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Issues of Participation: A Framework for Choices and Compromises

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ABSTRACT

Members of the Participatory Design (PD) community often raise concerns about participation – participation in what, by whom, and for what purpose? To help determine and answer questions important to participatory practice, the author derived a framework of key issues of participation using literature from Participatory Design and related practices such as Participatory Action Research, Participatory Democracy and Participatory Development. The key issues are: values, representation, power relations, context, transformations, effectiveness, and sustainability. The author posits that giving attention to these issues when designing, conducting and reflecting on participation will improve participatory practices by making choices and compromises more explicit to those involved in the research as well as those who review the research results. The paper discusses how the author derived the framework and then uses the selected literature to explore each of the seven issues and how they can be addressed in participatory practice in general, and within PD more specifically.

Keywords: *Co-Design, Context, Effectiveness, Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Design, Power Relations, Representation, Sustainability, Transformations, Values*

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Participatory Design community often raise concerns about participation – participation in what, by whom, and for what purpose? While questions such as these are integral to participatory practice they are not always addressed explicitly, which I believe is a key source of our concern.

To better understand participation and the choices we make while designing, conducting and reflecting on participation, I decided to see whether there are some issues common across participatory practices. I looked at Participatory Design as well as Participatory Democracy,

Participatory Management, Participatory Education and Participatory Development. Like Participatory Design (PD), these practices share a commitment to participation, have roots in Participatory Action Research, and continually grapple with the realities of practice.

In addition to these commonalities, these participatory practices share particular relationships to Participatory Design. PD's original focus on workplace democracy makes links to Participatory Democracy and Participatory Management perhaps most clear. As PD has moved outside the workplace, links to Participatory Education and Participatory Development have emerged. There have been wonderful

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cases of PD in a development context (Dearden & Rizvi, 2008a; Puri, Byrne, Nhampossa, & Quraishi, 2004). In addition, Dearden and Rizvi (2008b) have provided a rich comparison of Participatory Design and Participatory Development and how they might be used together.

In international development, participation moved from the margins to the mainstream during the 1980s (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Through the 1990s, a backlash built and in 2001, a collection of articles was published entitled *Participation: The New Tyranny*. Focusing on Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) – a specific form of participatory development – the provocatively titled volume criticized, in particular, the descent of PRA into a technical approach, failing to engage issues of power and politics. This failure echoed similar concerns within PD. However, help seemed to be at hand in the form of a response book entitled *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation*. Rather than refuting the first book, the editors of the second book, Hickey and Mohan, agree with the key underlying concern about issues of power and politics. Still committed to participatory approaches, the authors in this volume try to tackle these issues directly, mostly through thoughtful reflections on their own practices, including trying to draw on and create relevant theory.

In the introduction to the book, Hickey & Mohan identify a series of “thematic priorities” that “contemporary approaches to participation must engage in order to (re)constitute participation as a viable and legitimate approach within development” (2004, p. 13). The priorities they identify – transformation, temporal and spatial aspects, and representation – became the beginning of the issues I address in this paper. While not stated explicitly as “thematic priorities”, values and power relations underlie the discussion of all of their other priorities and I have chosen to identify these as separate issues. Finally, I added two more issues that were understated in the Hickey and Mohan chapter but surfaced within other contexts, in particular within PD. The first I’ve termed “effectiveness” to encompass attempts to improve

the end-product, productivity, the process, and participants’ ownership of the product and process. The final issue I examine is sustainability, encompassing several definitions of that concept as well.

The paper begins with some definitions of participation drawn from PD as well as the other participatory literatures reviewed, followed by my exploration of the issues of participation within these fields. Thereafter, I look at the seven issues that form the Key Issues of Participation Framework I derived. The first four issues permeate participatory endeavours from beginning to end: values (goals, values and interests), representation, power relations and context. While the last three issues are also present throughout, they focus more specifically on the outcomes: transformations, effectiveness and sustainability. In the conclusion, I discuss how the issues of participation outlined in this paper can be of assistance in identifying the choices that we make as PD practitioners and how we can make those more explicit.

Throughout this paper I use the term “participants” to include all of the people who participate in the participatory process – researchers, designers, developers, the people intended to use the system (for which I’ve used the terms “users” and “end-users” interchangeably) as well as other stakeholders (such as company or organization representatives).

DEFINING PARTICIPATION

Looking at the etymology of the word “participation”, it means “to take part” (participation, n.d.). However layered on top of this basic definition are many ideas about the forms and issues of participation. Perhaps the most familiar and well-considered form of participation is democracy – although the definition of democracy goes further than “to take part”. According to its etymology, its basic meaning is “common people rule” (democracy, n.d.), which defines who is participating and the form of their participation. Taking these basic definitions as a starting place, I use other definitions

and attempts to operationalize “participation” from within the chosen literatures to build a characterization of participation.

In the preface to their important collection of chapters on Participatory Design, Schuler and Namioka (1993) discuss other “participative endeavors”, including participatory education, and speculate that these endeavours share similar concerns and motivations:

The most basic motivation is the idea of democracy. To be more concrete: People who are affected by a decision or event should have an opportunity to influence it. Participation is the key element in democracy. (Schuler & Namioka, 1993, p. xii)

So, although the basic definition of the word “participation” doesn’t necessarily include “by whom” or “how”, our current understanding

of participation has been intertwined with the definition of democracy. For example, in her seminal paper “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”, Arnstein defines democracy as “Participation of the governed in their government” and proposes a ladder of citizen participation (Figure 1) “with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens’ power in determining the end product” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

She is careful to stress that the ladder is overly simplistic in a number of ways, most significantly in the juxtaposition of the “powerless” and the “powerful” as homogeneous blocs in direct opposition (Arnstein, 1969). Nonetheless, the ladder illustrates a key quality of participation – the degree of power of the participants.

In *Community Participation, Social Development and the State*, Midgley states that many writers rely on the definition of participation

Figure 1. Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation. Adapted from “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” by S.R. Arnstein, 1969, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4), p. 217. Copyright 1969 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

offered in the United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 1929 (LVIII):

... participation requires the voluntary and democratic involvement of people in "(a) contributing to the development effort, (b) sharing equitably in the benefits derived therefrom and (c) decision-making in respect of setting goals, formulating policies and planning and implementing economic and social development programmes" (Midgley, 1986, p. 25).

Like Arnstein, this description of the requirements of participation includes decision-making and goes further to clarify *decision-making throughout the process* from goals through policies and planning to implementation. It also provides two more aspects to the definition of participation: that it must be *voluntary* and *beneficial to the participants*.

A few paragraphs later, Midgley continues:

Several writers have distinguished between authentic participation which involves all three criteria mentioned previously and pseudo-participation which limits community involvement to implementation or the ratification of decisions already taken by external bodies. (Midgley, 1986, p. 26)

Here, Midgley raises two notions that have preoccupied many discussions and practices of participation: authentic participation and pseudo-participation. For example, in a very interesting paper grappling with participatory reforms in education in the United States, Anderson raises issues of authentic participation:

To speak of authentic participation is to ask: Who participates, in what areas and under what conditions, and to ask: Participation toward what end? (Anderson, 1998, p. 575)

He answers the first question by stating "participation is authentic if it includes relevant stakeholders and creates relatively safe, structured spaces for multiple voices to be heard"

(Anderson, 1998, p. 575). Regarding the goal of participation, he refutes that greater organizational effectiveness leading to greater student achievement is enough, stating "the ultimate ends of participation should be the constitution of a democratic citizenry and redistributive justice for disenfranchised groups" (Anderson, 1998, p. 575).

The issue of authentic participation has been a long-standing theme within Participatory Design and, according to Simonsen and Robertson, is at the heart of Participatory Design. In the Handbook of Participatory Design they describe genuine participation as "the fundamental transcendence of the users' role from being merely informants to being legitimate and acknowledged participants in the design process" (2012, p. 5).

In the management arena, Dachler and Wilpert suggest that the definition of participation is value-dependent:

The pervasive value bases underlying topic labels like industrial democracy and power equalization are not usually made explicit and are therefore rarely systematically questioned. But different value systems imply different definitions of participation, so that the term participation has a variety of meanings across investigators. (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978, p. 1)

In their paper published in Administrative Science Quarterly, they create a framework to integrate work on participation from a variety of disciplines and from a variety of value systems. According to the model (Figure 2), contextual factors (such as characteristics of society, organizations, groups and individuals) form the boundaries for the potential of participation. The potential is then determined by the values, the properties, and the outcomes of participation. They identify four value orientations and their associated goals, pointing out that these are not mutually exclusive: democratic, socialist, human development, and productivity. The properties in the model include the range of people involved, the degree of decision-making,

Figure 2. Overview of the defining dimensions of participation. Adapted from "Conceptual Dimensions and Boundaries of Participation in Organizations: A Critical Evaluation" by H.P. Dachler and B. Wilpert, B., 1978, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23(1), p. 3. Copyright 1978 by Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School at Cornell University. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications, Inc.

and types of decisions. Since the goals of the participation are determined by the value orientation(s), the outcomes are identified by level, i.e. individual, group, organization and societal.

According to Dachler and Wilpert:

'Democratic and socialist theories concentrate on societal issues' and 'human-growth-and-development, and the productivity and efficiency orientations emphasize organizational and group factors'. However, they suggest 'a view of participation which integrates the major questions contained in all the theoretical orientations' in order to 'provide a more complete or realistic definition of participation' (1978, p. 9).

In traditional PD, with its focus on workplace democracy, participation is similarly defined to include democratic principles:

The employees must have access to relevant information; they must have the possibility for taking an independent position on the problems,

and they must in some way participate in the process of decision making. (Kensing as cited in Clement & van den Besselaar, 1993, p. 31)

Again we see the emphasis on decision-making power seen in definitions by previous writers in multiple milieus. Also highlighted is the need for *independence of the participants* – similar to the need for voluntary participation but more nuanced. Here the need is not only for voluntary participation but for independence of participation and of thought throughout the process. The first point, *access to relevant information*, is also nuanced by what is relevant, who decides what is relevant, and who is sharing information.

More recently within PD, Bratteteig and Wagner (2014) have undertaken a similar effort to define participation. From across milieus, they bring attention to several writers, some of whom have built on Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Figure 1). Rocha contributes "A Ladder of Empowerment" that starts with building the critical awareness of individuals

and moves towards action through community development (paraphrased from Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014, pp. 95-96). Pretty’s typology of participation takes the participant position, reaching from “manipulative participation” to “self-mobilization” (paraphrased from Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014, pp. 95-96). Cornwall’s “typology of interests” underscores the dynamic nature of participation and how it is often shaped by external boundaries but also by “who participates and where their agency and interests take things” (Cornwall cited in Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014, p. 93). According to Cornwall, Pretty’s typology brings attention to the “motivations of those who adopt and practice participatory approaches as an important factor” while Arnstein’s typology “reminds us that participation is ultimately about power and control” (Cornwall cited in Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014, p. 93).

In this section, I have explored what defines participation, outlining some of the definitions, forms, and elements that together can amount to an understanding of participation. In the next section, I look at particular issues that are associated with participation.

KEY ISSUES OF PARTICIPATION

There are innumerable ways to characterize the issues of participation. However, there are some common themes that emerge from the six literatures I’ve touched upon, namely participatory endeavours in action research generally and more specifically in design, democracy, management, education and development. As mentioned previously, I chose these fields because they have current and historic relationships with PD and have practices related or overlapping with PD.

Searching within these literatures, I found and reviewed well over 100 articles and chapters related to “participation”. I particularly focussed on writers that not only exposed some of the issues of participation but also suggested a framework (loosely defined) for understanding these issues and their relationships. From their frameworks, I derived the Key Issues of Participation Framework. Table 1 shows my derived framework in the left column with the articles that provided the original inspiration in the subsequent columns – specifying

Table 1. Key issues of participation framework mapped to the focal inspirational articles

Key Issues of Participation	Hickey & Mohan (Development)	Dachler & Wilpert (Management)	Elden & Chisholm (PAR)	Stohl & Cheney (Management)
Goals, Values and Interests	--	Value	Purposes and Value Choice	--
Representation	Representation	--	Participation in the Research Process	Agency Identity
Power Relations	By implication	--	--	Power
Context	Temporal aspects	Contextual Boundaries	Contextual Focus	Structure
	Spatial aspects	Properties		
Transformations	Transformation	Outcomes	Knowledge Diffusion	--
Effectiveness	--		Change Based Data and Sense Making	--
Sustainability	By implication	--	--	--

their terminology mapped against my chosen terminology.

As discussed in the introduction, Hickey and Mohan (2004) identified four “thematic priorities”: representation, transformation, spatial and temporal aspects. Using these themes, I derived the first three key issues of participation in my framework: representation, transformations and context (combining spatial and temporal aspects).

Within Dachler and Wilpert’s (1978) model discussed in the previous section, the key issues could be considered the contextual boundaries, the values, the properties and the outcomes of participation.

In *Emerging Varieties of Action Research*, Elden and Chisholm (1993, p. 126) identify five characteristics of “classical action research”:

- “Purposes and Value Choice”, i.e. a key purpose is change that has positive social value;
- “Participation in the Research Process”, i.e. those who supply the data participate to some degree in certain phases of the research process;
- “Contextual Focus”, i.e. the inquiry is set in a specific context, often defined by the participants;
- “Knowledge Diffusion”, i.e. knowledge is generated and disseminated, usually by the researchers;
- “Change Based Data and Sense Making”, i.e. data must be collected, interpreted and made sense of over time to track the consequences of change.

In their paper *Participatory Processes/Paradoxical Practices*, Stohl and Cheney identify a number of paradoxes drawn from the literature and their own experiences with employee participation and workplace democracy. The paradoxes are organized under four broad headings:

... structure, the architecture of participation; agency, the efficacy of participation; identity,

the character of participation; and power, the direction of participation. (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 359)

While the paradoxes themselves are interesting, it is the categories used to organize the paradoxes that are useful here because they represent a way of thinking about participation. Their categories of power and structure map readily to power relations and context, as I have done in Table 1. Agency and identity refer to a participant’s ability to act on their own behalf but also as part of the group, which I have considered issues of representation.

In most cases, the writers that inspired my framework did not intend to be exhaustive in itemizing issues of participation nor did they intend to create a framework. Despite my re-direction of their purpose, the elements that the various writers provided were extremely helpful in expanding beyond the original 4 issues from Hickey & Mohan, but also in validating the similarities in themes and concerns across the chosen milieux. Several authors consider values and goals central (Dachler and Wilpert, 1978; Elden and Chisholm, 1993). The main goals identified are transformation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004) and effectiveness (Elden and Chisholm, 1993). Some of the “properties” of participation are embedded within representation (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Stohl & Cheney, 2001) and context (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978; Elden & Chisholm, 1993; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). And, while not addressed autonomously within any of the frameworks, power relations pervade Hickey and Mohan’s discussion of transformation and are also strongly tied to issues of representation and context. Hickey and Mohan mention sustainability but it is not a strong focus in their text and was not included by any of the others. However, power relations and sustainability are addressed within several of the literatures reviewed, including within PD (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014; Clement & vanden Besselaar, 1993; Ehn, 1993; Törpel, 2006).

Notably absent from Table 1 is a framework from Participatory Design. In PD, a number of writers address issues of PD but less so issues

of participation specifically. For example, in a special issue of *Communications of the ACM* on PD, Greenbaum makes a personal statement defining three perspectives on the need for Participatory Design: pragmatic, theoretical and political (1993). The pragmatic concerns goals to improve systems and productivity. For the theoretical, she offers one example of creating prototypes for better communication between developers and users. The political need for PD is the belief that users must have influence over the technology they use.

In *Participatory Design: Issues and Concerns*, Kensing and Blomberg (1998) outline the following issues most frequently addressed by PD researchers:

- The politics of design;
- The nature of participation;
- The method, tools and techniques for participation;
- The transfer of results to workers, user groups and design professionals;
- The sustainability of PD.

Regarding the nature of participation, Kensing and Blomberg itemize some requirements for participation:

Clement and Van den Besselaar (1993) ...reiterate three basic requirements for participation outlined by Kensing (1983): (1) access to relevant information, (2) the possibility for taking an independent position on the problems, and (3) participation in decision making. They add two additional requirements: (4) the availability of appropriate participatory development methods and (5) room for alternative technical and/or organizational arrangements. (Clement and Van den Besselaar cited in Kensing & Blomberg, 1998, p. 172)

More recently Kyng suggested a framework for PD that brings attention to elements that “fill the gap” between politics and methods, such as company roles, funding, and project outcomes. He posits that addressing a larger range of ele-

ments will make PD more relevant to future ICT design. While some of Kyng’s elements map to my framework, they are focussed on PD specifically while my framework is focussed on participation more broadly.

Although the perspectives (Greenbaum, 1993), the issues (Kensing & Blomberg, 1998), the requirements (Clement & van den Besselaar, 1993) and the elements (Kyng, 2010) identified within PD do not represent a framework for issues of participation specifically, they certainly address one or more of the issues outlined in Table 1. In addition Brattetiég and Wagner have grappled more directly with participation in *Distinguishing Participation* (2014). In the section entitled *What is Participation?* they briefly mention a number of elements that map readily to my framework including “representativity” (representation), “space” (context) and “power issues” (power relations). Their discussion draws on some of the same authors (e.g. Gaventa and Cornwall) I used while deriving the framework.

Beyond the inspirational articles represented in Table 1, many articles reviewed in the selected literatures address the issues in the framework to varying degrees, including literatures that are not represented in the table (as mentioned, Participatory Design but also Participatory Democracy and Participatory Education). In the sections that follow I use articles from the selected literatures to provide a better understanding of each of the issues in the framework and to identify insights that can be used to tackle each issue.

While closely related, I believe these seven issues are distinct and address different questions. Goals, values and interests answers the question *Why use participation?* – but with the sense of purpose rather than tangible outcomes. Representation addresses the question *Who will participate?* with all its underlying complexity. *Who can participate freely?* is answered and mitigated by discussions of power relations. Context addresses *What is the setting for participation?* encompassing many dimensions including time, space and their relation to power.

In terms of outcomes, transformations asks *Who will be changed by participation?* Effectiveness considers *What will be effected by participation?* and sustainability addresses the question *How will the outcomes of participation be sustained and sustainable?*

GOALS, VALUES AND INTERESTS

In their model of participation (Figure 2), Dachler and Wilpert link values and assumptions with the goals of the research. They identify four value orientations: democratic theory, socialist theory, human growth and development theory, and productivity and efficiency orientation. These orientations are based on Greenberg's paper "The Consequences of Worker Participation: A Clarification of the Theoretical Literature" (1975). While Dachler and Wilpert's list of "orientations" mixes theories and goals, Greenberg makes a clearer distinction between theories (schools of thought) and goals (consequences), thereby strengthening the distinction between the "schools of thought". In Figure 3, he outlines the four schools of thought, associating them with the intensity and scope of participation generally used as well as two sets of goals: attitudinal and behavioural consequences for the individual worker and social and political consequences.

According to Dachler and Wilpert (1978), the four orientations in their model are not mutually exclusive. While some of the desired outcomes may overlap, I would argue that the dominant value orientations do not. For example, in Figure 3, "The Participatory Left" subsumes the consequence of "enhanced mental health" from the Humanist Psychology school of thought but not to create "improved industrial efficiency, stability and productivity".

Like other participatory endeavours, early PD grew from a strong set of values, as characterized by Suchman:

Participatory design makes explicit the critical, and inevitable, presence of values in the system development process. To predominant values of

product quality and work productivity are added broadened participation and skill development. The premise is that these values are closely related; that the productiveness of our work is tied to the extent of our involvement, and that product quality is a matter of technology support for the continually expanding and developing work practices of skilled practitioners. (Suchman, 1993, p. vii)

We will see in a later section on Transformations that retaining these goals and values in current PD practice is of great concern to many in PD as well as other participatory practices. Many identify the root of the problem as the sharing of technique (and terminology) without the sharing of goals and values. This concern is shared by other participatory endeavours, for example, in participatory education:

...the current discourse of participation has absorbed – and been absorbed by – other discourses that promote a variety of goals, values, and interests, some of which may actually be nondemocratic in practice. (Anderson, 1998, p. 573)

In a well-documented argument, Anderson (1998) suggests four "sources of inauthenticity" that result in negative uses of participation. *Legitimation* is the use of participation to deflect criticism regarding a process and outcome. As a *control* mechanism, participation can be used as a way to have participants regulate one another's behaviour. *Collusion* is a way to support the status quo while looking progressive. And finally, participation can be used as a *distraction*, keeping participants focussed at the micro-level to distract from the macro-level.

From the management arena, Greenberg provides an example of this last point:

Participation to date has been confined, by and large, to the shop floor-to issues such as work schedules, pace, lunch breaks, and the like, thus excluding any participation in enterprise-wide decisions. (E. S. Greenberg, 1975, p. 194).

Figure 3. Comparing the four schools of thought predictive claims about worker participation. Adapted from "The Consequences of Worker Participation: A Clarification of the Theoretical Literature" by E.S. Greenberg, 1975, *Social Science Quarterly*, 56, p. 206 - 207.

School of Thought	Participation (by workers)		Consequences	
	Intensity	Scope	Attitudinal and Behavioral (for individual worker)	Social and Political (for society)
Management	Low	Narrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced morale, efficiency, enthusiasm for work and identification with enterprise goals. Decreased absenteeism, sabotage Decreased support for work stoppages and "wild-cat" strikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved industrial efficiency, stability and productivity
Humanistic Psychology	High	Narrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced mental health (happiness, creativity, self-esteem, ego, strength, etc.) Increased sociability and cooperativeness Decreased hostility, anxiety Greater maturity, independence, self-confidence and sense of responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved industrial efficiency, stability and productivity Creation of a mentally healthy workforce Decreased support for extremist political movements
Democratic Theory	High	Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased knowledge and interest in public affairs Growth in public-spiritedness at the expense of private self-interest Greater rationality and less emotionalism in decision-making Greater toleration for viewpoints of others Greater facility in use of democratic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realization of a Democratic Society Development of a civic-minded citizenry
The Participatory Left	High	Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a more healthy human personality (subsumes humanistic psychology list) Enhancement of productive skills and collective efforts Radicalization (growing hostility to capitalist order) Growing desire for worker control over higher levels of economic activity Increased self-confidence as member of a class in action Hostility to bureaucratic centralization and hierarchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-elitist, mass-based revolution

So, although Anderson is talking about education reform, it is easy to see how these negative uses of participation apply to other participatory practices.

While there is no quick remedy, it would seem that, as Greenberg called for in 1975 and many have done so since, it is imperative that we

identify the value orientation of our endeavours and encourage others to do the same.

REPRESENTATION

In early PD, the emphasis was on ensuring that "workers" were involved in technology

design in a meaningful way. However, it was recognized that:

In many PD projects it is not possible for all those affected by the design effort to fully participate. In these cases the choice of user participants and the form of participation must be carefully considered and negotiated with relevant organizational members, including management and the workers themselves. (Kensing & Blomberg, 1998, p. 173)

While Kensing and Blomberg offer some direction or spirit for the selecting of participants (e.g. representatives of various roles and skills, those identified by existing worker organizations, etc.), we are left with little in the way of skills or techniques to draw on, here or elsewhere in the PD literature. Furthermore, issues of representation are rarely addressed explicitly perhaps because of the early focus on workers. However, these issues will be difficult to avoid as PD moves beyond the workplace.

In Participatory Development, the need to address issues of representation seems fundamental and urgent. However, according to Hickey and Mohan, surprisingly little has been written on the subject (2004). In their volume *Participation: Tyranny to Transformation*, Gaventa states that work on political participation has focussed on “critical questions dealing with legitimate representation, systems of public accountability, policy advocacy and lobbying, rights education and awareness building, and party formation and political mobilization” (2004, p. 29), but these have been underplayed in community development. At the same time, “the political participation literature has paid less attention to issues of local knowledge, participatory process, or direct and continuous forms of engagement of marginalized groups” (2004, p. 29), issues that have been considered within community development. It seems that in Participatory Development, as in Participatory Design, certain issues of representation have been left in the political realm.

For example, while Kensing and Blomberg mention some ways to select workers for

participation, they don’t directly address issues of legitimate representation. In these issues, Gaventa includes direct vs. representative participation, the role of individuals vs. “representative” organizations, the use of existing representation structures, empowerment of local elites, and the desire by some to be represented rather participate directly (2004).

Gaventa also brings our attention to more progressive ideas of participation through an introduction to Empowered Participatory Democracy as conceptualized, and practiced, by Fung and Wright and others, and explicated in their book *Deepening Democracy* (2003).

Specifically on the issue of representation, Mansbridge, one of the contributors to *Deepening Democracy*, suggests “thinking of the individuals who do attend deliberative assemblies as informal representatives of those who do not attend” (2003, p. 193). But, also states that, like formal representatives, informal representatives should a) “... meet the criterion for adversary democracy that conflicting interests be represented in proportion to their numbers in the population”; b) “... meet the criterion for deliberative democracy that useful perspectives be represented in sufficient critical mass and internal variety to inform the deliberation on relevant issues”; and c) “... meet the participatory criteria that the arrangements of the polity give all citizens an opportunity to develop their faculties and that inequalities in participation do not generate, or map heavily onto, inequalities in respect” (2003, pp. 194-195).

Mansbridge suggests we “apply this three-part analysis to the cases at hand to understand whether these assemblies advance an acceptable form of informal representation or whether they reproduce and amplify harmful underlying inequalities”, warning that judgment and diligence are required in evaluating the effectiveness of representation on a case-by-case basis (2003).

I believe a greater understanding of issues of representation will become increasingly valuable within Participatory Design, both inside and outside the workplace.

In a recent PD example, Hess, Offenberg and Pipek do a good job of heeding advice offered by Kensing and Blomberg:

In making these choices, it is important to be clear about the motivations for participation, the scope of participation, and the resources allocated for the project. In addition, the relationship between those taking an active part in the project and those who do not should be carefully considered and attended to throughout the project. (Kensing & Blomberg, 1998, p. 174)

As part of their Community Driven Development process, Hess, Offenberg and Pipek (2008) created an elaborate representational governance structure within a software user community. All users were considered part of the “User Parliament”, providing input to the “Central Committee” who was charged with making the final decisions. The Central Committee seats were filled by vote of the users and developers.

Although the formality and details of the representation structure in their project will not be appropriate for many other PD endeavours, Hess, Offenberg and Pipek’s paper is one of the rare occasions in the PD literature in which the approach to representation is made transparent.

POWER RELATIONS

Early in PD two sets of power relations were identified and addressed: those between users and designers and those between management and labour. Some techniques used to mitigate these were the explicit acknowledgement of the need for mutual learning, using low fidelity materials to create prototypes, separating labour and management during learning and design activities, etc. (Ehn, 1993; Törpel, 2006) Other power relations, specifically gender, have also been addressed to a lesser extent (Ehn, 1993; Törpel, 2006) While there are many other power relations within a workplace environment, it could be argued that these three are most potent.

When PD is practiced outside the workplace, user-designer relations as well as gender power relations continue to be present and powerful in most environments. In addition, other differences may also affect the power relations, such as role on the project, subject matter expertise/experience, rhetorical skills – just to name a few. There may also be differences based on hierarchy (explicit or implicit) amongst the designers/developers. However in recent PD literature, power relations between users and designers, amongst designers, and amongst all participants, are not often addressed explicitly and few ways to identify and address power relations are given.

A very sophisticated examination of power relations is underway within Participatory Development. Drawing on multiple conceptions of power, several writers in *Participation: from Tyranny to Transformation* use their experience with development initiatives to illustrate some of the complexities of power.

Those with a structuralist view see power as somewhat fixed and stratified while those with post-structuralist perspective look at power as fluid and potentially useful. One writer, Masaki, brings these two conceptions together to account for the renegotiation of ongoing power dynamics by Tharus peasants in Nepal. He provides the following guidance for those engaged in external interventions:

...it is imperative to start out by considering how the daily flow of social interactions can potentially play a part in ameliorating potential bias in ‘participatory’ processes. It would only then be feasible to devise strategies that build upon opportunities arising from daily social interactions, as well as make up for limitations of local struggles to overcome entrenched inequalities. (Masaki, 2004, pp. 136-137)

Similarly, another writer in the book reminds us that transformation need not involve a reversal of power relations and may, instead, be achieved through strengthening bargaining power within existing relations (Williams, 2004).

This is demonstrated within Participatory Design in the early trade union projects in which negotiation models were developed to ensure democratic negotiations between workers and management on technology issues (Bjerknes & Bratteteig, 1995). Through the use of these models workers had greater influence in the negotiations process, thereby creating a shift in the power relations, but there was no goal or expectation that a balance of power between workers and management would be achieved.

While issues of power relations seem muted in recent PD literature, there is a rich history within PD as well as some new work on power, particularly by Bratteteig and Wagner (2014). Drawing on PD, and significant reconceptualizations of power relations in neighbouring participatory practices, provides a starting place for better examinations of power in our participatory practices.

CONTEXT

Since the conception of the socio-technical nature of systems in the early 1950s, the value of accounting for the context of technology use has been clear (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). Scholars from a range of fields have introduced approaches to studying context including situated action models (Nardi, 1996; Suchman, 1987), distributed cognition (Flor & Hutchins, 1991; Nardi, 1996), activity theory (Bødker, 1989; Kuutti, 1996; Nardi, 1996) and locales framework (S. Greenberg, 2001).

However, in this paper, I am interested in the context of participation in system development – not particularly in the context of use for the system – although it could be argued that development (and redevelopment) is part of the context of use.

In a paper about using actor-network theory in PD, Gärtner and Wagner develop a conceptual framework to analyze the political and organizational context of design and participation. The framework identifies four concepts used in the analysis: networks of humans and artifacts (actor networks), technical systems as mediators

of social interaction (intermediaries), system design and associated negotiations (practices) and the space-time contexts of activity (social arenas). While the actors, the technical systems and the practices are also part of the context, it is the last concept – the arenas – that is most relevant in my narrow definition of ‘context’. As you will see shortly, it maps very closely to a similar concept in Participatory Development.

Like Gärtner and Wagner, Hickey and Mohan identify temporal and spatial aspects of context (2004). Regarding temporal aspects, they suggest “understanding histories, overlapping temporalities, and the unfolding of political processes”. For PD these aspects could be extrapolated as understanding the organizational and political landscape as well as “the identity of the actors involved” (Gärtner & Wagner, 1996), attending to the timelines within and outside the ‘project’ or other social arena, and being aware of initiatives and events that may impact the current endeavour and vice versa.

While Hickey and Mohan briefly discuss the spatial aspects of context, it is Gaventa (2004) that identifies three intersecting continuums: power, place and space. He reminds us that power relations are not fixed but can be shifted by spaces and, vice versa:

Power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests. (Gaventa, 2004, p. 34)

To assess the transformative possibilities of a political space, he encourages us to look at each continuum.

For spaces, he suggests the following continuum: closed spaces, invited spaces and claimed/created spaces. Closed spaces are those in which decisions are made by specific people behind closed doors. Invited spaces are those in which all people are invited to participate by authorities (e.g. government, NGOs, etc.). At the end of the continuum are spaces that are claimed or created by the less powerful.

Regarding places – also referred to as “arenas” or levels of engagement – he suggests local, national and global as one possible continuum. It is notable in PD that Kensing and Blomberg (1998), referencing Gärtner and Wagner (1996), use “arenas” in a similar way to create a similar continuum, i.e. individual project arena, company arena, and national arena. However, Gärtner and Wagner’s original continuum focuses on what is being designed:

Arena A: Designing Work and Systems.

Arena B: Designing Organizational Frameworks for Action.

Arena C: Designing the Industrial Relations Context.

For power, Gaventa suggests a continuum based on the degree of visibility. Visible power is exercised in public space and presumed to be relatively open in terms of who can participate. With hidden power, who can participate, and how, are limited and generally unstated. Invisible power is when dominating ideologies, values and forms of behaviour have been internalized.

In his commentary near the end of *Participation: from Tyranny to Transformation*, Bebbington draws this conclusion:

The point of framing not just participation, but also the site’s from which it is advocated and promoted, in relationship to structural context is to be realistic about what is more and less possible, and also – and this is more important still – to be clearer about the obstacles to social transformation and increased levels of meaningful social inclusion. It means that participation events – in projects, research cycles, planning processes etc. – should never again be considered without considering the “immanent” conditions under which they occur. (Bebbington, 2004, p. 280)

While context is a huge issue, the edges of which are hard to delineate, it is clear that ac-

counting for relevant aspects of context is vital to understanding conditions of participation.

TRANSFORMATIONS

Perhaps the most fundamental principle of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the inclusion of actions throughout the research process, especially actions aimed at social change (Morris & Muzychka, 2002). In fact, PAR strives for three types of change, which can be considered the overarching goals of PAR: “development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants”; “improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process”; and “transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships” (Maguire, 1987).

Proponents of participatory approaches in all practices continue to identify transformation as key to participation, particularly in Participatory Development:

There remains a strong sense in the literature on participatory development that the proper objective of participation is to ensure the “transformation” of existing development practice and, more radically, the social relations, institutional practices and capacity gaps which cause social exclusion. (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 13)

Those committed to transformation are often concerned that this goal is lost with the mainstreaming of participatory practices that use “participation as a technical method of project work rather than as a political methodology of empowerment” (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 11).

The roots of PD were embedded in the notion of transforming the workplace but also of transforming work relations at the state and national level (Bjerknes & Bratteteig, 1995). Also of great importance was transforming participants through mutual learning and improved skills (Ehn, 1993).

As Participatory Design has moved outside the workplace and PD “techniques” have been mainstreamed, many PD practitioners are calling for a renewed commitment to some form of democratic intervention. The discussion of these concerns reached a peak with Beck’s paper *P for Political: Participation is not enough* and the many response papers it sparked (Bødker, 2003; Christiansen, 2003; Dittrich, 2003; Kanstrup, 2003). In it, Beck provides a rally cry for Participatory Design:

... this paper aims to inspire reflection on what ‘political’ means or could mean in a systems development context. While this continually needs rethinking and recontextualising, in my own use in this paper ‘political’ means concern about dominance patterns ... (Beck, 2002).

Similarly, in *Participation: from Tyranny to Transformation*, Hickey and Mohan summarize the rally cry of many of the writers in that volume, calling for a reframing of participation as citizenship:

First, participation must be ideologically explicit and tied to a coherent theory of development. Second, the locus of transformation must go beyond the individual and local and involve multi-scaled strategies that encompass the institutional and structural. We argue that a radicalized notion of citizenship – derived in part from alternative development theories of participation – provides the intermediary analytical and strategic basis upon which this project can be pursued. (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 12)

Drawing on Participatory Democracy debates, Anderson also points to a reconceptualization of participation based on “the existence of local social spaces in which human actors can learn and exercise the skills of dialogue and debate necessary for the development of a democratic citizenry” and “greater attention to the economic and structural constraints on participation” (Anderson, 1998, p. 575).

While there are concerns about the other common issues of participation, transformation stirs the most passion because, for many, it is the main purpose of participation.

EFFECTIVENESS

Participatory approaches are often offered as a remedy to the failure of current ‘non-participatory’ practices. For example according to Anderson, participation gained support in U.S. school reform “as an antidote to entrenched bureaucracy, hierarchy, and excessive specialization” (Anderson, 1998, p. 572). Similarly, participatory democracy is seen as a viable alternative to representational democracy, which is “increasingly ill suited to the novel problems we face in the twenty-first century” (Fung & Wright, 2003). In Participatory Development, major donors and development organizations started to use participatory approaches when “the ineffectiveness of externally imposed and expert-oriented forms of research and planning became increasingly evident in the 1980s” (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

In systems development, participation by end-users has been seen by some as a solution to problems encountered in the traditional life cycle or waterfall approach to information systems design. System developers have often found it difficult to gather and understand system requirements and end-users have often been frustrated by the resulting system (Asaro, 2000).

Asaro compares and contrasts Joint Application Development (JAD) and Participatory Design as two approaches that involve end-users in the system development process. Asaro raises concerns that JAD, and other similar approaches that focus on system effectiveness, prescribe the involvement of users in terms of scope and timing, and that this “limits the voice of the user through explicitly management-dominated organization meetings” and “serves to protect and promote the authority of technical experts”. By contrast, Asaro characterizes early “European Participatory Design” as “focused purely on democratic participation and overcoming vari-

ous difficulties in achieving this". He describes "the current heterogeneous field of participatory design" as having "the twin goals of increasing efficiency (of both technical experts and users) and increasing democracy (primarily for users)" (2000, p. 271).

'Increasing democracy' is part of the goal of 'transformation' discussed in the previous section. In this section, I am interested in the other goal 'increasing efficiency'. From the PD literature, 'efficiency' seems a bit narrow for the types of outcomes desired, therefore, I've used what I consider a broader term: effectiveness.

By effectiveness, I am grouping together "product quality and work productivity" (Ehn, 1993; Greenbaum, 1993; Suchman, 1993) as well as the notion of "improved process" in terms of user satisfaction with the process, and improved commitment to the successful implementation and use of the system. When these goals are the only goals, there is often a sense of cynicism about the process and the outcome, as discussed under "Goals, Values and Interests". However, even those that seek transformations, generally want to improve the product and the process (Greenbaum, 1993), and maybe provide a sense of satisfaction for the participants, if not productivity from management's perspective. In addition, a heightened awareness on the part of participants regarding issues of technology and increased confidence in addressing those issues would be considered by many as an 'effective' outcome (Clement & van den Besselaar, 1993).

In Clement and van den Besselaar's (1993) survey of PD researchers, many report that some aspects of the participation process continued after the end of the project. This is one example from their questionnaire:

... Friis describes how users moved from their traditional passive roles into analyzing, designing, and evaluating roles. EDP specialists changed from being traditional experts into "teaching and consultative experts." (Clement & van den Besselaar, 1993, p. 34)

For many PD practitioners, the goal is not just to leave behind a better product and satisfied users but also to leave behind the values of participation. But what if we don't leave behind a better product and satisfied users? As Asaro states:

A system will be a failure if it cannot achieve the intended design goals, if it is unreliable or breaks internally, if it never gets used as intended or at all, or if it actually impedes the jobs of workers (Asaro, 2000, pp. 277-278).

Participatory practices are seen as one way to improve the process and the product and, not surprisingly, there are calls for 'evidence' of the success of participation. The HCI literature tends to focus on two outcomes of effectiveness that can be 'measured': user satisfaction and user productivity. Based on this narrow scope and approach, the evidence in the HCI literature is mixed. While several studies and meta-analyses report at least a moderately positive outcome with regards to user productivity and/or user satisfaction, there are still many that report a neutral or negative outcome (Jun & King, 2008; McKeen & Guimaraes, 1997; McKeen, Guimaraes, & Wetherbe, 1994). However, for the most part, mainstream HCI accepts that user participation has a generally positive effect, especially on user satisfaction but also on user productivity, as evidenced by the many user participative approaches and activities that are currently in use (Jun & King, 2008).

While it is true that PD generally includes aspects of 'effectiveness' as a goal, that goal is defined more widely than the 'measurable' aspects of user productivity and user satisfaction.

SUSTAINABILITY

Both in the Participatory Design and Participatory Development literature, sustainability is mentioned as a desirable, even vital, outcome (Brown, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Kensing & Blomberg, 1998). However, little guidance is given on what is meant by sustainability and how to achieve it.

In *A Retrospective Look at PD projects*, Clement and van den Besselaar discuss some of the difficulties of creating “self-sustaining” PD activity, including the short-term nature of projects and the withdrawal of resources once the project is over. Their research also indicates that:

... successes according to the usual criteria of PD projects -- active involvement of users, increased learning and communications, and more effective, better adapted systems -- can be achieved, but are by themselves not sufficient for local self-sustaining processes of participation to continue. (Clement & van den Besselaar, 1993, p. 35)

Based on the survey responses they received from PD researchers, Clement and van den Besselaar (1993) suggest two things that must occur for a participatory design process to become self-sustaining. Amongst the participants, there must be users who are able and willing to become the “animators”. In addition, there must be external support for the survival of the process based on an awareness of the achievements. It seems that sustainability can refer to the sustained use of the “product” of the participation but also to the sustained commitment to the processes and goals of participation.

Transferring “ownership” of the product and the process from the “change agents” to the “users” can be vital in Participatory Development. In a case study of a project in Ethiopia, Henry provides a rather extreme example through a quote from a development partner:

We get them to feel ownership by forcing them to invest their own money so they will take care of the project. (Henry, 2004, p. 153)

Kensing and Simonsen touch on another type of sustainability as part of the MUST method – sustainability in the ecological sense, i.e. as a balance between utilization and protection of resources. Rather than wasting valuable resources such as money and users’ skills, they

encourage identifying and protecting these resources during the project but also producing a sustainable basis for the organization’s future decision-making and its’ ongoing technical and organizational development (Kensing & Simonsen, 1998).

Like the other key issues of participation, sustainability has multiple facets, many of which we are only beginning to understand and explore.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have looked at literature from PD and some related participatory practices to provide a better understanding of participation and to derive a framework of key issues that seem common not only to these participatory practices but perhaps to participatory practices more generally.

I have brought attention to these issues so that we can be more conscious and explicit about the choices and compromises we make while designing, conducting and reflecting on participation – and so that we can share this decision-making power with participants. I have looked within and beyond PD to uncover strategies for addressing these issues and the questions I associated with each.

From within Participatory Education, Anderson has identified four sources of inauthenticity regarding *goals, values and interests* that result in negative uses of participation: legitimization, control, collusion and distraction. But even if we can avoid the negative uses, we can’t assume that all participants in a PD process share our values. For each endeavour, we should ask *Why use participation?* and expect a range of responses that will help begin the process of mutual learning.

Participatory Democracy has delved most deeply into issues of *representation*, such as legitimate representation, accountability, advocacy and lobbying, rights education and awareness building, and political mobilization. Considering the range of organizations and social structures that PD now engages in, we need

to transparently address *Who will participate?* and, perhaps, make contributions to issues not adequately tackled within Participatory Democracy such as local knowledge, participatory process, and direct and continuous participation.

Within Participatory Development, some practitioners are looking at using both fixed and fluid notions of power to understand and leverage existing social interactions with the goal of improving, rather than reversing, *power relations*. The traditional relations considered by PD such as management and worker, designer and user, continue to be important when we ask *Who can participate freely?* However, there are lots of other power issues that need our attention, some ubiquitous in society and others very specific to the context of our project(s).

Participatory Design has been at the forefront of identifying the importance of *context* in the design and use of ICTs but less so in the context for participation. Gaventa (2004) has suggested three spectrums for understanding the spatial aspects of context: space (closed, invited and claimed/created), place (arenas such as local, national and global) and power (visible, invisible and hidden). These are just a few of the many important facets of context we need to address when considering *What is the setting for participation?*

Transformations of the participants (through mutual learning and skill development) as well as transformation of organizations and society more generally, were integral to early Participatory Action Research and, by extension, the many participatory practices emanating from it. Therefore, it is no surprise that this goal remains paramount for many practitioners within a range of participatory practices. When we consider *Who will be changed by participation?* we could look beyond our immediate participants to see what ripples (or waves) we can make outside the confines of one process and one product. As some in PD have done, mutual learning with participants could include knowledge generating activities that are shared not just within academia but within practices relevant to our participants.

Many people believe that participation leads to *effectiveness*: improved products, processes, productivity and satisfaction. Although effectiveness without transformations is lamented from within all the participatory practices reviewed, it is often the outcome our participants most desire. If we look widely at *What will be effected by participation?* we should anticipate a range of responses that resonate to differing degrees with the participants. For example, some will be satisfied with a new product, others will be excited about the process, while others may have their sights set on organizational change.

The concept of *sustainability* within participation is multi-faceted and still evolving. From my investigation, only Participation Development and Participatory Design considered this issue and brought a couple of the facets to light: self-sustaining aspects of the product or process and conscious balancing of utilization and protection of resources. If we explicitly ask a question like *How will the outcomes of participation be sustained and sustainable?* this will influence our choices and compromises throughout our participation process.

While my examination of each of the seven issues is very brief here, it served the purposes I set out. Firstly, evidence of the issues within the PD literature and other participatory practices supported the inclusion of each of the issues in the framework and my belief that there are many common issues amongst these (and probably other) participatory practices. Secondly, I identified some literatures beyond PD from which PD practitioners could draw some value in their own practice. In addition, another, unintended purpose was served. The framework provided a new lens through which I could re-examine some of the PD literature and re-discover its value in my own work.

I am eager to consider how the framework could be improved to be even more useful within PD and how it could be extended to include additional issues not yet adequately captured here such as the need for resources, including skills and funding. I am in the process of elaborating

the Issues of Participation Framework, working my participants in the context of a current field study, and also in light of some recent conceptual contributions within PD (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014; Halskov & Hansen, 2015; Kyng, 2010). I also hope that discussions arising from this paper will help shape further development of the Issues of Participation Framework.

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