and over the process is entirely given to the stakeholders.

Despite very different ways of categorization and involvement levels, both theories aim at considering the assumption and/or sharing of power as the core element of participation's efficacy. Besides the scale pattern, the different participatory models are described by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), as three main types:
– *consultative* which is the most widespread model, in which people are only consulted by experts before any intervention takes place;
– *collaborative* in which people and experts work together on a certain project, conceived, built and controlled by the latter ones;
– *collegiate*, a situation of real participation, in which experts and people, groups and communities work together using their different skills in a process of mutual learning and the involved individuals have a wide control over processes and decisions.

One last example is the participation model proposed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2, 2007), encompassing five different levels: *inform*, *consult* and *involve*, which appear to be just superficial descriptions; and *collaborate* and *empower*, which on the contrary represent control methods, with more proactive roles in the definition of priorities and choices (Penderis, 2012).

Even in these last two cases, direct control over the whole process is the main discrimination element, determining a real involvement of citizens, groups or communities. Our study so far suggests that all possible forms of participation are weak if they don't aim at the *empowerment* strategy, achievable with a significant shift of the balance of power in favour of the relevant stakeholders (individuals and communities). This dimension becomes unavoidable and, as mentioned before, the weakness of most theories related to the participatory model is due to a lack of a thorough analysis of power and the institutional mechanisms that could hypothetically redistribute and share it (Atkinson, 1999; Atkinson, Cope, 1997; Stevens, Bur, Young, 1999). According to this observation, understanding participation requires a pre-understanding of power relations between authority and its different "social groups" (or "social classes") and *literature on community involvement is often not particularly thoughtful about this aspect, and would rather hide behind anodyne concepts like empowerment* (Atkinson, Cope, 1997, p. 206).

The assumptions underpinning the concept of *empowerment* are undoubtedly rather questionable, firstly because such a vague concept actually hides often contrasting interests (McArthur, 1995), secondly because of its multiple meanings and fields of application. There are also further problems that can cause the inspiratory principles to be perceived in a negative way, including: lack of trust in the institutions and in the political and government system; past experiences in which consultation did not bring the expected changes; difficulties in participating related to lack of time; lack of correct and extensive information; insufficient

organization skills of groups; social and economic marginality. Essentially, the political, social, economic and cultural features can or can not underpin involvement and, in some particular contexts, the key variable is the historic heritage of political mobilization and aggregation of interests of a particular local community (Collins, 1997). Following this reasoning, some critical analyses of projects in the field of urban regeneration local policies have highlighted the risk that participation produces perverse effects, such as the failure of certain objectives or the lack of citizens' recognition of the efficacy of participatory practices. This may increase the danger of *dis-empowerment* through a stronger feeling of scepticism in the relationship with institutions and among different groups, the growth of opportunistic behaviours and, as a consequence, the chance of a status quo reproduction (Foley, Martin, 2000; Jones, 2003). As a consequence, we cannot take for granted the association of participation (as described in this work) and the activation of *empowerment* processes. It is therefore essential to clearly define where (context), who (reference unit) and what (objectives) makes up the framework in which they are applied. From our point of view, beyond more or less reliable theoretical considerations, in the promotion of participation due regard should be given to which conditions are and/or can be there to favour a different access perspective to the power to adjust the forms and contents of participation, and the power to choose amongst possible negotiated and legitimized options.

These elements, as well as the above mentioned evaluation scales, place two sets of limits. The first one relates to the extension and intention of participation demands and the perennial problem of "measuring" both in a proper way. In fact, there are no suitable tools to evaluate such a complex system, involving different players with different interests, interacting with each other, plus the impact of contextual variables. Moreover, if a project is to be focused on participation, it should be medium-long term, therefore the conditions linked to the implementation of a possible local action can modify the strategies, alliances and relationships among groups and also the goals that no longer reflect the needs and expectations previously defined. As a consequence, it is rather complex to define objective, universally suitable indicators on the actual involvement of all represented social categories, on the increase of willingness to participate and on the acquisition of necessary skills to change the status quo. The second limit is that the ruling and promotional role of institutions in supporting citizen-oriented spaces and practices is not duly investigated. As has been highlighted, the different institutional contexts in which participation takes place, and the imperatives (or obstacles) related to participation that they produce should be considered as part of the studies on participatory development (Williams, 2006: 566; see also Cleaver, 2001)[8]. Our introduction highlights that criticisms against the institutionalization of participation in supranational organizations show an ambiguous dynamic, often acting from the top with an assertive and prescriptive approach (*top-down*). As a consequence, the idea of rethinking and redesigning institutions from the bottom (*bottom-up*) is not taken into due consideration as an occasion to change locally the mechanisms that reproduce the same power inequalities and asymmetries. This does not mean denying the explicit and implicit difficulties around the current participatory paradigm and its institutionalization. It rather means highlighting the importance to create and/or innovate the institutional spheres as a precondition to make sure that their work is based on an open "problematic logic", capable of recognizing the differences and accepting social demands even when expressed in a conflicting manner.

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[8] On this topic, relevant for the purpose of intrinsic quality of participatory development see Blackburn, Hollands (1998).

3. The role of institutions and the participatory paradigm

What do we mean when we evoke institutions? The sociological thought with its tradition has described institutions as the entrenchment of practices and routines producing and reproducing over time constraints and possibilities for collective and individual action[9]. Based on this line of thinking, we can say that institutions are common assets, as they are distinguished by non-exclusion and by the possibility of being available to everyone.

For the purpose of the logic proposed here, by public institutions we mean those usually identified with the state and its administrative forms, in their local manifestations (Donolo, 1997), therefore the debate will focus on a specific social and historical form of institutionalization.

The prefiguration of the public dimension is instrumental to the hypothesis, referred to above, of a correlation between the community's actual participation and the planning and implementation of "good" public institutions.

Following Donolo's analysis, the *institutional building* consists of two main levels: the aggregation of preferences chosen among competing alternatives and the negotiation among the conflicting interests expressed by the social actors (Donolo, 1997: 41). This building shows the connotation of exchange, decision and goal sharing reflecting the ideal of active participation, responsible for a multitude of players.

Resuming the discussion on the relationship between *agency* and *structure*[10], we can imagine the institution to represent the architecture, or structured space, within which the grammar of citizens' action is outlined, as a limit and/or opportunity. Obviously, since the power to influence the preferences and interests of those groups with the larger number of symbolic and material resources is an issue that keeps re-emerging, we are talking about a conservative grammar rather than "generative" of chances for the redistribution of power. As thoroughly discussed, in certain contexts characterized by the privatization of collective interests, institutions are weak and unable to play an efficient regulatory-legislative role, an expression of rational choices agreed upon by the citizenship as a whole[11]. Another significant element is the capability of institutions to learn, as (according to Donolo) they make it possible to conceive new and more appropriate subject thematizations in the social and political process, they cooperate in the *problem setting* with their own organizational cognitive and legislative resources, they offer better chances to solve the emerging problems, they take rights, endowments and public assets reproduction more seriously and they put their own citizens into a social environment marked by more responsibility and proper behaviours (Donolo, 1997: 213).

Logically, the more institutions are open to grant spaces and participation occasions, the more likely it is that a co-learning dynamic between institutions and stakeholders becomes more important and stronger. On this subject, it may be useful to represent by means of a double entry table the outcome, in terms of democratic systems, of the crossing between opening and closure of the participating arena and the public institutional arena (see table below).

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[9] On institutions and the institutionalization process in the field of sociological tradition, see Berger, Luckmann's founding essay (1966); for a debate focused on "public" institutions to which we will repeatedly refer to, see Donolo (1997).

[10] On this point, see Giddens' recursive model (1990).

[11] Corruption and private forms of public assets weaken and delegitimize the public institutions; in that respect, without going too far, Italy is a paradigmatic case.

Table 1 - Models of democratic arenas

		Participatory arena	
Public institutional arena		Open	Closed
	Open	**A**	**B**
	Closed	**C**	**D**

Such a schematization, despite being simpler than reality from a cognitive perspective, can help understand the operative importance of the role and function of public agencies/institutions in configurating participation.

The crossing actually shows four ideal-typical democracy models: in situation A we achieve the ideal of direct democracy, within which learning is reciprocal and actively participating citizens take part in a dialectic with the institution, which supports their expression and welcomes their demands as resources and not as obstacles. Situation B represents a mode in which institutional openness faces an established social apathy. This situation offers the ground to understand those cases in which the institutional actor puts forward a progressive project but is hindered in its objectives by a conservative society, dominated by culturally established hierarchies tending to exclude certain individuals (such as the caste system). Situation C is the classic representation of society's emerging demand through conflict and mobilization, that does not find an immediate response within the institutional arena and that can bring about the stiffness of the actors, or a gradual recognition that can change the boundaries of representation and citizenship. A relevant example of this, with some obvious differences, can be the time when collective movements played a central role, described at the beginning of this work. Lastly, D is an example of the lack of democratic systems in favour of authoritarian forces that deny and repress dialogue.

A further step in this direction is the next table (table 4), within which the openness and/or closure are represented by means of the participation scale mentioned above and the possibility to think of institutionalization as the space where action can take place.

Table 2 – Participation scale and participation spaces

Non participation	**Tokenism**	**Citizen power**
Placation ↓	Consultation ↓ ↓ Engagement	Transformation ↓
↑ ↑ Manipulation Information	↑ Involvement	↑ ↑ Self-mobilization Empowerment
Closed space	Invite space	Inclusive space
Power over	*Power over*	*Power to*

(Source: Penderis, 2012)

In the first panel, non-participation precludes the direct involvement of citizens, groups and individuals; consequently the institutional space is closed and keeps the balance of power unchanged.

In the second panel, the situation changes (however slightly): institutions are expected to invite the stakeholders to play a consultative role in an institutionally defined planning stage, in a perspective of consensus and legitimization. Vice versa, in the third panel, space opens up and becomes "inclusive", putting in place the conditions for the transformation of reality, supporting mobilization and redistributing the decision-making powers of citizens and subordinate individuals.

When describing an evident positive dialectic between "good institutions" and "good participation" it is important not to over-simplify reality. Many research papers carried out in different countries in the North and the South of the world clearly show diverse situations determining, promoting and stating different integration models between open public arenas and marginalized communities, not always leading to positive outcomes (see Cornwall, Cohelo, 2007). The idea of transferability of the so-called *best practices* from one context to the other should therefore be rejected, without a critical analysis of the presence/lack of institutional agencies, their quality level and the ability of citizens to get organized and to mobilize for their own rights.

Participation as a public and collective action model always starts from scratch, regardless of its codification through field experience, meaning that its achievement will definitely need a thoughtful and careful scrutiny of citizenship spaces, offered both from the side of institutions and from the side of the involved social categories.

However, it is rather difficult to theorize that the fight against exclusion and *dis-empowerment* can be pursued without creating and redesigning public institutions, prepared to be flexible, *responsive* and *accountable* in front of the community, groups and movements. The latter too will have to aim at a change of their own structures, which tend to preserve unequal relationships and current hierarchies, making use of an available, inclusive political and action space.

The priority of setting up and implementing inclusive programs and policies is not only to achieve specific goals through a bottom-up strategy, but also to change the relationship between public actors and social actors, to make new institutional participatory practices capable of strengthening the political and claiming features (and/or spaces). In other words, any possible conflict is recognized for its legitimacy and opportunities to offer a different perspective of choices and priorities.

Conclusions

The extensive exchange of ideas on the participatory turn in neo-liberal strategies for the "management of exclusion" (governance) processes and growing inequalities brings about many doubts on its efficacy. For example, on the social, economic and cultural level in the south of the world, a large number of endogenous and exogenous variables generates backwardness.

The idea that participatory practices, implemented by NGOs' operators and experts, or by the above mentioned international organizations co-responsible of the widespread poverty situation, can generate an actual reversal of the trend in the current division of labour is

faulty[12]. The effort to intervene on survival conditions of certain local communities, for example access to drinking water, is still the ultimate and compulsory goal in the field of aids. Emergency proves to be a destabilizing factor within the plans to implement participation actions, in the terms described so far. In these cases, the idea is not to contribute to the *empowerment* of the so-called "earth's rejects", but to contribute, even slightly, to the reduction of poverty's devastating effects.

Quoting Isahia Berlin's well-known distinction, it is appropriate to act both on negative liberty ("liberty from" privations), and on positive liberty, i.e. the "liberty to" play my own citizen's role and to express my individuality (Berlin, 1989). Inevitably, the two liberties overlap: where there is a lack of tangible assets, it is easy to notice an absolute lack of citizenship and democracy.

As a consequence, most studies on participation refer to specific contexts in which conditions of marginality offer the possibilities of association, mobilization, and claim of rights.

Once again, to implement a plan for the direct involvement of a community it is necessary to assess the particular environment, and to understand whether the plan is feasible in respect of the principle of redistribution of the power to act and decide.

As noted, participating is not just a suitable verb for a rhetoric of good intentions. The work that needs to be done, wherever it can be accomplished, to promote such an approach is articulated on different levels and must necessarily face the difficulties of each one. As underlined, it is not enough to adopt a technical rationality and apply it without any distinction to prefigure a sort of actual change in the order of inequalities and to extend the boundaries of citizenship. Such a vision basically complies with the ethnocentricity of the western world that finds answers to problems through expert knowledge, an approach about which many doubts have been raised within western democracies[13]. It is right to remark participation's tyranny and its new role within the European welfare state and international institutions intervention criteria, however the issue is still open to interpretations and analyses.

Does participatory practice still represent a significant operational mode despite its weaknesses and the obstacles it faces? Can the contrasting outcomes of local development projects and social policies alone prove its inefficacy in transforming the structural conditions of exploitation and exclusion? In order to recognize, or at least adequately treat the importance and scope of the connected problems, the answers to these questions are not univocal.

It is obvious that participation, especially when bound from above, proves to be inadequate in respect of its potentially emancipatory, political and conflictual nature, however it must not be forgotten that strategy reversals can take place, opening the debate on the established order (see Foucault, 1991). Essentially, it has to be taken into account that active resistances may develop, deeply changing the operational and decision-making prerequisites on the one side, while mobilizing in favour of the denied citizens' rights and spaces on the other.

The overview given so far does not comply with neo-institutionalism's theoretical assumptions, thus a sort of institutional absolutism appears, which is nevertheless important

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[12] This does not take into consideration the emerging, or active long-term, conflicts in the South of the world, most often tacitly and/or explicitly supported by those governments that call for the participation of the excluded in the international settings. A thoughtful reflection on this evident contradiction would be appropriate.

[13] On the role of experts and of the technical-scientifical knowledge in public controversies, see Pellizzoni (2012). Also see Beck's reflections on risk society (2000).

to understand organizational and social dynamics in general[14]. Analyses show that the regulatory and legislative criteria of institutions are determined by exchanges, mutual learning, adjusting and innovation. In the case of public institutions, these assumptions are fundamental to pursue governmental inclusive and open instruments. Even more so in situations where local institutions show their dark side or are absent. Basing an intervention on participation increases its efficacy if it goes along with the institutional building of new political practices, new spaces for the negotiation of interests, new chances of co-learning (Cornwall, Coehlo, 2007). Going back to some of the observations made above, the unpredictability of participated planning can be dealt with and managed within government institutions characterized by the openness to change. This ideal configuration, although marked by obstacles in its application to the real world, brings about trust in the system, which is a necessary precondition for cooperation and transformation actions (Roninger, 1992). Finally, it could be argued that the establishment, at a local level of this democratic approach, affects the neo-liberal macro policies, strengthening the goals of participated development programs and spreading a plausible and viable alternative example even further.

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[14] For an introduction to this theory including empirical examples, see Powell, Di Maggio (2000).

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