

# Briefing

## Citizen Participation and Popular Education in the City

*Written for Friends of the Earth's 'Big Ideas' project by Dr Eurig Scandrett, Queen Margaret University*

### Introduction and Summary

This paper explores how citizen participation in cities can contribute to wellbeing within environmental limits. It is a contribution to Friends of the Earth's 'Big Ideas' project, which aims to identify "key interventions which could help humankind deliver wellbeing for all (within environmental limits) by 2050". This paper responds to the intervention - suggested from initial literature review - of:

*"Enabling enhanced citizen participation in urban governance, planning and management, underpinned by strong investments in popular education particularly for disadvantaged communities, so that enhanced participation does not become a means for further dominance by elites and special interests."*

In addition to drawing insights from the literature and the author's 20 years of experience in the field of community education and environmental campaigning, this paper was informed by participation in a joint Edinburgh / Warwick University event *Community Engagement: Community-based Adult Education – Tales from the Field*, and a specially arranged focus group of practitioners and researchers in the field of citizen participation.

The key arguments of this paper are:

- Citizen participation is a necessary although not a sufficient condition for wellbeing for all within environmental limits (or, indeed for democracy, social justice and ecological sustainability).
- The growth of interest in citizen participation in the past 50 years or so, and in particular in participatory democracy needs to be understood historically: in the context, initially, of both the *achievements* and the *limitations* of the welfare state; and latterly, as both *cooption by* and *resistance to* neoliberalism (just as

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For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.

representative democracy emerged in struggle as both cooption by and resistance to industrial capitalism).

- Participation through a dialogical educational process can generate deliberation and social learning throughout society, but requires public investment from the state (national, regional, metropolitan, local) and/or from civil society (NGOs, social movements).
- Participation cannot be limited to 'invited' forms determined by those with power. It must also take forms 'invented' by those who are outside the decision making process, who claim power by making demands on decision makers, challenging the terms of decision making, or transforming the conditions under which decisions are to be made.
- It is important that participation is not restricted to considering the *distribution* of resources but also the *production* of goods and services – that is, we need *economic* participation as well as *political* participation.

In the cities of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, increasingly affected by global neoliberalism, the dominant form of 'participation' in policy and decision-making that has been offered to citizens is that of the market ('voting with one's wallet'). However, the increasing commodification of the public sphere has been accompanied by an interest in participation both amongst the managers of this process, eager to incorporate the public into their agenda, and also by activists attempting to undermine the process and establish socially just alternatives.

Participation is therefore contradictory and has emerged through a process of conflict and struggle. It is important to understand participation within this context and in relation to the contradictions that it exposes. Citizens' participation is certainly an important component of the journey *towards* wellbeing, social justice and ecological sustainability, as well as an essential aspect *of* that society to which we aspire. It is also conceivable however, that citizens' participation could be abused to deliver more of the social dysfunction, injustice and ecological destruction that we see in 2013. There are fundamental questions to ask about *who* participates, *how*, *why* and on *whose* terms, *who* stands to benefit and *where* power lies in the process and outcome of participation.

This paper explores these questions, with reference to examples of both more successful and less successful participation, and suggests ways in which we might move beyond an instrumental approach to participation to one that is deliberative and dialogical and rooted in lifelong popular education.

The paper also suggests that the city is a critical locus for participation due to its high density of people, diversity and wealth (both private and public); opportunities and risks of social interaction and anonymity, and of social conflicts, urban movements and structural contradictions. The urban space is produced through capitalist social relations and also a site of resistance<sup>1</sup>. Its populations – likely to be a significant majority of most societies - include the rooted proletariat, the global cosmopolitan and the subaltern migrant. Cities are crucibles for opportunities in citizen participation, with massive implications for the wider society within which they lie.

## **Section one: Political Participation**

### ***Case studies in participation:***

#### **Kerala's People's Plan & Porto Alegre's Participatory Budgeting**

There have been some successful experiments with participation, primarily in decision making about use of resources and the provision of services – two significant examples outlined below are the Porto Alegre participatory budgeting and the Kerala People's plan. These have been selected because of their ambition and investment: they have been applauded internationally for their innovation<sup>ii</sup>. Although not perfect they are able to demonstrate success and have been an inspiration for other, smaller scale attempts to involve citizens in making decisions about the distribution of common resources.

#### ***Kerala's People's Plan***

The state of Kerala in southern India has achieved distinction in a number of ways. In terms of many of the indicators of development and quality of life - literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality, fertility rates, poverty reduction, child malnutrition - Kerala exceeds most low-income countries and even some rich countries, despite a below-Indian-average GDP. In 1996, the elected communist-led coalition Left Democratic Front (LDF) state government initiated the Kerala People's Plan (Fischer 2000 pp. 157-167; Mathew 2006)<sup>iii</sup>. The plan aimed to decentralise and popularise participation in planning for economic development and social justice and involved representative bodies ranging from village panchayats (councils) to city corporations and civil society organisations. The Plan built on an extensive Participatory Resource Mapping exercise involving local panchayats, in collaboration with the Kerala State Land Use Board and activists from the people's science movement NGOs. This exercise drew on local people's knowledge in order to map natural resources and environmental, social and economic conditions. The People's Plan then sought to identify, plan and execute a response to local issues through a series of five phases (Mathew 2006).

The first phase used mass local discussions led by trained volunteers, in groups of 25-50 people for each sector (health, education, agriculture etc), to identify local development problems and governance issues. This included specific focuses on Scheduled Castes and Tribes (groups with a history of social discrimination) and on Women's development issues involving women's self-help groups. The local discussions led to the second phase 'development seminars' in all panchayats and municipalities in which integrated solutions to development problems were explored by representatives elected by the people, along with officials and specialists. In the third phase the proposals were worked up into specific projects, with technical input from task forces of specialists and officials to assess feasibility. The fourth phase involved prioritising projects at a local level, together with devolved budget responsibility amounting to some 40% of the state development budget, and the fifth stage integrated these various local and district level plans into the People's Plan.

According to Mathew (2006) the People's Plan was largely successful in devolving decision making to autonomous local bodies, and partially successful at maximising direct participation and social auditing of performance although less successful at transparency in terms of accessing information. The Plan also resulted in a significant reduction in corruption in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram, although it generally achieved greater success in rural than urban areas.. The biggest problem was the lack of commitment from the bureaucracy, which was exacerbated by conflicts with the local activists who simultaneously regarded bureaucrats as necessary for the delivery of the plan and as the major barrier to

participation. The strength of the People's Plan however lay in its building on strong civil society and people's movements, including the voluntary effort of many activist-intellectuals from the people's science movement, many of whom were associated with the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) which led the elected Left Front government that implemented the People's Plan legislation in the 1990s.

### ***Porto Alegre's Participatory Budgeting***

Porto Alegre is the regional capital of the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, with high literacy and a strong tradition of radicalism, protest movements and popular education. In 1985 the Union of Residents' Associations demanded that the budget setting process in the notoriously closed municipal government be democratised. When the Worker's Party – a left leaning party with roots in popular social movements and radical Catholicism – was elected to government in Porto Alegre they responded to this demand with the Participatory Budgeting process, which was initiated in 1989.

The Participatory Budget (PB) process democratises the process of distribution of resources and identifying new investments from around 15% of the municipal budget that is not committed to essential revenue spend (salaries etc). The first stage of the annual budgetary cycle is the people's plenaries, open public meetings of often hundreds of people, held in each of the sixteen regions of the city<sup>iv</sup>. The purpose of the plenary is to hold the representatives to account for the delivery of the previous year's budget, to start the process of generating ideas for the following year and to elect community representatives to participate in the process. The number and distribution of community representatives has changed since the PB was instituted in order to maximise representation of different communities and sectors.

The community representatives then work with PB coordinators to develop proposals for investment in the following budget. There is one PB coordinator for each city region – and therefore each plenary – plus one for each of particular sectors: women, black people, youth and older people. The coordinators and community representatives liaise with neighbourhoods across the city region in multiple meetings to monitor progress on previous developments, identify new issues, discuss potential solutions and negotiate priorities. Throughout this process they have access to technical advisors to assess feasibility of proposals. They then prioritise amongst the different options, and this is put to the second people's plenary when the budget priorities are agreed, applying a weighting system to balance the different needs of the city. This budget is submitted to the Budget Council, which approves the budget that is formally submitted to the municipal assembly.

The Budget Council is made up of two delegates from each region, who are accountable to the community representatives. In addition to deciding the annual PB, the Budget Council holds the government officials to account for the delivery of decisions made in previous year's budgets.

According to Wainwright, the success of PB in Porto Alegre derives from the political commitment of the elected delegates and representatives, as well as the politicians and the officials, many of whom have a background in political radicalism in the Worker's Party, social movements, student activism or liberation theology<sup>v</sup>. The time and investment that has been given to PB in the city has ensured a learning process for all concerned, so that increasing members of the public take part, the community representatives are being elected in greater numbers and diversity and gaining knowledge and skills, and the rules are being

constantly updated to improve its efficiency and democracy. However, she points out that, when the process was extended to the whole state of Rio Grande del Sul it was less successful, especially in the rural areas.

### *Reflections on Kerala and Porto Alegre*

The most obvious similarities between Kerala People's Plan and Porto Alegre's Participatory Budget are that they both grew out of a tradition of political radicalism involving both people's movements and radical intellectuals. In Porto Alegre this grew from radical urban movements whilst in Kerala these democratic demands were greater in rural areas where investment in land reform, literacy movements and village health clinics had increased politicisation and contact between activists from amongst peasants and intellectuals. However in both contexts, the demand for participation was present to some extent when governments were elected that were in a position to deliver.

The election of left of centre governments with links to the social movements, trades unions and critical NGOs was also common to both examples: in Kerala a coalition of leftist groups led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) and in Porto Alegre by the Worker's Party.

In both cases, corruption in resource allocation was exposed, and neither case extends far beyond questions of resource distribution. Later in the paper we consider the importance of introducing participation into the economy and production of resources, as well as into the political system for their distribution.

### ***The growth, use and abuse of participation***

In the 1960s there was an explosion of interest in participatory democracy associated with new social movements. Popular participation promised an opportunity to transform social relations and provide a radical alternative to both capitalist social democracy and centrally-planned state communism. As the radical movements were crushed, incorporated or disintegrated, some of the activists took their struggles into the public service professions with a view to working 'in and against the state'<sup>vi</sup>. Gradually, techniques of citizen participation became more established and integrated into the fringes of education, urban planning, Third World development and health needs assessment. With a sensitive recognition of the power dynamics amongst participants and in the wider decision making process, such techniques can be useful for increasing participation in policy. But too often they are used rather to co-opt and legitimate.

'Participation' has moved from a demand of the radical movements of the 1960s to a range of techniques increasingly recognised in the fringes of practice of mainstream public policy. The theoretical roots of the 'movement for participation' lie in the 1960s and 1970s: Paulo Freire's iconic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in Portuguese in 1968<sup>vii</sup> and Sherry Arnstein's classic critical reflection *A ladder of citizen participation* was published in 1969 in response to what she called a "heated controversy over 'citizen participation', 'citizen control' and 'maximum feasible involvement of the poor'"<sup>viii</sup>. Robert Chambers' Participatory Rural Appraisal originated in the 1970s<sup>ix</sup>.

Since then, a multiplicity of techniques of participation have been adopted for such diverse issues as health care, land use planning, forestry, housing, education youth work, rural development, economic decision making. The list of 'branded' participatory techniques is long: participatory appraisal, Planning for Real®, parish mapping, future search, participatory

action research, participatory planning, ideas market place, world café, open space, civic assembly, citizen's jury, planning charrette etc.<sup>x</sup> The invention and rapid ubiquity of the internet and now social media has further increased the opportunities for participation. Environmentalists have often been amongst those at the forefront in calling for increased participation. In 1992, the Rio Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development asserted that "Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens". Such was the growth of participation in some disciplines, that by 2001, Bill Cooke and Uma Kathari could publish a book entitled *Participation: The New Tyranny*<sup>xi</sup>

So what are the opportunities provided by such a growth of participatory methods for promoting wellbeing within environmental limits? It is perhaps no coincidence that there has been an increase in the range of participatory methods and their use, and claims made on their behalf, during the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when neoliberal policies across the world have been undermining the role of the state in providing the welfare services most amenable to participatory approaches – health, education, land use, development etc. Indeed, many neoliberal reforms have been justified on the basis of the supposedly non-participative nature of state bureaucracies in social democracies. The experience of exclusion which many people felt from the paternalistic approach of some state welfare agencies and nationally owned industries and services was exploited by the ideological governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in particular, in order to offer individual 'empowerment' as consumers and capital owners instead of universal services, economic redistribution and the common good.

As David Harvey has pointed out, the city has been at the centre of this neoliberal revolution as urban spaces and identities are targeted for private economic benefit, a process which is resisted by urban movements and counter-cultures<sup>xii</sup>. In this context, methods of participation were seen on the one hand as processes that might democratise and therefore transform the welfare state and increase social justice from the bottom up, and on the other hand as tools for disempowering the state and thereby constructing spaces for the market to enter. In many British cities this tension was played out in the conflict between models of municipal socialism, which included promoting participation amongst diverse under-represented groups, at the same time that Margaret Thatcher was starting to privatise state functions from above. Globally, the neoliberal impact on cities and their hinterlands has created complex social mixes, as displacement and migration into, between and within cities lead to the coexistence of modern, traditional and informal economic relations and social structures.

#### *Participation as a tool of oppression*

Participation has been a deliberate tool used by corporate interests during the imposition of colonial, post-colonial or post-industrial structural adjustment programmes and the promotion of neoliberalism<sup>xiii</sup>. Investment decisions by transnational corporations in post-colonial contexts are designed to maximise capital gain by the owners of corporations and the ruling class in the host countries – often facilitated by the creation of areas offering preferential treatment to inward investors, such as 'Special Economic Zones'. Their impact on the local populations and their environment is at best mixed – some employment will be generated but at the expense of existing socio-economic relations, resource appropriation and environmental damage. In particular, land dispossession, displacement and the exploitation of natural resources accompany such developments, the 'participation' of local communities only serving to pacify resistance and ensure a smoother process of dispossession. There is no question of participation affecting the investment decisions themselves. Collins has

demonstrated how ‘dispossession through participation’ has also been used in urban regeneration initiatives in Scotland by the Royal Bank of Scotland<sup>xiv</sup>.

As Migdal, put it “*Participation is essentially a political act: the ideological context of any process of participation cannot be ignored. In any programmes which include ‘participation as a basic objective, it is important to ask who is to participate and on what terms, why the participation of the people is sought and how they are to participate’.* (Migdal 1977)” (cited by Oakley 2008: 82)<sup>xv</sup>

Does this imply that participation is inevitably flawed? If our aim is to move cities towards a social relationship in which everyone’s interests are reflected equally in decision making concerning social and environmental resource distribution and consumption; where those most in need disproportionately benefit and negative impacts are received by those most able to absorb them; and the interests of future generations are safeguarded; then improved participation is one of the mechanisms that can lead to this. Participation is not the only mechanism needed but it is an important and necessary part of that process. In order to achieve this, those whose interests are currently under-represented in decision making and in society generally should be amplified in order to equalise participation, and those whose interests are currently over-represented need to be moderated or confronted. In other words, a radical shift in power is needed, and participation is one mechanism that can be used towards this.

### ***Participatory and representative democracy***

Raymond Williams has pointed out the contribution to modern democracy made by the innovations of collective representation in trades unions and working class culture, challenging the individualism of the liberal parliament, itself a radical challenge to pre-democratic polity<sup>xvi</sup>. The principles of representative democracy are largely taken for granted in western societies. However it is important to recognise that these institutions emerged to contest as well as reproduce capitalist interests and are the result of demands made by working class and women’s movements such as the Chartists, trades unionists and suffrage societies.

The weaknesses of representative and collective mandate mechanisms of participation are also widely recognised, not least the gendered nature of such structures which have tended to institutionalise masculine assumptions within hierarchies<sup>1</sup>. The problems of majority rule excluding minorities, widespread non-participation and tensions between activist and membership bases are also widely recognised<sup>xvii</sup>. Constraints on active participation in representative democracy have also led to a growth and continual, critical refinement of alternative forms of decision-making which maximise participation such as the methods of consensus decision-making currently employed by direct action groups, indignados, climate camps and the Occupy movement<sup>xviii</sup>.

Can a form of participatory democracy governed by consensus decision-making replace representative democracy as suggested by some anarchist commentators?<sup>xix</sup> In the complex social relations that constitute a city, however much an increase in participation there is, it is likely that representative democracy will continue in some form. Some decisions will be so complex, so remote, so difficult or so mundane that many people may well choose not to

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: The potential for empowerment of women to contribute to fair and sustainable societies is to be explicitly considered in a later paper in the Big Ideas series.

participate actively in making them, and will be content with leaving such decisions to people that they trust. In such contexts, representative democracy has a powerful role, but with it must come adequate accountability to those affected by the decisions. At the same time, with decisions which have involved more participation comes the responsibility for the implications of those decisions.

The issue here is not so much that representative democracy is better for some kinds of decision making and participatory democracy for others (although this is undoubtedly the case), nor that adequate forms of participation are necessary in both representative and participatory democracy (which is also true), but that the selection of what decisions should be taken by representatives and which through participation should also be subject to democratic standards involving participation.

### *Upstream, invited and invented participation*

If participation is to be improved, not only in representative and consensus decision making but also in the balance between these, it forces the question about how far back in the decision making process it is necessary for people to participate. Brian Wynne in his discussions on decision-making concerning the introduction of new technologies, points out that public participation is routinely introduced very late in the process of innovation and research, citing the example of genetically modified crops in the UK for which public engagement only occurred after the technology had reached its final stages of field trials. Public participation, according to Wynne, needs to be built into basic questions about innovation and research in order to steer technology in the direction of public need, not corporate economic projections<sup>xx</sup>.

Where those with governance responsibility invite the public to participate in decisions that affect them, this should be sufficiently 'upstream' in the decision making process as well as employing the right approach, use appropriate methods, translate technical material accessibly, target the right people etc. But even under the best circumstances, in such 'invited participation', the terms are largely set by those with the power to do so. What is equally important is 'invented participation' where affected people take collective action to find new ways to intervene in decision making processes on their own terms. This is the material of social movements and community action. In the UK, the sham exercise in invited participation in relation to GM crops actually generated various forms of invented participation as activists destroyed the experimental GM crops that the public had been excluded from deciding upon. Major infrastructure projects such as power stations and road developments are frequently subject to similar sham invited participation exercises. On the other hand, recent innovative forms of invented participation in the west have included student sit-ins and teach-ins, academic seminars that blockade nuclear installations, anti-deportation sanctuaries, camps for climate action, and the Occupy movement.

Invented participation includes methods of consensus decision making which have developed through anarchist inspired direct action groups, but may also be much less formal and more 'messy' as disempowered groups draw on their own traditions and resources to experiment with alternative decision making processes, including, increasingly, through social media. Still the key shift is not so much the technique but the redistribution of power. A number of authors have criticised the anarchist 'fetishism of organisational form'<sup>xxi</sup> (David Harvey) that plagues some in the anti-globalisation movement and their rejection of the state as intrinsically oppressive, rather than a location for struggle. Hilary Wainwright similarly describes the "*tension between participation as a way of building the capacity of communities to help themselves, and participation as a means of strengthening people's*

*control over state resources and institutions*<sup>xxii</sup>. Invented participation is not a replacement for the state and its obligation to invite participation.

There are examples of effective outcomes from the tension between invited and invented participation. In Iceland, following the collapse of its banks in the 2008 crash, widespread protests known as the 'kitchenware revolution', led to the resignation of the government. The newly elected left of centre government established a bottom-up process of grassroots think tanks, which led to the Icelandic Constitutional Assembly, a form of indigenous democratic institution with ancient roots. Harvey (2011) gives another example from Bolivia, where popular struggle in the cities of Cochabamba and El Alto forced out, first the multinational corporations, and then two presidents with neoliberal sympathies. This enabled the election to president of the indigenous trade union leader Evo Morales, and, more significantly, forged new forms of democracy drawing on the traditions of indigenous public assemblies and displaced tin miners' militant trade union organising<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Most recently, the Occupy movement is an example of invented participation, where geographical spaces in cities were claimed by protesters as both a political occupation against the powerful and as a created experiment in participatory decision-making. Occupy was often criticised in mainstream media for not arriving with a set of demands fully formed. But it is a tactic of the powerful elites, when challenged, to seek to displace any serious threat to their power by looking for concessions to negotiate over. Instead, Occupy attempted to set the agenda for decision making itself, on behalf of the '99%' of people who are excluded from actions of the wealthy elite and are therefore victims of the resultant austerity policies. Occupy was thus experimenting with an alternative to these policies in the public gaze. In that sense Occupy was revolutionary, although it was not able to mobilise for the overthrow of the elite

Occupy Wall Street started through online participation: the title was originally a hashtag on the adbusters blog. Internet communication provides a major new opportunity for invented participation, not least because younger generations of radicals are growing up immersed in the technology. Whilst there have been many attempts to encourage participation in traditional democratic structures through e-democracy, as Malone points out, social media transform the meaning of democracy itself.

*"Specific characteristics and dynamics of social media tools and networks facilitate the free movement of counter-hegemonic ideas, meanings, education and practices at both a low cost and high speed. Again, to express this in its most simple form: large numbers of people now often have the ability to relate their own experiences and share those experiences, while learning about others, with a speed and scope not seen before."*<sup>xxiv</sup>

The impact of this technology is profound. As Paul Mason<sup>xxv</sup> suggests, 'networked individuals' expect to participate in an immediate and transitory way. Collective action can therefore become nothing more than the sum of individual actions at a particular time and place. Moreover, as exposures from a succession of whistleblowers (most of whom are now in prison or exile) have demonstrated, internet communication occurs alongside surveillance by the state and corporations alike, so: "... any attempts to theorise the internet and its inherent usefulness to social justice movements, or society generally, will be rendered meaningless if they fail to take account of the ways it can be used to oppress."<sup>xxvi</sup>

Nonetheless, as the Arab Spring highlighted, ‘invented’, ‘upstream’ political participation taking place in the intersection between urban space and cyberspace has transformational potential<sup>2</sup>.

### *Communicative rationality*

Participation in decision-making draws on assumptions about the capacity for rational individuals in an unconstrained public space to be able to debate and deliberate appropriate decisions on the basis of mutual learning.

Habermas has argued that communicative rationality, that enables social forms of decision-making through debate and underpins democratic forms of governance, has evolved historically and supplanted reliance on myth and tradition. However, in advanced modernity, communicative rationality has been challenged by alternative rationalities of commerce and bureaucracy, which threaten to colonise social communication. The mass media, which invade our consciousness in the interests of commercial gain, risk imbuing commercial market relations with the same apparently innate quality as communicative rationality.

For Habermas, the pinnacle of communicative rationality is the public sphere, the idealised space of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution. In the public sphere, every individual has an equal right to engage in debate, leaving behind such social influences as class, status, gender etc<sup>3</sup>.<sup>xxvii</sup> Whilst philosophers and bourgeois revolutionaries may imagine such spaces, others have pointed out their impossibility. For example, Nancy Fraser has criticised Habermas on the grounds that it is impossible to leave behind social influences since they are embedded even in the language of communication<sup>xxviii</sup>. Communicative rationality might be rational, but is also social and therefore embedded with social power relations around class, status, gender etc.

Fraser highlights that those who are systematically disempowered in society, have always constructed their own public spheres in order both to debate and discern decision-making, and to present such decisions more strongly to those in more powerful social categories. For example, women constructed their own spaces for addressing public issues such as slavery or the franchise, and in the 1970s around women’s rights in the private sphere of the body and intimate relationships. Feminist forms of collective organisation in the 1970s<sup>xxix</sup> have been a significant contribution to the consensus decision-making approaches of Occupy and direct action groups today. Fraser calls such spaces where disempowered social groups communicate, ‘subaltern counterpublics’, and cities are an important place where such spaces and groups are formed.

The internet may provide a public sphere which approximates more closely to the liberal ideal than is possible in direct communication. The social location of participants in internet communication can be concealed, and with it, the power that accompanies it. Not only is it possible to hide the age, gender, occupation accent, geographical location etc and all the other visible signs or symbols of power in stratified societies, but it is also possible to obfuscate the influence of that power by deliberately adopting false or fictitious persona. The fact that participants in online decision making processes may not be who they seem to be,

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<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note: these ideas are explored further in Agyeman et al’s (2013) parallel paper in the Big Ideas series on ‘Sharing Cities’

<sup>3</sup> The ideal of the public sphere has allowed philosophers such as John Rawls (1999 A Theory of Justice 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford) to imagine an ‘original position’, in which people may debate the principles of a just society behind a ‘veil of ignorance’, having no knowledge of their place in that society – their relative affluence, gender, membership of a socially discriminated group

makes the process both more and less open: inbuilt prejudices and more structural means of exclusion are sidestepped but also opportunities for manipulation are greater<sup>xxx</sup>. For example, even when participants' identities are concealed, many online environments require collusion with a misogynistic masculine culture.

#### *Community Development and urban regeneration*

Community development and its variants (community education, community work) is a process for facilitating participation by people experiencing poverty or some other source of oppression (racism, pollution) in identifying shared problems, analysing their causes, devising solutions, demanding changes and articulating their own futures. Many of the contradictions already identified in the problem of participation have been at the core of community development. As Marjory Mayo describes it, Mass Education (the fore-runner to community development) “was a ‘movement designed to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation of and, if possible, on the initiative of, the community’, yet intended also to “promote ‘political development’, meaning, in the contemporary context of the Cold War, winning hearts and minds, keeping the newly-independent Commonwealth and other states safe from communism – economically as well as politically integrated within the frameworks of Northern agendas”. She continues: “In the event, of course, community education and development programmes contributed to strengthening movements for colonial freedom, as in the case of the Gold Coast (now Ghana). But community development programmes were also promoted as part of counter-insurgency strategies ... far more dubious strategies that included the emergency ‘resettlement’ (ie. forced removals) of some half a million people in ‘community development’ villages in what was then Malaya.” (Mayo, 2008: 19)

In Britain in the 1960s, the British Community Development Programme typified the contradictions. These projects were established in areas of ‘persistent’ deprivation in English cities to address the perceived deficits in these communities, which prevented their participation in the economic growth experienced elsewhere. Yet, contrary to the rhetoric of persistent poverty, poor communities were not lacking in the skills or confidence to get the least well paid jobs that the growing economy threw up. Rather the growing economy needed small pockets of unemployed and low waged workers, preferably segregated by racial antagonism and fixed gender demands, to push down wages, prevent solidarity and ensure increasing profits in the face of rising wage demands. In other words, poverty is caused by structure of the economy, not by the inadequacy of the unemployed. Community development workers were – in practice - being asked to facilitate people’s participation in a process of collusion with their own oppression – instead some developed a critical approach to community development that built collective resistance to models of economic growth that excluded them.

Yet, as the case study of urban regeneration in Scotland (below) reveals, even armed with such a critical approach, most communities are still vulnerable to the agendas of those who set the terms of participation.

#### ***Urban Regeneration – Case Study from Scotland***

Most western countries have adopted policies and tactics for addressing persistent urban poverty, usually focused where those who experience poverty are concentrated. The European Commission has encouraged urban regeneration to support economic development and social cohesion in cities and city regions. The language of such policies ranges between warm evocation of community, or partnership, or a moral panic with urban

decay. Scotland makes for a useful case study, in part because of “a greater stress on partnership working ... in Scotland and a greater stress on community development”<sup>xxxix</sup>.

In 1988, the Scottish Office (an administrative unit of the then Conservative controlled UK government) published *New Life for Urban Scotland*. Some £80 million was directed into projects in the four most deprived urban areas of Castlemilk (Glasgow), Wester Hailes (Edinburgh), Whitfield (Dundee) and Fergusliepark (Paisley) in a new approach which addressed urban regeneration through partnership between public and private agencies and civil society with a strong emphasis on local community participation.

In an ironic comment on the relationship between partnership and democracy, Chik Collins noted that the “*Scottish Office [is] trying to find a way to give practical effect to the principles of Thatcherism in a Scotland which has just voted decisively to reject them... [by] arguing that the Scots as a nation suffer from a ‘dependency culture’, and ... [setting] out to ‘roll back the state’ and fashion an ‘enterprise culture’ ... [all] under the rubric of ‘partnership’ between central and local government, public and private sectors, politicians and local communities.*”<sup>xxxix</sup>

As policy in this area developed, the language of partnership took centre stage. The four targeted urban areas were categorised as Urban Regeneration Partnerships and Priority Partnership Areas (*Progress in Partnership* (1993); *Programme for Partnership* (1995)) which were required to demonstrate the participation of the principal non-governmental public bodies – not only community groups but also the voluntary and even private sectors. Of course the terms of participation, and the relative power wielded differed considerably, but this requirement at least enabled organised communities to leverage a little more power over decisions that would directly affect them. The Castlemilk Umbrella Group, for example, which represented community organisations through regular open meetings, developed parallel policy and strategy which it was able to bring to the Castlemilk Partnership. By walking out of the Partnership at one stage, and boycotting the Partnership for three months on another occasion, the Umbrella group was able to make use of its status as partner to maximise community influence on decision-making<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Following the election of New Labour government in 1997 urban regeneration policy maintained an emphasis on partnership but adopted the new language of social inclusion. Thirty four area based Social Inclusion Partnerships alongside 14 ‘issue based’ partnerships focused on geographically dispersed groups facing urban deprivation. The latter – such as the Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance and Routes Out, a project helping prostituted women to leave the sex industry -proved more successful in meeting their expressed aims,.

In 2002, these Social Inclusion Partnerships were integrated into Community Planning Partnerships intended to merge regeneration into mainstream city-wide or regional planning. Regeneration targeted on the poorest areas, with the opportunity for community participation, but also an attempt to involve the private sector, had changed to city-wide, or region-wide strategies with more diffuse and more private involvement. Scott and Mooney (2009) argue that while the new policy “went further in some ways ... and over the next three years saw a greater reduction in child poverty than in England” (Scott and Mooney 2009 p 381) it was never fully radical, and like the subsequent 2006 regeneration statement *People and Place* continued to use ‘partnership’ as a process of coopting communities and public services into an agenda of privatisation and neoliberalism. Collins (2006) agrees, arguing that, in *People and Place*: “*we are told that regeneration policy is crucial to achieving the Executive’s economic objectives – which now involve ‘growing’ globally competitive firms [and that] regeneration will seek to act as a catalyst, or lay the foundations, for private sector*

*involvement ... much more needs to be done to ensure that private sector players, such as developers, banks and the construction industry, view Scotland as 'open for business' on regeneration" ... He concludes: "It could hardly be clearer: The Scottish Executive is open for business'. The Executive, that is, will ensure that Scotland's communities – with their many 'development opportunities', but also with their health and social services and their education services – are "open for business", and that their potential to fuel the growth of large "service provider" companies is realised*"<sup>xxxiv</sup>

With the election of an SNP government in 2007 the responsibility for urban regeneration was devolved to local authorities without any obligation for community participation

In urban regeneration it seems, community participation is now optional but integration with the global neoliberal experiment remains compulsory, whichever party is in power. Participation is invited downstream, with the caveat that citizens' decisions must be compatible with a market orientation. Cracks in this hegemony through invented participation are, however, possible., Collins draws attention to the success of one popular mobilisation of an urban community achieved in spite of repeated attempts to co-opt the interests of the community into the 'adaptation agenda' of neoliberalism. The Clydebank Centre in West Dunbartonshire is rooted in grassroots community and trade union organising, crucially, making demands on the state but remaining independent of the state's policies of urban regeneration, The centre – providing education, training, jobs and social cohesion, has survived through "*a sustained process of collective self-education and co-learning, driven by that ethic of solidarity, and committed to the defense of the gains of previous struggles.*"<sup>xxxv</sup> (p.77)

### *False consciousness*

There can be an assumption built into approaches to participation that people tend to know and act in their own best interests. Despite our capacity for utopian dreaming – which is certainly to be encouraged – we are limited in the choices we set ourselves, and the restrictions of time, place, culture, gender and class.

For example, feminists from Simone de Beauvoir to Donna Haraway have argued that gender shapes our understanding of the world. Men's historically dominant position in society has served to define 'common sense' as the world according to men, whilst women were 'added on'. The implications of such 'common sense' has served to define rational debate and politics as properly the domain of men whilst women's participation is exceptional and judged by different criteria (perhaps according to emotional content (hysterical) or physical appearance). Such is the power of this 'common sense' that women have often absorbed it too, judging each other and themselves by the same criteria and undermining their own contribution. Such 'common sense' therefore tends to reproduce – and reify - social relations that benefit men.

Marxists have long struggled with the problem of 'false consciousness', the fact that people do not necessarily act in or know what is in their best interests. For classical Marxists this often focuses on the working class accepting assumptions that benefit their capitalist oppressors, rather than a class consciousness which can overthrow capitalism for universal benefit. For environmentalists it might rather appear as an absorption in green consumerism and a focus on behavioural change, which reflect the interests of the professional class from which environmentalism has emerged, Such views are often dismissed as elitist and patronising, but the alternative – 'workerism', or, the community is always right – can be

dangerous. It is not that an elite knows better than a public what is in their interests, but rather that all people view the world from their own social context, a context that is shaped by major social categories such as class, culture and gender.

If we all see the world through the filters of our own social context, then what seems common sense to us will tend to be assumptions that do not challenge our own place in the world. However, since power is invested in some social groups at the expense of others, then those who speak loudest, use the same language as the decision makers, share the assumptions of the mainstream media etc tend, inevitably, to influence culture disproportionately. One does not have to be a Marxist to recognise that the interests of the ruling class are reflected in the dominant ideas of any society, and that in capitalist societies, working class interests will typically be subsumed beneath the interests of economic growth. Writing from the prison cell where Mussolini's fascists incarcerated him, Antonio Gramsci suggested that ruling classes in advanced capitalist societies, maintain power largely, not by coercion but by persuasion, through generating a culture of 'common sense' that legitimates ruling class interests and leads to passive consent to their rule<sup>4</sup>.

Under such circumstances, improving participation without acknowledging the power embedded in class, gender and other social factors, risks doing little more than encouraging the expression of ruling interests. More positively, the inclusion and equal standing of diverse standpoints will mean that the world is better understood, and so social change will better reflect the interests of those who have been excluded from the 'common sense'.

Engagement in collective struggle serves to increase consciousness. This is fundamental to 'praxis' the combination of taking action with others who share a common grievance and reflecting on how the causes of that grievance can be understood and challenged. Good sense emerges from such practical action and analytical reflection in what Fraser called the subaltern counterpublics. These create the space for participants to discern their shared interests based on good sense, and thus reflect these interests when participating in decision-making.

So is democracy more robust when it reflects individual views or collective interests? The peripheral housing estate of Wester Hailes in Edinburgh has at different times developed representative structures based on interest groups (eg. unemployed, health service users, problem drug users, women, black anti-racist activists) or citizens (neighbourhood committees, tenants associations). Whilst the distinction between these types of groups is not absolute, it seems both are needed: citizen-based groups involve more people, but inevitably under-represent minorities who have greater need for services and/or are more susceptible to discrimination, while interest-based groups ensure representation of the issues which affect particular groups but risk becoming an unrepresentative professional elite.

Certainly, interest-based groups, as subaltern counterpublics, are an essential component of participatory democracy, and cities can act, appropriately, to support their formation and influence. Identifying why, for example, Muslim women are under-represented in public meetings to consult on planning decisions and then implementing positive action measures such as women-only sessions, may not arise from democratic participation of street committees, nor may such even represent the views of Muslim women (whose absence from

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<sup>4</sup> A number of writers have analysed the role of formal education and schooling in this process in different ways, including Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis; Pierre Bourdieu; Michael Apple; Ivan Illich and Michel Foucault; while Noam Chomsky emphasises the importance of the media in 'manufacturing consent'.

such decision making may not have been recognised by them), but such actions could represent their interests. On the other hand, democratic principles would suggest that where interests are represented they should be accountable to those whose interests they are, if necessary with educational provision to deepen understanding of the role and procedures of planning. As the campaign slogan of the poor people's movement goes "nothing about us without us is for us".

*Collective organisation, social movements and invented spaces for participation*

In an account of in a range of cities<sup>5</sup>, Wainwright suggests a series of conditions to enable participatory democracy to attain legitimacy and to re-invigorate democratic politics:

- *"it needs to be open at its foundations to everyone affected by ... decisions... [and such] openness ... needs to be worked at.*
- *"there need to be mutually agreed and openly negotiated rules.*
- *"the autonomy of the participatory process from the state [must be preserved].*
- *"the genuine sharing of knowledge.*
- *"real resources must be at stake, resources which could make a positive difference to the lives of the community.*
- *"the feasibility and legitimacy of the participatory process is enormously enhanced by the existence and electoral success of a party that believes in it."* (p. 188-189)

Writing in 2002-3, she comments on the success of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre emerging from the "particular combination in Porto Alegre of well-organised urban movements, strong democratic traditions and a history of left-of-centre governments", quoting Celso Daniel, Workers' Party mayor of Santo Andre "We [the Workers' Party] believed in taking the principles of democracy from social movements, including the trade union movement, with us when we gained office. This meant we had to share political power, the management of the city, with the community" (p. 47). Daniel was later murdered by vested interests challenged by democratisation, and Brazil as a whole has been forced to accommodate the interests of neo-liberalism. Now, ten years later, the legitimacy of the Worker's Party in the eyes of urban social movements has been visibly contested on the streets in protests over the prioritisation of football stadiums for the 2014 World Cup, rather than public services such as transportation, highlighting once again the importance of the urban arena for the renewal of democracy.

Participatory budgeting and the best of the various 'community-based' urban regeneration and community development initiatives, Wainwright suggests, constituted an example of the most advanced form of democracy, which combines an accountable state governed by representative democracy with strong, participatory decision making. Thus "*managing public resources through a combination of electoral and participative democracy involves an overall gain in democratic legitimacy and as a result, potentially, in power. People are more likely to feel that they become, in Tom Paine's terms, 'proprietors in government'.*" (p. 190). However, democratising the management of public resources is one thing, but for Wainwright this needs to go further – democratising the production of these resources in the first place – economic democracy. For Wainwright, this is achieved through 'embedded bargaining power' and alliances between political institutions and "*cooperatives, the social economy generally, trade unions, public and trade union pension funds [which] can all bring about the wider economic democracy without which participatory democracy is always unfinished and under threat. Moreover, the notion of bargaining power involves seeing social movements as*

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<sup>5</sup> Porto Alegre in Brazil, Manchester, Luton and Newcastle in England, Florence, Italy; Oslo, Norway; Ottawa, Canada; Kaoshiong, Taiwan and in Cuba, Mozambique, South Africa, Scotland, South Korea and the Philippines.

*causing ripples well beyond their apparent focus: the green movement or the peace movement for example when in alliance with others are able potentially to exert power over the economy as well as over politics. Both movements raise fundamental questions about the purpose of production in huge swathes of the economy.” (p. 190-1)*

This is a vital question: how can participatory democracy take control of the market and challenge the tendency of private capital to offload costs as cheaply as possible onto the environment and people with least economic leverage or political power? Social democracy was a temporary answer to this question for representative democracy, as markets were brought under the control of an interventionist welfare state. The perceived failings (and perhaps also the successes) of social democracy in the post war era, however, led to the domination of free market ideologies from the 1980s, and the 2008 economic crisis. Since then, across Europe, elections have been determined by what is acceptable to ‘the market’: anti-austerity parties and politicians have been constrained, as seen in the unelected appointment of Mario Monti’s government of technocrats in Italy; the crisis in Europe at the prospect of anti-austerity left alliance SYRIZA in Greece; and Hollande’s abandoning of his electoral platform of redistributive growth in France. Centrally planned economies such as in the Soviet Union were able to control the market somewhat, but were associated with ‘popular democracies’ (ie control by a revolutionary party), and never coexisted comfortably – if at all – with representative democracy, let alone participatory forms. The lack of independent participation in these economies contributed to their subsequent collapse into particularly unaccountable market economies.

So long as participation is focused on the allocation and distribution of resources alone, whilst the production of those resources is left to the market, then inequalities in power and access to resources will persist. As Nancy Fraser<sup>xxxvi</sup> points out, affirmative models of resource redistribution to promote equality (such as social democracy) are constantly reacting to a political economy that systematically produces inequality. Moreover, such redistributive systems rely on the identification of categories of people that are directly or indirectly disadvantaged by this system (for example pensioners, single parents, Bangladeshis, the ‘underclass’), thereby sowing the seeds for resentment. Environmental impacts are also the systemic result of current production processes which are either addressed remedially (end of pipe) or else through yet more marketisation: achieving ecological sustainability will require economic accountability. Participatory democracy needs to stretch beyond politics into the economy.

## **Section two: Participation in the economy**

### ***Participation in the economy***

In the neoliberal affected cities of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the form of ‘participation’ in both social and economic decision-making is increasingly reduced to market choice. The mechanism by which the public is expected to express their preferences for services is through the price that they are willing to pay, often using indirect quasi-market mechanisms in cases where direct pricing is not feasible, such as sponsorship of sports, league tables for schools, ratings for public broadcasting, branding of health services or emissions trading of pollution – for the ‘service’ of clean air. Urban ‘public’ space is increasingly in private ownership and access or use is determined through price – either directly or more likely indirectly, as the only purpose of some space is for shopping. The apparently public urban space known as Liverpool One is owned by the Duke of Westminster and devoted to a massive shopping area. City Hall in London appears to symbolise city level representative

democracy, and the paved pedestrian area in front might seem an ideal spot for vigils, protests and publicity stunts - open, public attempts to persuade elected politicians and their constituents alike. However, this paved area is privately owned, policed by private security and available for a fee for wedding photographs and commercial sponsors – the photogenic vistas of London architecture thereby becoming a lucrative source of ‘ground rent’ for its owners<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Representative democracy is available for sale, not only through the grubby business of back-handers and paid interests for politicians but through the value that democracy can bring for private profit.

Expecting the public to express their values through price is flawed from the point of view of democracy – power to define the city is directly related to wealth, and most of the public is forced to inhabit a city determined by the rich. The poorest are concentrated in areas either neglected by the wealthy, or else targeted for entrepreneurial investment for profit generation. Declining engagement in politics is perhaps a rational response to the irrelevance of politics in a society where preference is expressed through purchase.

Research comparing citizens’ juries with methods of economic valuation in environmental resource conflicts (O’Connor 2000a, 2000b)<sup>xxxviii</sup> concluded that market mechanisms were inadequate because “*many people are motivated by ... moral beliefs, principles of good or right action, etc.*”. On the other hand, the Citizens’ Jury generated alternative solutions which were widely accepted by stakeholders.

In contrast to the current trend for participation in social policy to be determined by the economics of the market, to deliver wellbeing for all within environmental limits we must move in the opposite direction – putting the economy under increased participatory democratic control.

Mapping models of economic participation onto Arnstein’s ladder of participation (figure 1)<sup>xxxix</sup> highlights both the range of possible models, and the possible limitations to many approaches to economic participation. This exercise implies that cities and city authorities might usefully explore interventions at the level of development planning, where controls can be applied at the territorial location of economic development, as well as at the level of the productive enterprise itself.

**Figure 1: Participation in economic arenas**

<b>Arnstein’s ladder</b>	<b>Formal Economy</b>	<b>Informal Economy</b>
Citizen control	Community ownership	
	Community business	Local Exchange Trading Systems
Delegated power	Democratic enterprise	
	Community representation	Volunteering
Partnership	Workers’ cooperative	Autonomous work
	Community accountability	Self sufficiency
Placation	Genuine community liaison	
	Community consultation	
Consultation	Nationalisation	
	Local Authority representation	
Informing	Planning regulations	
	Shareholding democracy	
Manipulation	Manipulative community liaison	
	Planning avoidance	

From Scandrett, 1999

*Participation in development planning*

Development planning in Britain<sup>6</sup> is designed to allocate different kinds of economic development to their most appropriate locations, judged according to local or regional geographical plans and national policies in the devolved nations, all of which go through exercises of consultation. In theory therefore, social and environmental criteria determine where and what kind of development occurs and where it doesn't. Consultations on plans are sometimes accompanied by participatory exercises ranging from public meetings to 'Planning for Real®' events (in which participants get to construct and arrange models on schematic maps of the area concerned). For example, in the South East Wedge community consultation in Craigmillar in Edinburgh, 'planning for real' was used with local schools and community groups to come up with innovative plans for an area of land adjacent to the housing estate. But this did nothing to shift power relations, so none of the community proposals were implemented.

More often, consultations on plans and planning policy follow limited traditional patterns of publication and invitations to respond in writing. Several factors make this unsatisfactory and a cause of concern with communities<sup>xl</sup>. First, the window of opportunity is small for participation in establishing the plan. Second, the system is designed to facilitate development and to allocate different kinds of developments appropriately, not to discern the value of the development or to constrain certain kinds of development. This might be a valuable principle for developments that are widely acknowledged to be in the public good, so long as appropriately located – such as wind farms, drugs rehabilitation centres or waste recycling depots – but not for developments which are themselves contested, such as brothels or nuclear power stations. Moreover, economic decisions are not included in such decisions but left to the cost-benefit analysis of the developer, which, in most cases, remains confidential.

Following from this, further problems arise in the establishment of individual developments. Public participation at this stage is limited to commenting on the proposed development, seeking concessions from the developer or opposing the development on the grounds of the plan or policy. There are some examples of developers encouraging community participation prior to seeking approval from the Local Authority, but the system leaves this to the initiative of the developer. Such consultation might consider how many houses or where the access road to the supermarket goes but there is no question about whether the local community would rather have earthships than houses or a farmers' market, or even a library, rather than a supermarket.

Several approaches have been suggested to improve participation in this stage of economic development. Multi-Criteria Analysis brings the potential to maximise participation by the community and other stakeholders in both the range of potential developments that might be acceptable for a particular site, and also the criteria against which they should be judged. The first stage is to engage the community in discussions about the local and wider criteria against which they would judge a development – for example, how important is job creation, low nuisance, social benefit, or environmental improvement .

Having established a set of community-owned criteria, the process then invites development opportunities that fulfil these criteria. Private developers at this stage might put forward

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<sup>6</sup> Planning systems in most democracies have similar principles although differ in detail and implementation.

proposals and the community and the public authority might also propose developments. This leads to a range of feasible developments and a list of criteria against which they will be judged, thereby to a community-led discussion about what and how development should occur.

MCA still remains an experimental procedure, although it is being used in diverse contexts as special cases.<sup>xii</sup> In its most accountable form, financial factors are also included in the list of criteria. Developments which are for public benefit and break even economically, or make a loss and require subsidy from elsewhere, might be equally considered. Indeed, when addressing social or environmental factors, what constitutes a profit or loss depends on how incommensurable attributes as health, welfare, happiness and dignity are valued.

#### *Participation in production*

Arnstein's model as applied to economic participation covers some models that have been widely used within capitalist economies. Several European countries, specifically Germany, have variations of a stakeholder economic model in which workers' representatives have *ex officio* places on Boards, and devolved banking models encourage closer relationships between firms and their financial backers. Such models provide a degree of leverage for some stakeholders in the direction of economic decision-making and encourage longer term investment in communities over short term profiteering. Barbara McLennan has suggested that providing such long term finance to urban communities would particularly benefit women<sup>xiii</sup>.

Good Neighbour Agreements are an example of structures with some possibility of achieving accountability to communities from businesses at the level of the local operating plant. In its original formulation and use in the USA, Good Neighbour Agreements (GNAs) were mechanisms through which a polluting company agrees to standards and conditions set by the local community, higher than the legal minimum<sup>xiiii</sup>. For such an agreement to be effective, the community must have some sanction which gives collective power against the company should it breach these conditions. The first Good Neighbour Agreement in Britain was between the Dundee community of Douglas and Angus and the incinerator operators Dundee Energy Recycling Limited. Here inadequate sanctions meant that the GNA failed to prevent repeated problems with toxic emissions. A version of GNA was introduced into law in Scotland in 2006 but although they have potential for community leverage over local economic decision-making, GNAs remain under-used and at risk of exploitation by corporate greenwash.

Workers' cooperatives, employee-ownership models (such as John Lewis in Britain), consumer cooperatives (from the Rochdale pioneers to Cooperative Retail Group and local food coops), community-owned businesses and some social enterprises and non-profit distributing agencies also provide varying degrees of stakeholder participation in economic decision making compared with the standard western model of maximising of shareholder value, albeit operating within capitalist conditions that force these companies to imitate non-participative firms through competition. Mondragon in the Basque country has become an example of large-scale worker-owned cooperative industries, funded by investor-owned cooperative banks, trading with other cooperatives through an organised supply chain. The question remains open whether such existing models have the capacity to shift the whole economy in the direction of participatory democracy, or whether, on the contrary, economic decision-making within these firms is largely determined by the market in which they compete – in which profit maximising companies seek to force out or buy out the successful participatory enterprises.

These initiatives try to operate within the existing economy but with the values of a different one. They occupy one end of a range of proposals for transforming the economic system, from Will Hutton's socialised capitalism generated from long term regional finance, through Pat Devine's local economy where economic decisions are controlled by all relevant stakeholders, to Michael Albert's<sup>xiv</sup> Parecon (Participatory Economics) promoted as 'Life after Capitalism' for anti-globalisation activists. Under Parecon, private ownership would be abolished, and workers' and consumer councils would control economic production in terms of investment, work organisation and economic planning.

#### *Participation in and through the informal economy*

Proposals to democratise the economy, from Hutton's socialised capitalism, through Wainwright's embedded bargaining power, Devine's local economic democracy and Albert's Parecon, all focus on the formal economy, based on a workplace-level organisation of production and a price-based system of distribution. Some authors and activists have argued that the formal economy is intrinsically non-participative and have therefore proposed alternative economic systems which improve participatory control. Local Exchange Trading Systems have been established in many areas as a form of local currency, operating alongside the formal money economy, and in some ways undermining it. LETS are primarily designed to counter injustices in the economic system by providing a consensual agreement on the value of work. Rather than the value of your work being for the benefit of your employer, a LETS allows you to work directly for others in exchange for credit against another person's work for you.<sup>xiv</sup> Thus LETS values all work irrespective of whether this is cleaning, plumbing, nursing, web design or architectural services, and exchanges work on the basis of demand at a local level. Although not exclusively used in urban contexts, the opportunities at the level of a city are immense, because of the diversity of work and potential consumers of it that exist within a relatively small area – although the issue of trust may be more difficult to establish in the more anonymous urban context<sup>7</sup>.

Another writer who focused on the informal economy is Andre Gorz. For Gorz, capital controls workers by controlling their time – hence the development of the clocking-in system as factories replaced workshops as sites for production in the early development of capitalism. We think of our 'work' as what we do for our employer whereas democratising the economy requires taking control of our own work – our productive capacity, by wresting control of time from our employer. The shorter working week, flexible hours, and an end to the 'work culture' has long been a demand of trades unions and a benefit of progressive employers. Moreover, Gorz argues, as less time is spent on heteronomous work in the formal sector, more time can be spent on 'autonomous work', which involves production, service, reproduction or study for the benefit of the worker herself and her family and other intimates. Some of this autonomous work can even reduce the requirement for heteronomous work by self-provisioning for example, growing food, preparing meals, making clothes, constructing buildings, making furniture, mending cars, babysitting friends' children etc – or exchanging this work through LETS. Gorz estimated that there are around 20,000 hours of work per person that is unlikely to be done through autonomous work – the equivalent of about 12 years full time working, or a 10 hour working week. In other words, by taking control of working time, everyone will be able to participate freely in an informal economy for most of their lives. The 20,000 hours in which there is no choice over their work would be a fair obligation in exchange for a lifelong citizen's income.

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<sup>7</sup> Reviews of Initiatives in the sharing economy covered in a companion paper (Agyeman *et al* 2013) suggest that in such schemes trust is being facilitated through on-line reputational measures and social media networks.

### Section three: Education and participation

#### ***Deliberative democracy, educated and participating democracy***

In the focus group, one of the participants advocated the use of deliberative mini-publics such as citizen's juries because these facilitate the opportunities for deliberation between differing stakeholder positions with the aim of achieving the best – or at least the most widely acceptable - resolution to a problem. As he put it “‘*Participation*’ usually means self selected middle class domination” whereas minipublics can be selected to represent demography, interests, quality of communication and capacity for empathy<sup>xlvi</sup>.

Deliberation is certainly essential to achieving better solutions, and especially in the real world where participation is low. However it is important to aim more ambitiously, to integrate participation and deliberation. Mini-public deliberation is based on the Habermasian argument for communicative rationality, which as Fraser has pointed out is flawed because power is always embedded in communication. There may indeed be examples of powerful or wealthy groups ceding their privilege through rational communication and deliberation, but a more likely outcome is a settlement in which disempowered groups settle for what powerful groups chose to concede. Fraser's solution to this problem is through 'subaltern counter-publics'.

Yet there is a potentially huge contradiction between the desired *process* of an effective, deliberative and participatory democracy, and the desired *outcome* of a wholesome, socially just and ecologically sustainable society– ie between *ends* and *means*. It is not possible to open the process to high levels of participation and at the same time to determine the outcome. This contradiction can only be addressed however through a dialogical process because, despite the critical praxis of activists and the technical expertise and reflexivity of experts, we can only know what wellbeing means, or even what environmental limits are tolerable, by learning from one another and valuing all forms of expertise and experience.

In particular, since our knowledge is shaped by the collective experience of the social groups in which people are located, so the expertise of the poorest, the disenfranchised, discriminated against, of women, migrants, minorities, disadvantaged and excluded peoples, of the victims of social and environmental injustice is all essential. The knowledge that is contributed by the oppressed is essential for social justice as well as for epistemological rigour. However, just as environmental and social justice activists and specialists need to have the humility to know that they do not have all the knowledge, so too, the oppressed are not necessarily right. The risk of romanticising the oppressed as superior is as bad as dismissing the oppressed as 'ignorant'. Hence the importance of the complex process of dialogical learning.

Raymond Williams advocated an 'educated and participating society'<sup>xlvii</sup>. Here participation is as an attribute of the whole of society, and to be educated is therefore both a prerequisite for participation and a right for all citizens. Whilst mini-publics provide a mechanism for deliberation, this is inevitably a form of 'invited' participation, in which elites select the issues on which participation is to be sought, who should participate, and the terms under which participation can occur. Participative deliberation instead involves the whole of society and democratises the educational process of dialogue.

This recognises that people are not in a position to participate effectively in decision making without access to education. This is emphatically not a proposal to exclude from decision making the less educated, but rather an argument for education appropriate to democratic

participation, both in content and in form. Indeed, whilst many parts of the world still struggle to access formal education, the quality of such education throughout the world is increasingly commercialised, knowledge commodified, teachers deprofessionalised and students turned into consumers.

Examples of neoliberalism in education are widespread. In England, the introduction of Academy schools, often imposed against the will of the teachers, students and parents, brings private capital and its interests directly into the management of the school, and indeed the curriculum. The introduction of fees in English Universities following the Browne report (Lord Browne, former Chief Executive of BP and currently of fracking company Cuadrilla) generates a commercial relationship between Higher Education and students. Education is treated as an investment with returns in higher earning potential so the curriculum becomes a commodity to be bought rather than a relationship of discovery. State support remains reserved for instrumental programmes (eg medicine, engineering), presumably until this 'market failure' is resolved when the privatisation of the NHS is completed and 'public works' entirely handed over to the market, when such courses will be available only to wealthy or corporate sponsored students.

Even where Higher Education remains free of fees, such as in Scotland, the sector is forced to compete with increasingly market orientated education elsewhere. League tables promote competition, managerialism is focused on delivery of key performance indicators, the 'student experience' is interpreted individually and quality assurance focuses on 'graduate attributes' and 'employability'. Academics and teachers are under constant pressure to increase 'productivity' through student numbers and technological innovations. Western universities are opening campuses throughout the world to compete with the growing number of private colleges and online courses. 'Lifelong learning' generally means remedial literacy or upskilling in a rapidly changing labour market, or perhaps a free market in recreational adult classes. Even MOOCs<sup>8</sup>, with no up-front fee, serve to reproduce the monopoly position of a few centres of knowledge. The neoliberal vision has no place for a widely educated population.

By contrast, education that enables participation is a lifelong process that arises from social needs and desires – in the sense of UNESCO's Ettore Gelpi's term 'Lifelong Education'. Such lifelong education may occur in educational institutions (although such institutions are as likely to discipline desire and reproduce existing power relations and epistemological straightjackets), but will also occur in nonformal, informal and accidental learning contexts of voluntary association and political campaigning. In order for society to solve its problems, we need all to participate in the process of analysing the problems, learning about the opportunities and discerning the solutions. This is a learning process for all, since we do not know how these problems are to be solved – or even, sometimes, how to articulate the problems. In lifelong education, teacher and student meet as equals in dialogue, respecting and interrogating each other's expertise and assumptions and testing these against the social reality that needs to be changed. The curriculum emerges therefore from the social conflicts and contradictions experienced throughout society. The victims of social conflicts have both a material interest and a specialist knowledge to contribute to social change, and so should have a privileged role in this dialogue – what Paulo Freire<sup>xviii</sup> referred to as the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Popular education has developed as a participatory education, drawing on Freire's methods, in which those who are oppressed by social conditions control the process and the curriculum of learning in order to find the solutions.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Massive open online courses'

Originally used in literacy education amongst landless peasants in Brazil, Freire's methodology starts by challenging the assumption that illiterate people simply lack a skill – reading and writing – which can be imparted to them decontextualised from their socio-political reality of oppression. Rather, landless peasants are illiterate because they are oppressed, but they also inhabit a social context and are a source of knowledge about that context which is necessary for challenging oppression. Literacy education therefore must become a dialogue between the knowledge and skills of the educator that the peasants desire, and the knowledge and skills of the peasants, that must be shared with the educator if together a liberating education is to be achieved.

It is perhaps helpful to explain this term 'oppressed'. Oppression may be regarded as an objective, material condition of belonging to a social category (for example, female) that suffers systematic disempowerment relative to another social category (male). It is not dependent on whether any individual within this category 'feels' oppressed, nor whether that oppression is expressed through overt repression, nor whether that oppression results in a form of exploitation, nor whether an individual also belongs to an 'oppressor' category. So the landless peasants with whom Freire worked whilst devising his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were oppressed because they were landless peasants in a social context where land ownership constituted power. I am oppressed as an employee of a university – which most of the time provides considerably less suffering than that experienced by landless peasants, but is still oppression in these terms. At the same time, as a white male I am also an 'oppressor' – I benefit unintentionally from a racist and patriarchal social structure. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed recognises these structures of oppression and seeks liberation for both the oppressed and the oppressor through recognising and overcoming the oppressed-oppressor relationship.

Central to Freire's approach is the dialectic: between oppression and liberation, between the educator and the learner, between the concrete knowledge of the peasant and the abstract knowledge of analysis, between the word and the world, between theory and practice, between knowing the world and changing the world. A dialectical, or dialogical process goes one step further than deliberative process because the central role of inequality is addressed. Deliberation is typically a linear process which assumes a pluralist political space to which all have equal access, and in which only the rules of rationality will be applied<sup>9</sup>. A dialectical process looks for the contradiction that will drive the current, unequal situation to a new situation based on equality. Deliberation tends to aim for compromise, whilst dialectics aims for transformation.

Popular education, based on Freire's methodology is therefore explicitly political on the side of the oppressed and their liberation. Popular education comes from the Portuguese *educação popular* or Spanish *educación popular* – people's education, or education of the masses. As Liam Kane describes it "*In Spanish or Portuguese, 'popular' means 'of the people', 'the people' being the working class, the unemployed, 'peasants', the 'poor' and sometimes even the lower middle-class: it stands in contradistinction to the well-off middle class and the rich*"<sup>xlix</sup>. Again this is an objective analysis of society, not a question of 'identity': popular education requires a social analysis of where lines of oppression lie in order to challenge them. Occupy's slogan 'we are the 99%' similarly recognised that the beneficiaries of our current economic system based on speculative finance and debt financing, are a tiny proportion of the world's population. The oppressed therefore include the poor 30% who risk

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<sup>9</sup> Although contemporary practitioners of deliberative public engagement now talk of iterative deliberative ecosystems in which inequalities can be considered, and the possibilities for more dialogic forms of deliberation might emerge.

material deprivation as well as the working class who risk becoming poor, the users of services who are suffering from austerity cuts and privatisations, the victimised student protestors, Ed Miliband's 'squeezed middle' and even some of the better off whose incomes, savings and property are losing value.

As Ian Martin defines it:

*"Popular education is understood to be popular, as distinct from merely populist, in the sense that:*

- *It is rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people*
- *It is overtly political and critical of the status quo*
- *It is committed to progressive social and political change*

*Popular education is based on a clear analysis of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression and is informed by an equally clear political purpose. This has nothing to do with helping the 'disadvantaged' or the management of poverty; it has everything to do with the struggle for a more just and egalitarian social order"<sup>10</sup>.*

So popular education is a distinctive form of political practice. Lifelong education as developed by Ettore Gelpi, formerly of Unesco, develops the dialectical approach to education and social change further<sup>1</sup>. For Gelpi, any social context contains systemic contradictions which are experienced as social problems, grievances or oppressions but are also opportunities for learning, which in turn generates new understandings and social practices which can change these conditions. The contradictions are most obvious when there is social conflict, so contexts such as community action, social movements or political protests<sup>11</sup> are good locations for lifelong learning through the praxis of engendering social change. However, latent contradictions not expressed as overt conflict are also sources of an educational curriculum in which the underlying causes of social problems can be obtained and critical consciousness achieved: an educated and participating democracy.

*"Lifelong education can therefore take place in a classroom, a community centre or a climate camp, it can involve professionally trained educators, lay experts or movement intellectuals, and it may even involve dialogical, didactic or experiential teaching and learning methods. What is critically significant is that the curriculum emerges from the contradictions inherent in the conditions that people experience as problems to address."<sup>ii</sup>*

Lifelong education may therefore hold the key to the contradiction between deliberative democracy and participative democracy. Moreover, because it recognises the task of education as transforming social relations based on the experience and analysis of contradiction, embedding lifelong education into the practice of the city would enhance meaningful citizen participation that could help humankind deliver wellbeing for all (within environmental limits) by 2050.

Unesco has recognised the city as a significant locus for education, but has moved away from 'lifelong education' towards 'lifelong learning'. This is not just a semantic change, but an ideological shift away from Gelpi's vision of dialogical education imagining beyond the limits of the system to another possible city. Learning Cities today are designed instrumentally, to

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<sup>10</sup> In this popular education can be seen as an effort to build capabilities (a need placed at the heart of justice by Amartya Sen).

<sup>11</sup> As Agyeman et al (2013) suggest in a companion Big Ideas paper, such movements are a particular (although not exclusive) feature of the urban demos.

solve problems without transforming their causes; reinforcing the ideology of business as usual.

Freire's literacy education was designed, not to teach landless peasants to read, but to liberate them by using literacy to devise strategies to abolish landlordism. In the Learning City, literacy is more likely to be aimed at getting a job; lifelong learning may enable people to learn how to read accounts, but does not differentiate between those who wish to make a profit from those who wish to hold public servants to account; a learning organisation might just as equally be a multinational corporation keeping its employees loyal as a church protecting asylum seekers from deportation. There are tremendous opportunities afforded by Learning Cities but they must be identified, invented and imagined. As Gelpi put it: "*in every society there is some degree of autonomy for educational action, some possibility of political confrontation, and at the same time an inter-relation between the two*"<sup>lii</sup>

There is no doubt that the city of 2050 will be a learning city, but it must be one based on Lifelong Education in which learning is geared towards overcoming oppression, resolving problems for social benefit, participating in decision-making about the production and distribution of wealth, and discerning how to live well in a socially just city within the earth's ecological limits.

## Conclusions

Participation is contradictory. On the one hand, participatory approaches are often abused to incorporate citizens into activities that defend privileged interests. On the other, citizen participation is necessary for cities and societies to promote wellbeing and social justice within ecological limits, and essential in the process towards such a society.

Advances in participation have only ever been achieved through struggle: the 18<sup>th</sup> century bourgeoisie against inherited privilege; the capitalist working class against bourgeois individualism; feminists for women's empowerment and suffrage; educated professionals working in and against the state; students and activists experimenting with participatory protest. We cannot separate questions of participation from questions about power distribution: qualitative questions about who participates in what, why, when and for whom, and against whom.

This paper has argued that the purpose of participation must be to deepen democracy, to distribute power more equally: recognising that this inevitably implies disempowerment of those who currently enjoy privileged access to power. It also implies a need to challenge and undermine the insidious processes and tendencies which lead to unequal power distributions – such as bureaucratisation and market forces. This means dismantling hegemony, the subtle, cultural, taken for granted assumptions that have become – apparently - common sense, but rather must be challenged through critical analysis and by the creation of subaltern counterpublics.

So this is not merely a top-down process in which city leaders and decision makers can simply *invite* wider participation. Invited participation has its place, although this must occur further upstream, ever earlier in the process of making major decisions. But decision making processes *must* be receptive to invented participation. Decision makers need to make space for, and resources available to the disempowered and those who act in solidarity with them to *invent* new forms and opportunities for participation, experimenting with dialogue, deliberation and protest, and with ways to undermine and challenge hegemonic power. This

is a complex process which requires spaces for subaltern counterpublics; the ability to contradict power-bases; the stimulation of dialogue.

Such experiments with participation cannot be limited to the political domain. Neoliberal policies tolerate political participation only on the grounds that economic activity is dominated by the market, and that participation is mainly a matter of exercising market choice. However, genuinely participatory decision making is required, not only in political decisions over the distribution of goods and services, but also in the economic decisions that determine their production.

Participatory democracy at any scale requires an educated and questioning participating community, engaged in lifelong dialogue, to expose and analyse problems and generate solutions. Most of all, the victims of structures of social and environmental oppression have a crucial role in this dialogue. Current trends in educational provision run contrary to this, as curricula are commodified and learning subjected to market conditions. Cities should rather embrace (and where appropriate, public authorities should support) popular education and lifelong education which derive their curricula from struggles for social and economic justice, human dignity and ecological integrity. It is such education that generates the really useful knowledge necessary for wellbeing within environmental limits.

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