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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE: INCONTESTABLE ADVANTAGES AND INEVITABLE RISKS

The paper explores the crisis of contemporary democracy, and citizen participation in public governance as a tool for its resolution. The reasons for the growing discrepancy between the demands of the citizens and the actions of the government are presented. The pros and cons of citizen participation are summarized in order to frame multiple dimensions of this complex issue. Studies on the positive and negative outcomes of participation are considered, and a conclusion is reached that under certain circumstances citizens' involvement might be very beneficial, and under other circumstances it might not.

Key words: *citizen participation, crisis of democracy, quality of democracy*

Г. Станков. Участь громадян у державному управлінні: безперечні переваги та неминучі ризики

У статті досліджується криза сучасної демократії і участь громадян у державному управлінні як інструмент подолання кризи. Представлені причини наростаючої невідповідності між вимогами громадян і діями влади. Автором узагальнено переваги і недоліки участі громадян для того, щоб визначити певні аспекти цієї складної проблеми.

Значна частина сучасної теорії демократії присвячена якості демократії та динаміці процесів демократизації та протилежних їй процесів. У наукових дослідженнях обґрунтовано тезу, що в демократичних суспільствах зростає незадоволення функціонуванням влади, і все більше громадян вважають свої уряди недостатньо демократичними. Іншими словами, демократії стикаються з викликом стати більш демократичними.

Метою цієї публікації є дослідження можливостей підвищення якості демократії через посилення участі громадян у прийнятті рішень.

Для досягнення цієї мети проаналізовано широкий спектр літератури у галузі політології та державного управління щодо практичних наслідків залучення та участі громадян.

Практичне значення одержаних результатів полягає у тому, що вони можуть бути використані широким загалом фахівців і науковців, які в галузі публічного управління вирішують комплексну проблему залучення та участі громадян у державному управлінні з погляду на безперечні переваги та неминучі ризики.

Результати проведеного дослідження дозволяють зробити висновок, що за певних обставин участь громадян може бути досить корисною, а за інших обставин – навпаки. З огляду на потенційні переваги та недоліки залучення та участі громадян у визначеній політиці, наукова дискусія щодо того, як саме громадяни повинні брати участь у прийнятті рішень, триває. Основне питання полягає у тому, який тип процесу участі найкраще працює для усіх зацікавлених сторін та в яких конкретно випадках. Як теорія, так і практика демократичних інновацій мають бути зосереджені на розробці ефективних моделей та процедур, які використовують і збільшують переваги участі громадян та зменшують або нейтралізують її недоліки.

Ключові слова: криза демократії, участь громадян, якість демократії.

Formulation of the problem. A significant part of the modern theory of democracy is dedicated to the quality of democracy and the dynamics in the processes of democratization and dedemocratization. A growing body of research shows that in democratic societies there is growing dissatisfaction with their functioning, and more and more citizens consider their governments insufficiently democratic. Democracies face the challenge of becoming more democratic. The purpose of this text is to explore the possibilities for enhancing the quality of democracy by strengthening citizen participation in decision-making. In order to achieve this purpose, a wide range of literature from the domain of political science and public administration on the practical effects of citizen participation has been studied.

Purpose. The paper explores the crisis of contemporary democracy, and citizen participation in public governance as a tool for its resolution. The reasons for the growing discrepancy between the demands of the citizens and the actions of the government are presented. The pros and cons of citizen participation are summarized in order to frame multiple dimensions of this complex issue. Studies on the positive and negative outcomes of participation are considered, and a conclusion is reached that under certain circumstances citizens' involvement might be very beneficial, and under other circumstances it might not.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The crisis of democracy in the 21st century. In the second decade of the 21st century, democratic societies are in a very complex period. Among many citizens there is a growing belief about the inability of the democratic institutions to fully implement the principles of democracy [11; 13; 22]. The increasing frustration with the discrepancy between the way governments govern and citizens' expectations makes representative institutions unrepresentative [17; 15], and as a result, the authority of representative democracy declines [21] and public trust in democracy collapses [9]. The phenomenon of delegitimization of democracy in society is undoubtedly not a special case of one or several nations, but a common problem of the democratic European societies [8].

The loss of the legitimacy of democratic institutions leads to distrust in political parties and public administration, and hence to an overall problem that Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki [4] aptly call the «crisis of democracy.» According to them, the governance and the administration are not able to respond to the citizens' demands. As a result, citizens become more dissatisfied,

and the administration becomes more exclusive. This situation produces a vicious circle of the growing estrangement between citizens and governance.

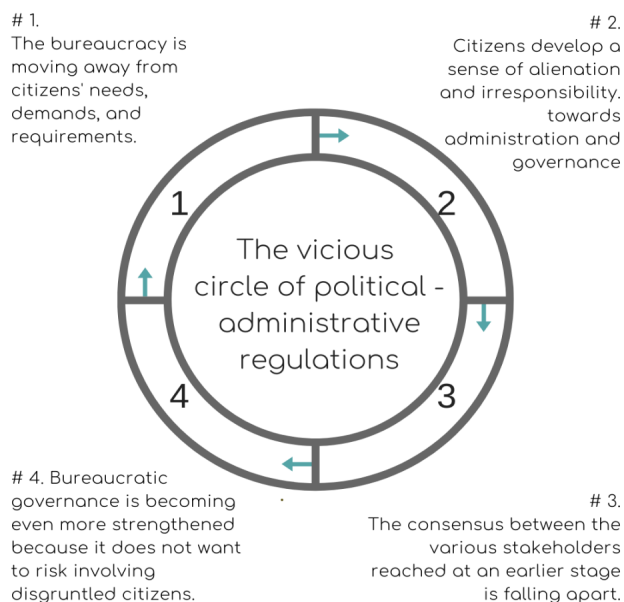


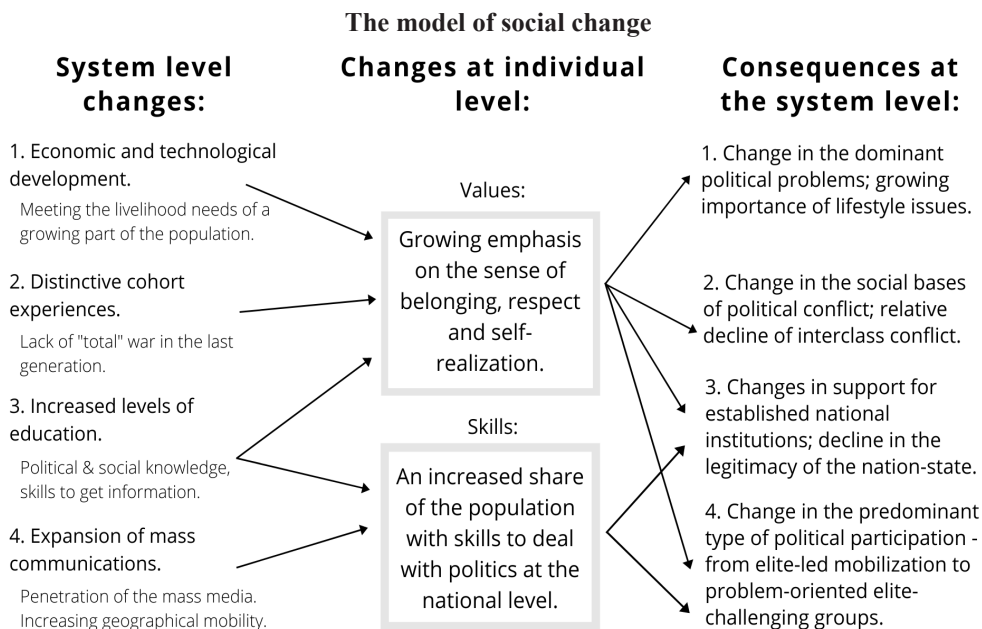
Figure 1: The vicious circle of political-administrative regulations

Source: adapted from [4].

Looking for explanation of this process, Inglehart [5] found the reasons for the discrepancy between citizens and government in certain system level changes in modern society that created space for new values and new motives for social action. These changes include economic and technical development (improving the livelihood conditions of a growing part of the population), distinctive cohort experiences (generations, growing in the absence of «total» war and relative peace and stability), increased levels of education (better understanding of the political and social life, and skills to get information), expansion of mass communication (mass media reaching a bigger part of the population). As a result, a significant number of people developed what Inglehart called «postmaterialist values», such as the need for belonging, respect, self-expression and self-realization. At the same time, these people have significantly improved their political skills and are increasingly interested in participating in decision-making at various levels and in policy-making, a change that Inglehart defines as a «challenge to the elite.» The new style of participation gives citizens a more important role in making specific decisions, not just the right to choose between two or more groups of candidates for decision-makers.

In this changing environment public governance faces enormous challenges, and it is clear that the old tools and decision-making approaches of representative democracy, inherited from the 20th century, can no longer achieve the results that citizens would perceive as necessary, desired and fair.

Table 1



Source: adapted from [5, p. 5].

Presentation of basic material of the research.

Citizen participation in the decision-making process – a possible solution to the «crisis of democracy»

Altman [1] states that when the public loses its trust in the democratic institutions, citizens demand change, which could happen in two ways: a) reform of the existing institutions and b) adoption of new forms of citizen participation. Citizen participation, in turn, is achieved through the introduction of forms of direct democracy, such as referendums, or through deliberative forums and participatory democracy. Citizen participation is usually defined as «the process by which members of a society... share power with public officials in making substantive decisions and in taking actions related to the community» [18, p. 320]. For Arnstein [2], it is a «civil power», characterized by a «redistribution of power», allowing previously excluded citizens to join the decision-making process.

Advantages and risks of citizen participation in the decision-making process.

Researchers note numerous advantages of citizen participation:

Usually society looks forward to getting involved in solving important issues [14].

Participation reduces the so-called «legitimacy gap» [19].

Participation provides an opportunity to monitor manifestations of corruption, politics behind-the-scenes, and clientelism [7].

Some forms of participation involve more stakeholders, which improves the quality of decision-making and also allows less represented groups to express their wishes [12].

Increasing overall social trust [16].

Increasing civic engagement and strengthening the sense of political efficiency [16].

At the same time, researchers find certain risks of citizen participation. For example, Smith [20] identifies five main disadvantages of citizen participation:

1) It is impossible to achieve the inclusion of all citizens due to the different levels of participation in different social groups, most of which are not particularly motivated to participate.

2) Citizens do not have the skills and competence to make reasoned political judgments, which compromises the idea of making informed decisions.

3) Even if they are motivated and / or competent to make decisions, citizens cannot have a serious effect on governance because the authorities will ignore or substitute their decisions to serve their own interests.

4) Participation is a very burdensome and costly resource for both citizens and institutions, and this reduces its effectiveness as a contribution to governance.

5) The effectiveness of civic participation is limited by the scale in which it takes place, which reduces the opportunities for transfer of good practices for engagement in the democratic process.

Thus, despite the great and justified enthusiasm for the idea of more citizen participation in the decision-making process, the accumulated practical experience shows that along with the incontestable advantages, it also carries some inevitable risks.

Analysis of pros and cons of participation from public administration's perspective

From the point of view of public administration, for the political system and the administration, the behavior of the citizens is both a possible resource of the external environment and a possible threat. If a SWOT analysis is made, reflecting the perspective of an institution, for it civic activity is not always an opportunity, on the contrary - uncontrollable and often spontaneous actions of the public in different situations are a threat to its activities and the performance of its functions.

Table 2

SWOT – analysis matrix

	Positive	Negative
Internal environment	S (<i>strengths</i>): strengths of the administration	W (<i>weaknesses</i>): weaknesses of the administration
External environment	O (<i>opportunities</i>): external opportunities for the administration	T (<i>threats</i>): external threats (challenges) to the administration

Source: created by the author.

Irvin and Stansbury [6] summarize the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation, taking into account the perspectives of citizens and government.

Advantages include:

Table 3

Advantages of citizen participation in government decision making

Advantages of Citizen Participation in Government Decision Making		
	Advantages to citizen participants	Advantages to government
Decision process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education (learn from and inform government representatives) • Persuade and enlighten government • Gain skills for activist citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education (learn from and inform citizens) • Persuade citizens; build trust and allay anxiety or hostility • Build strategic alliances • Gain legitimacy of decisions
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break gridlock; achieve outcomes • Gain some control over policy process • Better policy and implementation decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break gridlock; achieve outcomes • Avoid litigation costs • Better policy and implementation decisions

Source: adapted from [6, p. 56].

Disadvantages include:

Table 4

Disadvantages of citizen participation in government decision making

Disadvantages of Citizen Participation in Government Decision Making		
	Disadvantages to citizen participants	Disadvantages to government
Decision process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming (even dull) • Pointless if decision is ignored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Costly • May backfire, creating more hostility toward government
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worse policy decision if heavily influenced by opposing interest groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of decision-making control • Possibility of bad decision that is politically impossible to ignore • Less budget for implementation of actual projects

Source: adapted from [6, p. 58].

Desiring to specify what conditions can be defined as «ideal» for enhanced citizen participation in decision-making, not only through the prism of who the stakeholders are and what the environmental conditions are, Irwin and Stansbury offer a specific cost-benefit analysis, adding two new dimensions to the typology of participation conditions: high or low are the potential costs and benefits of organizing a participation procedure [6].

Table 5

A model for cost-benefit analysis

	Costs	Benefits
High	Indicators	Indicators
Low	Indicators	Indicators

Source: adapted from [6, p. 62].

The analysis of Irwin and Stansbury categorizes the costs and benefits as high and low, thus allowing practitioners and decision-makers to find when citizen participation would be really beneficial.

Table 6

Costs and benefits of citizen participation

	Costs	Benefits
High	<p>High-Cost Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An acquiescent public is reluctant to get involved in what is considered the job of government employees. • The region is geographically large or presents other obstacles (such as heavy traffic) that make regular face to-face meetings difficult. • Many competing factions and socioeconomic groups require a very large participatory group. • Low-income residents are key stakeholders for the issue at hand and should be included, yet they cannot because of work and family priorities. • Complex technical knowledge is required before participants can make decisions. • The public does not recognize the issue under consideration as a problem, nor are potential competing policy alternatives familiar to the public 	<p>High-Benefit Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue is gridlocked and a citizen mandate is needed to break the gridlock. • Hostility toward government entities is high, and the agency seeks validation from community members to successfully implement policy. • Community representatives with particularly strong influence are willing to serve as representatives. • The group facilitator has credibility with all representatives. • The issue is of high interest to stakeholders and may even be considered at «crisis stage» if actions are not changed
Low	<p>Low-Cost Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens readily volunteer for projects that benefit the entire community. • Key stakeholders are not too geographically dispersed; participants can easily reach meetings. • Citizens have enough income to attend meetings without harming their ability to provide for their families. • The community is homogenous, so the group requires fewer representatives of interest groups; smaller groups speed decision making. • The topic does not require representatives to master complex technical information quickly 	<p>Low-Benefit Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public is generally not hostile toward government entities. • The agency has had prior success in implementing policy without citizen participation (that is, the voting process is sufficient to guide policy-making behavior). • The population is large, making it difficult for involved stakeholders to influence a significant portion of the population. • The decisions of the group are likely to be ignored, no matter how much effort goes into their formation (the group does not have authority to make policy decisions). • The decisions of the group are likely to be the same decisions produced by the government entity

Source: adapted from [6, p. 62].

Conclusions. Given the potential advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in specific policy-making, the debate over how exactly citizens should participate in decision-making continues [3]. Konisky & Beierle [10] argue that the question is no longer whether direct or indirect democracy is preferable, but what type of participatory process works best for all stakeholders and in what cases. Both theory and practice of democratic innovations should focus on the development of models and procedures, which use and increase the advantages of participation and reduce or neutralize its disadvantages.

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Г. Станков. Участие граждан в государственном управлении: бесспорные преимущества и неизбежные риски

В статье исследуется кризис современной демократии и участие граждан в государственном управлении как инструмент его разрешения. Представлены причины нарастающего несоответствия между требованиями граждан и действиями власти. Суммируются плюсы и минусы участия граждан, чтобы обозначить несколько аспектов этой сложной проблемы. Рассматриваются исследования положительных и отрицательных результатов участия, и делается вывод, что при определенных обстоятельствах участие граждан может быть очень полезным, а при других обстоятельствах – нет.

Ключевые слова: гражданское участие, качество демократии, кризис демократии.

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