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ČASOPIS ZA UPRAVLJANJE KOMUNICIRANJEM
COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT QUARTERLY

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Francesca Pasquali

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Interrogating audiences: Theoretical horizons of participation

Edited by Nico Carpentier & Peter Dahlgren

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The Action “Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies” (2010-2014) is coordinating research efforts into the key transformations of European audiences within a changing media and communication environment, identifying their complex interrelationships with the social, cultural and political areas of European societies. A range of interconnected but distinct topics concerning audiences are being developed by four Working Groups: (1) New media genres, media literacy and trust in the media; (2) Audience interactivity and participation; (3) The role of media and ICT use for evolving social relationships; and (4) Audience transformations and social integration.

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- Introduction: Interrogating audiences – Theoretical horizons of participation 7–12
Nico Carpentier and Peter Dahlgren
- The concept of participation.
If they have access and interact, do they really participate? 13–36
Nico Carpentier
- Social capital: Between interaction and participation 37–60
Manuel José Damásio
- Applying genre theory to citizen participation in public policy making:
Theoretical perspectives on participatory genres 61–86
Marie Dufrasne and Geoffroy Patriarche
- Parameters of online participation: Conceptualising civic contingencies 87–110
Peter Dahlgren
- Competing by participation – A winning marketing tool 111–140
Nóra Nyiró, Tamás Csordás and Dóra Horváth
- Mediated public voices need theory to be heard 141–158
Nurçay Türkoğlu
- When the museum becomes the message for participating audiences 159–180
Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Pille Runnel
- A critical analysis of two audience prototypes
and their participatory dimensions 181–202
Mirosljub Radojković and Ana Milojević
- The participatory turn in the publishing industry: 203–220
Rhetorics and practices
Francesca Pasquali

CM

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Introduction: Interrogating audiences – Theoretical horizons of participation

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The concept of participation is one that emerges throughout the social. It is part of everyday and academic languages, policy, legal and activist languages, economic and cultural languages, and many more. Especially whenever a structural power imbalance occurs, attempts are organised to redress this imbalance by increasing the level of participation of the disadvantaged actors. The debate on media participation is a good example of the omnipresence of the concept of participation: In the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, participation in and through media has been on the agenda in the debates on, and practices of, alternative and community media, the world information and communication order, talk shows, reality television, new media, and a diversity of other media-related fields.

At the same time this conceptual omnipresence has had an impact on the way the concept has been used. In academia, the stringent requirement to define core concepts is surprisingly rarely followed when it concerns participation. This black boxing of the meaning(s) of the concept of participation maybe be understandable and practical, but it has not helped to develop critical theoretical reflections about the notion itself. Moreover, it has not served to enhance empirical elegance, nor has it led to unravelling the myriad of meanings that participation has, in both academic frameworks and in everyday practices.

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A first problem is related to the conceptual broadness of participation. In some cases participation is seen to act in a semantically imperialist way, as it incorporates many different social practices that are often better described by other concepts from sociological, political or communication and media studies. Sometimes participation is, for instance, seen as mere presence, and people are seen as participating when they are simply being exposed to specific cultural products (like watching television, visiting a museum or reading a blog). In other cases participation and consumption become mercilessly conflated. Even merely being in a specific social space (such as the online) seems sometimes to already merit the label of participation, as it is then implied we are becoming part of a broader cultural reality, through the logics of socialisation and/or social integration. Paradoxically, participation is sometimes unnecessarily confined to a delimited specific societal sphere, which is defined as a privileged site of participation, while we would argue that in fact the logics of power and participation work in every societal sphere. Especially institutionalised politics is sometimes seen as the locus of participation, ignoring the complexity and multilayered character of power (and participation) and thereby reducing the political to politics.

Secondly, confusion exists between participation and its conditions of possibility. As one of us has argued extensively, political engagement is a crucial precondition for participation (Dahlgren, 2009). One has to feel invited, committed and/or empowered to enter into a participatory process. But the presence of a participatory culture cannot be conflated with participation itself and its logics of equal(ised) power relations. Participation has a clear material and actionist dimension, and cannot be reduced to how we think or feel about participation. To put it into simple grammatical terms, to participate is a verb. A similar argument about participation's conditions of possibility has been raised by the other editor of this special issue, who has pleaded for a distinction between access, interaction and participation (Carpentier, 2011). The argument here is that participation is strongly related to the power logics of decision-making, whether it is explicit or implicit, formal or informal, minimalist or maximalist and egalitarian or not.

Finally, regardless of how committed we ourselves might be to the further democratisation of our societies, there is still a need for a more cool-headed approach towards participation that does not lose itself in celebratory frenzies. Organising sustainable forms of participation, especially in their more maxi-

malist versions, is highly complex and difficult to accomplish. Moreover, the often-made (implicit) assumption is that participation is necessarily beneficial and that, if it is only enabled, it will also be appreciated by all those involved, who will do nothing but gain from it. This assumption is problematic because it decontextualises participatory practices, and, as Cooke and Kothari (2001) implicitly argue, disconnects them from a very necessary articulation with democracy, empowerment, equality and a number of other crucial concepts.

The signifiatory diversity that characterises the concept of participation should come as no surprise, as participation is not a fixed notion, but is deeply embedded within our political realities and thus the object of long-lasting and intense ideological struggles. Ideology does not stop at the edges of academic analyses; it is an integral part of any analysis. This precept compels us to emphasise the unavoidability of the positioning that any author who intervenes in these debates faces, whether acknowledged or not. The lack of acknowledgement of participation's ideological embeddedness, and the myopia for participation's signifiatory diversity, comes with a danger, as this myopia often pays lip service to the politics of the status-quo by ignoring more radical forms of participation. Denominating all social process as participatory makes it impossible to distinguish between different social practices, different loci and contexts, and different types of power relations and (im)balances.

This peer-reviewed special issue tries to contribute to the development of participatory theory within the framework of communication and media studies. As always, this requires careful manoeuvring to reconcile conceptual contingency with the necessary fixity that protects the concept of participation from signifying anything and everything. In order to deepen the theorisations of participation, two strategies will be used: In a first cluster of articles, the concept of participation will be confronted with another theoretical concept or tradition that will enrich the theoretical development of participation. In the second cluster of articles, the workings of the notion of participation will be analysed within a specific topical field, which will allow deepening participatory theory by confronting participation with the contextualised logics of that topical field.

The first article, by Nico Carpentier, is an introductory text that focuses on the concept of participation. It grounds participation in democratic theory, but then broadens the scope towards the political. This movement allows listing the key characteristics of participation, together with a delineation of participation from access and interaction. In the first cluster of articles that follow, where

participation encounters other theoretical concepts or traditions, Manuel José Damásio links the concept to social capital theory. He first discusses the dimensions of social capital, and then moves into participation, first at a general level, and then more focused on the media sphere. Marie Dufrasne and Geoffroy Patriarche's article combines participation with the genre concept, using the horizon of public policy making. They use a series of topical questions to theorise participatory genres, taking context and interrelationships into account. Peter Dahlgren concludes the first part of this special issue, by confronting participation with the online environment. He first distinguishes five parameters for participation: trajectories, modalities, motivations, sociality and visibility, and then discusses the contingencies that both facilitate and hinder participation.

The second cluster of articles in this special issue looks at the workings of participation in specific topical fields. Nóra Nyirő, Tamás Csordás and Dóra Horváth discuss how participation functions within the field of marketing, combining both activity-focused and output-focused forms of participation. Nurçay Türkoğlu's article addresses the field of critical media literacy, arguing for the application of participation's theoretical frameworks on the world of the everyday, and at the same time analysing the thresholds that impede such developments. Pille Vengerfeldt and Pille Runnel look at the field of museum studies, and the changing nature of the museum which has increasingly highlighted the role (and participation) of the visitor. Through a series of topical questions, combined with three key institutional roles of the museum (economic, cultural and public), the authors describe the reasons for and meanings of museum participation. Miroljub Radojkovic and Ana Milojevic return to the audience, describing the participatory dimensions of two historical audience prototypes, and showing how these two prototypes co-exist and overlap. Finally, in the last article of the second part, Francesca Pasquali analyses participation in the publishing industry, which has been structurally affected by digitalisation processes. This article suggests a recognition of the diversity of the forms of participation.

The theoretical work captured in this article originates from the Working Group on "Audience interactivity and participation" of the COST Action "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies" (TATS), which is financed from 2010-2014. The main objective of the TATS COST Action is to advance state-of-the-art knowledge of the key transformations of European audiences within a changing media and communication environment, identifying their interrelationships with the social, cultural and political areas of European socie-

ties. This COST Action comprises more than 230 scholars from 30 countries. Its Working Group on “Audience interactivity and participation”, chaired by Nico Carpentier, focuses on the possibilities and constraints of mediated public participation; the roles that old and new media institutions and professionals (including journalists) play in facilitating public participation and in building citizenship; the interlocking of mainstream media and non-mainstream media and their production of new hybrid organisational structures and audience practices.

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The concept of participation. If they have access and interact, do they really participate?¹

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***Summary:** Participation is a concept that is being used in a wide variety of fields, and that has obtained an evenly wide range of meanings. This article attempts first to ground participation in democratic theory, which allows introducing the distinction between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation. In the second part of the article, a broad definition of the political will be used to transcend to logics of institutionalized politics, and to emphasize that the distribution of power in society is a dimension of the social that permeates every possible societal field. Both discussions are used to describe the key characteristics of participation, and to increase the concept's theoretical foundation. The article then zooms in on one of these characteristics, namely the difference between access, interaction and participation, as this distinction allows further sharpening the key meanings attributed to participation as a political process where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian.*

***Keywords:** Participatory theory, democratic theory, political, power, access, interaction, contingency*

1. Introduction

Participation has (again) become one of the key concepts of communication and media studies, especially after the popularization of web 2.0. At the same time, the concept of participation has a long history, where especially in the 1960s and 1970s the debates about participation were omnipresent in a wide

¹ This text is based on Carpentier, N. (2011) *Media and participation. A site of ideological-democratic struggle*. Bristol: Intellect.

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variety of societal fields. This has caused this concept to feature in a surprising variety of frameworks, which have been transformed through an almost infinite number of materializations.

But the problems that characterize (the use of) participation have not disappeared, on the contrary. Already in 1970, Pateman wrote (1970: 1) “the widespread use of the term [...] has tended to mean that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared; ‘participation’ is used to refer to a wide variety of different situations by different people”, and this situation has not altered. In communication and media studies, but also in many other fields and disciplines, participation is still used to mean everything and nothing, remains structurally under-theorized and its intrinsically political nature – as part of a democratic-ideological struggle on the nature of democracy – remains unacknowledged.

By returning to democratic theory, this article aims to firmly ground participation in democratic theory, in order to show the importance of power in defining the concept of participation. At the same time we need to transcend the realm of institutionalized politics, as democracy and participation cannot be restricted to this realm but need to be seen as transecting all realms of society. By revisiting these theoretical debates, a series of key characteristics of participation can be developed, in combination with a model that explicates the differences between access, interaction and participation.

2. Back to democratic theory

Democracy, because of its concern with the inclusion of the people within political decision-making processes, is one of the key sites of the articulation of the concept of participation. The centrality of people’s participation is described in Held’s (1996: 1) definition of democracy as “a form of government in which, in contradiction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule. Democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people”. Held’s work provides an immediate and excellent overview of the complexity of the notion of democracy. In his *Models of Democracy*, Held (1996: 3) initiates the debate by referring to Lively’s (1975: 30) list of ways to organize this form of political equality in practice. Lively distinguishes seven variations: (1) all should govern; (2) all should be involved in crucial decision-making; (3) rulers should be accountable to the ruled; (4) rulers should be accountable to the representatives of the ruled; (5) rulers should be chosen by the ruled; (6) rulers should be chosen by the representatives of the ruled and (7)

rulers should act in the interest of the ruled. This list first highlights the strong emphasis in democratic theory on the difference between rulers and ruled, with the important consequence that the concept of participation is articulated exclusively in relation to the ruled, ignoring the rulers. The list can also be seen as an initial indication that democracy is not a stable concept with a fixed signification, but encompasses a multitude of meanings.

The meaning of the concept of democracy is complicated by three elements: the variety of democratic manifestations and variants, the distinction between formal democracy and democratic cultures and practices, and the distinction between the narrow-political system ('politics') and the broad-political dimensions of the social (the 'political'). One of the crucial dimensions structuring the different democratic models is the minimalist versus maximalist dimension, which underlies a number of key positions in the articulation of democracy.

In this regard a key theme has been the always-present balance between representation and participation, which, for instance, provides structuring support for Held's (1996) typology of democratic models. As Held describes it, "Within the history of the clash of positions lies the struggle to determine whether democracy will mean some kind of popular power (a form of life in which citizens are engaged in *self*-government and *self*-regulation) or an aid to decision-making (a means to legitimate the decisions of those voted into power)" (Held, 1996: 3 – emphasis in original). The notion of representation refers here to political representation, *Vertretung*, or speaking-for, in contrast to the other main meaning of representation, *Darstellung*, or standing-for (Spivak, 1990: 108).³ Political representation is grounded in the formal delegation of power, where specific actors are authorized on behalf of others "to sign on his behalf, to act on his behalf, to speak on his behalf" and where these actors receive "the power of a proxy" (Bourdieu, 1991: 203). Obviously, one of the basic democratic instruments for the formal delegation of power is elections, where, through the organization of a popular vote, political actors are legitimized to gain (at least partial) control over well-defined parts of the state's resources and decision-making structures. This control is not total, but structured through institutional, legal (often constitutional) and cultural logics.

On the other side of the democratic balance is the notion of political participation, which refers to the involvement of the citizenry within (institutionalized) politics. As Marshall (1992: 10–11) explains in his discussion of political

³ In this interview, Spivak refers to the etymology of *Vertretung* ("to thread into someone's shoes"), but also emphasizes the differences and interconnections between the notions of *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, which she also refers to her 1988 essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*.

citizen rights, this not only includes the right to elect, but also the right to stand for election: “By the political element [*of citizenship*] I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political power or as an elector of such a body”. Again, these forms of political participation are not total, but structured through institutional, legal and cultural logics (see Dahlgren, 2009). One important example is the limits imposed by the concept of citizenship itself, which is not only a democracy-facilitating concept, but also has an exclusionary component.

Different democratic models (of democratic theory and practice) attribute different balances between these concepts of representation and participation. When the political is defined, following Schumpeter (1976), for instance, as the privilege of specific competing elites, thus reducing the political role of the citizenry to participation in the election process, the balance shifts towards representation and the delegation of power. In this minimalist model, the societal decision-making remains centralized and participation remains limited (in space and time). In contrast, in other democratic models (e.g., participatory or radical democracy – see below), participation plays a more substantial and continuous role and does not remain restricted to the ‘mere’ election of representatives. These democratic models with more decentralized societal decision-making and a stronger role of participation (in relation to representation) are considered here to be maximalist forms of democratic participation.

3. Maximalist versions of participation in democratic theory

Although the field of democratic theory is extensive, and characterized by an almost unsettling degree of diversity, I want to focus in this part on the democratic models that share a strong(er) commitment to maximalist democratic participation. These models each show the intimate connection between participation, power and decision-making processes, in a variety of different articulations. At the same time, this overview also shows the development of participatory thought over time, and the way this has contributed to their articulatory diversity.

A more practical implication of this diversity is that in this part only a selection of models is discussed, a decision that inevitably leads to the exclusion of some other, still relevant, models (such as Giddens’s (1998: 113–117) model of dialogical democracy⁴). The models I briefly discuss here are Marxism, an-

⁴ The reason for excluding this model is that it can be seen as a hybrid combination of deliberative and radical democracy, both of which are discussed in this article.

archism, the New Left models of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and radical democracy, which I deem to be the most representative models showing the workings of the more maximalist participatory articulations.

Marxist theory takes a strong emancipatory position that is embedded in a critique of the bourgeois domination of society. Marx nevertheless foresaw a structural change, through a series of class conflicts and revolutionary struggles, fed by logics internal to capitalism, establishing a communist society. Despite its inevitability, Marx did not envisage this change as being immediate: He distinguished two stages in the development of communism. In the first and transitional stage (later referred to as socialism by Lenin), most productive property would become collectively owned, but some class differences would persist, because society would “still [be] stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges” (Marx, 1994: 315). In practice this meant that the worker (in this transitional phase) would receive “[t]he same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, [...] back in another”. In this transitional phase the state needed to be democratized through what Marx calls the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.⁵ In *The Civil War in France*, Marx expands on the blueprint provided by the Paris Commune and develops it to extend to the national level. This national Commune model was based on a council structure⁶ and delegation to higher decision-making levels (Marx, 1993). The pyramid structure of the model of direct (or delegative) democracy (Held, 1996: 145–146) allows for (and requires) high levels of participation, through the selection of and subsequent actions of delegates, which would create a more horizontal set of power relations. But not until the second phase would society have completely transcended capitalism, and would “the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour [have...] vanished” (Marx, 1994: 321). For Marx, communist society is constructed on the basis of a new conception of the self, which is highly altruistic and non-conflictual: For instance, labour is performed to please the others, and not out of a sense of duty. In this utopian situation, the need for repressive state apparatuses would also have disappeared, and only a series of basic coordination, purely administrative tasks would require elected coordinators. This “labour of supervision and management” (Marx, 1992: 507) could be compared to the role of the

⁵ The dictatorship of proletariat should not be confused with the Leninist notion of dictatorship of the vanguard of the proletariat.

⁶ Some authors, like Gramsci, related the council to the soviet (Bottomore, 1991: 114).

conductor of an orchestra, as Marx (1992: 507) writes in *Capital*. Through the logics of cooperation, participation would become maximized in the egalitarian communist society. This implied the disappearance of the principle of power delegation, as participation was organized through everyday life.

Frequently ignored in debates on maximalist versions of participatory democracy is (the legacy of) anarchist theory (cf. May, 1994). Arguably, this neglect does justice to neither anarchist nor democratic theory. Anarchism's emphasis on decentralization and local autonomy led to a strong emphasis on participation within what Godwin (1971) called 'parishes' or voluntary federations. The distrust of government and rejection of (political) representation, that characterize anarchism, are fed by a discourse of anti-authoritarianism, which resists the establishment of societal hierarchies and systems of domination and privilege (Bookchin, 1996: 29). Illustrative of this is Bakunin's (1970: 31) statement, "It is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men". This immediately brings us to anarchist theory's strong emphasis on maximalist participation and decentralization as principles of decision-making. As Jennings (1999: 138) formulates it, there is a "generalised preference for decentralisation, autonomy and mass participation in the decision-making process". Through the free and equal participation of all in a variety of societal spheres, government as such becomes unnecessary, and an equal power balance in these decision-making processes can be achieved, which, in turn, maximize individual autonomy within a context of societal heterogeneity. Similarly, within the economic realm, the principle of capitalist struggle is replaced by a decentralized gift economy.

The New Left conceptualizations of participatory democracy – developed by Pateman (1970, 1985) and Macpherson (1966, 1973, 1977) and later by Mansbridge (1980) and Barber (1984) – focus on the combination of the principles and practices of direct and representative democracy. The problems of coordination in large-scale industrial societies bring the latter to accept representation (and power delegation) as a necessary tool at the level of national decision-making. At the same time Pateman (1970: 1) critiques authors such as Schumpeter (1976), for attributing "the most minimal role" to participation, and for basing their arguments on a fear that the implementation of more developed forms of participation might jeopardize society's stability. This induces Pateman and Macpherson to introduce a broad-political approach to participation, which can be found in Pateman's seminal definitions of partial participation as "a process in which two or more parties influence each other in

the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only” (Pateman, 1970: 70), and full participation as “a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions.” (Pateman, 1970: 71) This broad-political perspective also brings Pateman (1970: 110) to look at what she calls “alternative areas”, in order to maximize participation. It is only through participation in these ‘alternative areas’ of the political that a citizen can “hope to have any real control over the course of his life or the development of the environment in which he lives” (Pateman, 1970: 110). This expansion of participation into these ‘alternative areas’ is deemed a necessity, since “for a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized [...]” (Pateman, 1970: 43). For Pateman, this also implies a broadening of the concept of politics: When discussing participation in the industry, she explicitly defines these realms of the social as “political systems in their own right” (Pateman, 1970: 43). In *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Pateman (1970) focuses on participation in one specific ‘alternative area’: industry. Macpherson’s (1977) work takes a different angle: He describes the (first) model of participatory democracy, which he develops in *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, as follows: “One would start with direct democracy at the neighbourhood or factory level – actual face-to-face discussion and decision by consensus or majority, and election of delegates who would make up a council at the next more inclusive level, say a city borough or ward or a township. [...] So it would go up to the top level, which would be a national council for matters of national concern, and local and regional councils for matters of less than national concern.” (Macpherson’s, 1977: 108) At the same time, Macpherson (1980: 28) acknowledges that “[t]he prospects of a participatory pluralist system [...] appear rather slight” and investigates how some of the principles of participatory democracy can be reconciled with (and supported by) a competitive party system. Macpherson is suggesting the reorganization of the party system on less hierarchical principles, which would increase organizational democracy within political parties, rendering them “genuinely participatory parties [that] could operate through a parliamentary or congressional structure” (Macpherson, 1977: 114).

The model of deliberative democracy also tries to (re)balance the participatory and representative aspects of democracy, but, here, the participatory moment is located in communication, as deliberative democracy refers to “decision making by *discussion* among free and equal citizens” (Elster, 1998: 1–emphasis

added). Elster (1998: 8) points to the two main characteristics of this model: Its democratic nature is ensured because of its focus on “collective decision making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives”, and its deliberative nature lies in the focus on “decision making by means of arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to values or rationality and impartiality” (emphasis in original). Habermas’s work is one of the main sources of inspiration for the model of deliberative democracy.⁷ His older work on communicative rationality and the public sphere plays a key role in grounding deliberation in the intersubjective structures of communication, where the “speakers’ orientation toward mutual understanding entails a commitment to certain presuppositions rooted in the idea of unconstrained argumentation or discourse” (Flynn, 2004: 436). In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) further develops his model of deliberative democracy (and its relationship to law). In the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy, participation is multidirectional because of the strong emphasis on the procedural-deliberative, and on the role that institutions play in the transformation of public opinion into communicative power. In his two-track model of deliberative politics, the public sphere becomes a “warning system with sensors that, though unspecified, are sensitive throughout society” (Habermas, 1996: 359) and that can problematize issues, while deliberative procedures in the formal decision-making sphere focus on cooperative solutions to (these) societal problems, without aiming for ethical consensus.⁸

Laclau and Mouffe (1985), aiming to de-essentialize Althusser’s and Gramsci’s work (and thus also the work of Marx and Engels),⁹ developed a post-Marxist democratic model. Their work parallels the work on the deliberative model, but was developed differently because it was inspired by a post-structuralist agenda. They considered their democratic project to be radically pluralist because of its embeddedness in a social ontology, which emphasized that “subject positions cannot be led back to a positive and unitary founding principle” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 167). This implies also that the radical pluralist democracy advocated by Laclau and Mouffe was not radical in the sense of identifying ‘the true and pure democratic model’: “Its radical character implies, on the contrary, that we can save democracy only by taking into ac-

⁷ Of course, Habermas is not the only author in this debate. See Cohen (1989), Fishkin (1991) and Dryzek (2000). The deliberative democratic model was also supported by Rawls (1999: 139), who in 1999 declared that he was “concerned with a well-ordered constitutional democracy [...] understood also as a deliberative democracy”.

⁸ For instance, Mouffe (2005) continues to criticize Habermas for his focus on consensual outcomes.

⁹ See Carpentier and Spinoy (2008). This part is mainly based on the introductory chapter of this book.

count its radical impossibility” (Žižek, 1989: 6). For this reason, Mouffe (1997: 8) refers to radical pluralist democracy as a democracy that will always be ‘to come’. Nevertheless, the radical pluralist democratic model also contains a plea to balance power relations in society. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe want to “broaden the domain of the exercise of democratic rights beyond the limited traditional field of ‘citizenship’”, claiming that the distinctions between public/private and civil society/political society are “only the result of a certain type of hegemonic articulation” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 185). Again, we can identify a call to extend the political into the realm of the economy, where the importance of the “anti-capitalist struggle” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 185) is emphasized. But through Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985: 176) emphasis on the plurality and heterogeneity of the social, the broad definition of the political and “the extension of the field of democracy to the whole of civil society and the state”, also the notion of participation moves to the foreground. Although the concept of participation is used only rarely, its importance becomes clear in Laclau and Mouffe’s critique on the “anti-democratic offensive” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 171) in neo-conservative discourses. These neo-conservative discourses are seen as the antipode of their radical democratic model because they want to “redefine the notion of democracy itself in such a way as to restrict its field of application and limit political participation to an even narrower area” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 173). Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 173) continue by stating that these discourses would “serve to legitimize a regime in which political participation might be virtually non-existent”. The increased level of (political) participation that radical pluralist democracy has to offer is still delineated by the need to “agree on the liberal-democratic rules of the game”, although this is not taken to mean that “the precise interpretation of the rules of the game” would be given once and for all (Torfing, 1999: 261; Mouffe, 1995: 502). In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 176) state explicitly that the contemporary liberal-democratic ideology should not be renounced, but rather reworked in the direction of a radical and plural democracy, which generates sufficient openness for a plurality of forms and variations of democracy, which correspond to the multiplicity of subject positions active in the social. It is at this level also – combined with their dealing with “a very different theoretical problematic” – that Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 194) explicitly distinguish their position from the work of Macpherson and Pateman, who they see as defending a too specific and too well-aligned democratic model. But Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 194) add that they “nevertheless share [with them] many important concerns”.

4. Beyond democratic theory

In late (or post) modern societies, the frontiers of institutionalized politics have also become permeable. Discussions within the field of democratic theory, as exemplified in the previous part of this article, indicate that it would be difficult to confine the political (and the logic of power and decision-making in society) to the realm of institutionalized politics. Democratic theory has (sometimes) incorporated such transformations, but these theoretical expansions did not develop in a void. They grew out of a diversity of political practices that originated from actors that often were (strictly speaking) situated outside the realm of institutionalized politics. Whether they are called interest groups, old/new social movements, civil society or activists, these actors broadened the scope of the political and made participation more heterogeneous and multi-directional.

In some cases these political practices were still aimed at impacting directly on institutionalized politics, but in other cases their political objectives diverged from the 'traditional' and were aimed at cultural change. In many cases, several objectives and 'targets' were developed in conjunction. For instance, the feminist movement aimed for the re-articulation of gender relations, within a diversity of societal spheres, combining identity politics (see e.g. Harris, 2001) with (successful) attempts to affect legal frameworks. Not only do we witness a broadening of the set of actors involved in political activities, but also an expansion of the spheres that are considered political. One example here is the feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970), which claimed the political nature of social spheres such as the body and the family. Millett (1970), for instance, coined the term sexual politics, extending the notion of the political into the sphere of the private. In her chapter on the *Theory of Sexual Politics*, she introduces her sociological approach with the simple sentence "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family" (Millett, 1970: 33). A few pages on she notes that "The chief contribution of the family in patriarchy is the socialisation of the young (largely through the example and admonition of their parents) into patriarchal ideology's prescribed attitudes toward the categories of role, temperament, and status" (Millett, 1970: 33).

In these feminist projects we see (a plea for) the political (to) move further into the social. We can apply a similar logic within democratic theory, since a considerable number of authors who tend towards the more maximalist versions of democratic participation have sought (and found) solutions to the scale problem in large democracies by reverting to civil society, the economy and the

family as sites of political practice. Here, Mouffe's (2000: 101) concept of the political, as the "dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations", can be used to argue that the political touches upon our entire world, and cannot be confined to institutionalized politics. Here, also, the difference Mouffe makes between the political and the social is helpful because she locates this difference in the sedimented nature of practices. To use her words:

The political is linked to the acts of hegemonic institution. It is in this sense that one has to differentiate the social from the political. The social is the realm of sedimented practices, that is, practices that conceal the originary acts of their contingent political institution and which are taken for granted, as if they were self-grounded. Sedimented social practices are a constitutive part of any possible society; not all social bonds are put into question at the same time. (Mouffe, 2005: 17)

At the same time hegemony and the taken-for-grantedness it brings is never total or unchallengeable. Sedimented practices can always be questioned, problematized and made political again. This is what democratic and social movement theorists, together with political activists, have attempted to do in a variety of societal fields: to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of a specific social ordering and to show its political nature.

These logics do not apply only to the realms often discussed in democratic theory (such as the economy); they apply also to the cultural/symbolic realm and the media sphere, which has to be implicated in the broadening of the political. In other words, the representational is also political. The concept of the politics of representation (see e.g. Hall, 1997: 257) can be used to refer to the ideological logics in representational processes and outcomes. Dominant and/or hegemonic societal orders feed into these representational processes and outcomes, and at the same time are legitimized and normalized by their presence (or in some cases by meaningful absences). Organizations such as publishers and broadcasters – to mention but a few – act as discursive machinery that produces these representations, but at the same time they are organizational environments with specific politics, economies and cultures where, for instance, the politics of the expert or the professional create power relations that impact on the organization itself, but also on the 'outside' world and who from this 'outside' world is allowed in.

This all-encompassing process of the broadening of the political, where all social realities become (at least potentially) contestable and politicized, means also that the notions of democracy and participation can no longer remain

confined to the field of institutionalized politics. All social spheres are the potential objects of claims towards democratization and increased participation, although these claims (and the struggles provoked) do not lead necessarily to their realization, and the resistance in some societal realms turns out to be more substantial than in others.

5. Characterizing participation

As argued in the previous part: We should keep in mind that the political-democratic does not stop at the edges of institutionalized politics. The political-democratic, and the distribution of power in society that lies at its heart, is a dimension of the social that permeates every possible societal field. But democratic theory still takes a privileged position in the theoretical discussion on participation, as it immediately shows its political nature, and the key role of power in defining participation. Keeping the need for a broad-transectional application of participation in mind, we can still return to democratic theory (and especially to its more maximalist versions) to describe the key characteristics of participation, and to increase the concept's theoretical foundation:

1. The key defining element of participation is power. The debates on participation in institutionalized politics and in all other societal fields, including media participation, have a lot in common in that they all focus on the distribution of power within society at both the macro- and micro-level. The balance between people's inclusion in the implicit and explicit decision-making processes within these fields, and their exclusion through the delegation of power (again, implicit or explicit), is central to discussions on participation in all fields. Some prudence is called for here, as power is often reduced to the possession of a specific societal group. Authors such as Foucault (1978) have argued against this position, claiming that power is an always-present characteristic of social relations. In contemporary societies, the narrations of power are complex narrations of power strategies, counter-powers and resistance.

2. Participation is situated in always particular processes and localities, and involves specific actors. In order to understand participation, and the many different participatory practices with their sometimes very different participatory intensities, the characteristics, power positions and contexts of the specific processes, localities and actors have to be taken into account. Participation is not limited to one specific societal field (e.g., 'the' economy) but is present in all societal fields and at all levels. The contexts that these different fields and levels bring into the equation, is crucial to our understanding of any participatory process. For instance, in the theoretical debates on participation, we can see that

at the macro-level, they deal with the degree to which people could and should be empowered to (co)decide on for instance political, symbolic-cultural and communicative matters. At the micro-level, they deal with the always-located power relations between privileged and non-privileged actors, between for instance politicians and media professionals on the one hand, and (ordinary) people who do not hold these positions on the other. Although it would be too much of a simplification to define all privileged actors as part of one societal elite, these privileged actors do form (partially overlapping) elite clusters, that hold stronger power positions compared to individuals not part of these elite clusters. Within all fields, debates about participation focus exactly on the legitimization or the questioning and critiquing of the power (in-)equilibrium that structures these social relationships.

3. The concept of participation is contingent and itself part of the power struggles in society. The signification of participation is part of a “politics of definition” (Fierlbeck, 1998: 177), since its specific articulation shifts depending on the ideological framework that makes use of it. This implies that debates on participation are not mere academic debates, but are part of a political-ideological struggle for how our political realities are to be defined and organized. It is also not a mere semantic struggle, but a struggle that is lived and practiced. In other words, our democratic practices are, at least partially, structured and enabled through how we think participation. The definition of participation allows us to think, to name and to communicate the participatory process (as minimalist or as maximalist) and is simultaneously constituted by our specific (minimalist or maximalist participatory) practices. As a consequence, the definition of participation is not a mere outcome of this political-ideological struggle, but an integrated and constitutive part of this struggle.

More particularly, the definition of participation is one of the many societal fields where a political struggle is waged between the minimalist and the maximalist variations of democracy. In the minimalist model, democracy is confined mainly to processes of representation, and participation to elite selection through elections that form the expression of a homogeneous popular will. Participation here exclusively serves the field of institutionalized politics because the political is limited to this field. In the maximalist model, democracy is seen as a more balanced combination of representation and participation, where attempts are made to maximize participation. The political is considered a dimension of the social, which allows for a broad application of participation in many different social fields (including the media), at both micro- and macro-level, and with respect for societal diversity.

A similar logic can be used to describe minimalist and maximalist media participation. In (very) minimalist forms, media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, often restricting participation to mainly access and interaction, to the degree that one wonders whether the concept of participation is still appropriate. Participation remains articulated as a contribution to *the* public sphere but often mainly serving the needs and interests of the mainstream media system itself, instrumentalizing and incorporating the activities of participating non-professionals. This media-centred logic leads to a homogenization of the audience and a disconnection of their participatory activities from other societal fields and from the broad definition of the political, resulting in the articulation of media participation as non-political. In the maximalist forms, (professional) control and (popular) participation become more balanced, and attempts are made to maximize participation. Here we see the acknowledgement of audience diversity and heterogeneity, and of the political nature of media participation. The maximalist articulation allows for a recognition of the potential of media participation for macro-participation and its multidirectional nature.

4. Participation is not to be seen as part of the democratic-populist fantasy, which is based on the replacement of hierarchical difference by total equality. The celebrative-utopian variation of this fantasy defines the equalization of society, and the disappearance of its elites, as the ultimate objective for the realization of a 'truly' democratic society. In contrast, the anxietatic-dystopian variation is based on the fear that the democratic-populist fantasy might actually be realized. These are both populist fantasies, because (following Laclau's approach to populism) they are based on an antagonist resistance of the people against an elite. As Laclau (1977: 143) puts it: "Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc." Models that support stronger forms of participation (even the most maximalist versions) do not aim for the (symbolic) annihilation of elite roles, but try to transform these roles in order to allow for power-sharing between privileged and non-privileged (or elite and non-elite) actors. For instance, the positions that defend strong forms of media participation do not necessarily focus on the elimination of the media professional (or the journalist), but attempt to diversify and open up this societal identity so that the processes and outcomes of media production do not remain the privileged territory of media professionals and media industries.

5. Participation is invitational. Even the contemporary maximalist participatory models only rarely aim to impose participation. Their necessary

embeddedness in a democratic culture protects against a post-political reduction of participation to a mere technique, but also against the enforcement of participation. Here, I concur with Foss and Griffin (1995: 3), who contrast invitation and persuasion (the latter being fed by the “desire for control and domination”), and Greiner and Singhal (2009: 34), who develop the concept of invitational social change, which “seek[s] to substitute interventions which inform with calls to imagine and efforts to inspire”. These kinds of reflections allow participation to be seen as invitational, which implies that the enforcement of participation is defined as contradictory to the logics of participation, and that the right not to participate should be respected.

6. Participation is not the same as access and interaction. Arguably, these notions are still very different – in their theoretical origins and in their respective meanings. But they are often integrated (or conflated) into definitions of participation. One example here is Melucci’s (1989: 174) definition, when he says that participation has a double meaning: “It means both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the ‘general interests’ of the community”. Another example of this conflation¹⁰ can be found in *Convergence Culture* where Jenkins (2006: 305) defines participation as referring “to the social and cultural interactions that occur around media”. Yet another example can be found in Taylor and Willis’s (1999: 215) introductory sentences to their chapter on *Public Participation in the 1990s*: “Broadly, three different models of audience participation can be identified in the non-fiction media. First^[11], there has been a wide increase in the use of audience interaction ‘segments’ on television.”

However valuable these approaches and analyses are, I would like to argue that participation is structurally different from access and interaction and that a negative-relationist strategy – distinguishing between these three concepts – helps to clarify the meaning(s) of participation. A considerable number of academic disciplines, including communication and media studies, have become insensitive towards the need to properly define participation, which implies that audience practices like watching television, surfing on the web, visiting a museum, talking to a neighbour, pressing the red button to initiate the interactive functions of digital television are all deemed necessarily partici-

¹⁰ It should be added that Jenkins does distinguish between interactivity and participation (Jenkins, 2006: 305), and that (in some rare cases) he uses the concepts of participation and interaction alongside each other, leaving some room for the idea that they are different concepts (Jenkins, 2006: 110, 137).

¹¹ The other two modes they distinguish are programmes that entirely consist of audience participation and programmes that are centred on a live studio audience.

partory activities. This over-stretched approach towards participation causes the link with the main defining component of participation, namely power, being obscured. Moreover, the over-stretching of participation often causes the more maximalist meanings of participation to remain hidden¹².

Access and interaction do matter for participatory processes in the media – they are actually its conditions of possibility – but they are also very distinct from participation because of their less explicit emphasis on power dynamics and decision-making. Here, especially Pateman's (1970: 70–71) definition of participation, which refers to influence or (even) equal power relations in decision-making processes, is useful to avoid the signifier participation being over-stretched. Taking this definition and the here discussed characteristics of participation as starting point, we can develop a model that distinguishes between access, interaction and participation.

6. Access, interaction and participation (AIP)

If we revisit the theoretical discussions on participation, we can find numerous layers of meanings that can be attributed to the three concepts. This diversity of meanings can be used to relate the three concepts to each other and to flesh out of the distinctions between them. All three concepts can then be situated in a model, which is termed the AIP-model (see Figure 1¹³). First, through this negative-relationist strategy, access becomes articulated as presence, in a variety of ways that are related to four areas: technology, content, people and organizations. For instance, in the case of digital divide discourse, the focus is placed on the access to media technologies (and more specifically ICTs), which in turn allows people to access media content. In both cases, access implies achieving presence (to technology or media content). Access also features in the more traditional media feedback discussions, where it has yet another meaning. Here, access implies gaining a presence within media organizations, which generates the opportunity for people to have their voices heard (in providing feedback). If we focus more on media production, access still plays a key role in describing the presence of media (production) technology, and of media organizations and other people to (co-)produce and distribute the content.

The second concept, interaction, has a long history in sociological theory, where it often refers to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships.

¹² From this perspective, the conflation of access, interaction and participation is actually part of the struggle between the minimalist and maximalist articulations of participation.

¹³ See Carpentier (2007) for an earlier version of the AIP model.

Subjectivist sociologies, such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenological sociology, highlight the importance of social interaction in the construction of meaning through lived and intersubjective experiences embodied in language. In these sociologies the social is shaped by actors interacting on the basis of shared interests, purposes and values, or common knowledge.¹⁴ Although interaction is often equated with participation, I here want to distinguish between these two concepts, as this distinction allows an increase in the focus on power and (formal or informal) decision-making in the definition of participation, and – as mentioned before – protecting the more maximalist approaches to participation.

If interaction is seen as the establishment of socio-communicative relationships within the media sphere, there are again a variety of ways that these relationships can be established. First, in the categorizations that some authors (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Lee, 2000) have developed in order to deal with the different components of Human-Computer Interaction, different types of interaction have been distinguished. Through these categorizations the audience-to-audience interaction component (strengthened later by analyses of co-creation) has been developed, in combination with the audience-to-(media) technology component. At the production level this refers to the interaction with media technology and people to (co-)produce content, possibly within organizational contexts. A set of other components can be found within the 'old' media studies approaches. The traditional active audience models have contributed to this debate through their focus on the interaction between audience and content, which relates to the selection and interpretation of content. As these processes are not always individualized, but sometimes collective, also forms of media consumption like family or public viewing (Hartmann, 2008) can be included, not to forget the role that interpretative communities can play (Radway, 1988; Lindlof, 1988).

This then brings me to the concept of participation. As repeatedly argued, this difference between participation on the one hand, and access and interaction on the other is located within the key role that is attributed to power, and to equal(ized) power relations in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the distinction between content-related participation and structural participation can then be used to point to different spheres of decision-making. First, there are decision-making processes related to media content production, which

¹⁴ I do not want to claim that power plays no role in interactionist theory, but power and especially decision-making processes do not feature as prominently as they do in the democratic-participatory theories that provide the basis for this article.

might also involve other people and (proto-)machines, and which might take place within the context of media organizations. Second, there is the structural participation in the management and policies of media organizations; also technology-producing organizations can be added in this model, allowing for the inclusion of practices that can be found in, for instance, the free software and open source movement(s). At the level of reception, many of the processes are categorized as interaction, but as there are still (implicit) decision-making processes and power dynamics involved, the reception sphere should still be mentioned here as well, although the main emphasis is placed on the production sphere.

Figure 1: Access, interaction and participation – The AIP model.

Access (presence)				
	Technology	Content	People	Organizations
Production	Presence of (proto-)machines to produce and distribute content	Presence of previously produced content (e.g., archives)	Presence of people to co-create	Presence of organizational structures and facilities to produce and distribute content
Reception	Presence of (proto-)machines to receive relevant content	Presence of (relevant) content	Presence (of sites) of joint media consumption	Presence of organizational structures to provide feedback to

Interaction (socio-communicative relationships)				
	Technology	Content	People	Organizations
Production	Using (proto-)machines to produce content	Producing content	Co-producing content as group or community	Co-producing content in an organizational context
Reception	Using (proto-)machines to receive content	Selecting and interpreting content	Consuming media together as group or community	Discussing content in an organizational context (feedback)

Participation (co-deciding)				
	Technology	Content	People	Organizations
Production (and reception)	Co-deciding on/with technology	Co-deciding on/with content	Co-deciding on/with people	Co-deciding on/with organizational policy

7. Conclusion

Participation is not a fixed notion, but is deeply embedded within our political realities and thus is the object of long-lasting and intense ideological struggles. The search for harmonious theoretical frameworks to capture contemporary realities might have been an important fantasy of the *homo academicus*, but also it might not do the analysis of these realities any favours. This does not mean that conceptual contingency needs to be celebrated and radicalized; after all, “a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). It requires careful manoeuvring to reconcile the conceptual contingency with the necessary fixity that protects the concept of participation from signifying anything and everything. But still, at some point participation simply stops being participation.

Through a more detailed reading of the articulations of participation in (maximalist) democratic theory, participation’s crucial and intimate connection with power (and the societal redistribution of power) becomes emphasized. Moreover, participation’s embeddedness in a democratic logic allows us to avoid two key problems: the democratic-populist fallacy, where the myth of total equalization rears its ugly head, and the repressive version of participation, where participation is enforced. But the main theoretical strategy used in this article to clarify participation’s contemporary discursive limits is negative-relationist. In this negative-relationist strategy, concepts are defined through their juxtaposition to other concepts. In the case of participation, it is seen as structurally different from interaction and access. Access and interaction remain important conditions of possibility of participation, but they cannot be equated with participation. The concept of access is based on presence, in many different forms: for instance, presence in an organizational structure or a community, or presence within the operational reach of media production technologies. Interaction is a second condition of possibility, which emphasizes the social-communicative relationship that is established, with other humans or objects. Although these relationships have a power dimension, this dimension is not translated into a decision-making process. My argument here is that, through this juxtaposition to access and interaction, participation becomes defined as a political – in the broad meaning of the concept of the political – process where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian.

The qualification ‘to an extent’ reintroduces the notion of struggle because the political struggle over participation is focused precisely on the equality and

balanced nature of these power relationships. Participation is defined through these negative logics – distinguishing it from access and interaction – which demarcates the discursive field of action, where the struggle for different participatory intensities is being waged. This is also where the distinction between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation emerges: While minimalist participation is characterized by the existence of strong power imbalances between the actors (without participation being completely annihilated or reduced to interaction or access), maximalist participation is characterized by the equalization of power relations, approximating Pateman's (1970) concept of full participation. Although maximalist participation – seen as equalized power relations in decision-making – has proven to be very difficult to translate into social practice, we should be careful not to erase it from the academic agenda of participation research because of mere carelessness.

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Social capital: Between interaction and participation

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Summary: *The purpose of this article is to discuss different ways of conceptualizing social capital in order to bring out the contested and multidimensional character of the concept and relate that with both social interaction and participation in the context of media and network technologies use and consumption. Throughout its history the media have always included a mix of centralized practices and interpersonal communication processes that shape different patterns of relationship between subjects and technologies and generate different social outcomes. The emergence of the communication and networks paradigm as central to the processes of social interaction and community building, invites us to look closely at the mechanisms that individuals use in order to interact and participate in the social networks in which they move themselves. Social capital is one of such mechanisms, a multidimensional concept with different dimensions and features. We discuss social capital's complementary and sometimes antagonistic dimensions in relation with subjective forms of participation and interaction with and via the media. Finally, we will also tap into the different constructs that social capital allows for and exploit their potential for the argument around network media potential to generate original forms of interaction and participation.*

Keywords: *media, social capital, networks, interaction, participation, social resources*

1. Introduction

Social capital is one of the relevant but at the same time contested concepts in the social sciences (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Kim, Subramanian & Kawachi, 2006; Koniordos, 2008; Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009). Social capital's conceptual vagueness has somehow contributed to the criticism around the

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theme, and its multidimensional nature only makes the issue more complex. Nevertheless, social capital remains an important concept. This article will survey different aspects of social capital and the exchange of social resources in networks, and explore the theoretical intersections between the different facets of social capital and a media saturated environment (Poster, 2006). Our proposal intends not only to assess the different formulations of social capital, but also to discuss the role interaction and participation play in them and the different positions the media assume in a variety of theoretical perspectives on social capital. Starting on the different formulations and “theories” on social capital, we will then isolate specific forms of social capital that integrate the media within their core. The role they assign to social technologies allows us to better understand current dynamics of social participation and engagement with media technologies.

Social capital is a metaphor about advantage that inheres in social relationships and the access an actor has to the resources available in a network (Bourdieu, 1986). For others it is an aspect or function of a social structure (Coleman, 1998), or it refers to resources embedded in a social structure (Burt, 2000). The increase in dependency on network media and the importance the internet has in our society, once again brought to the centre of the debate the relation between social capital, the media (Haythornthwaite, 2005) and different forms of interaction and participation, both at an individual and at a collective level (Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009; Hampton & Wellman, 2003).

Different dimensions of social capital can be delineated in function of several elements. We will start by discussing these different conceptions and their roots and then go on to evaluate how interaction and participation are related with specific formulations of social capital. We will after that consider the sources and outcomes of social capital and relate those with media use and consumption.

This article aims to contribute to social capital literature by discussing a series of questions. The first set of questions will focus on social capital theory: What are the different dimensions of social capital, and how are modes of interaction and participation related with these dimensions? The second set of questions brings in the media: What are the possible relations between social capital theory/ies and media and what are the contributions social capital theories might have for the study of media forms in our society? Do the media influence social capital accumulation and outcomes? What is the relation between social capital and media supported forms of interaction and participation?

2. Dimensions of social capital

The advantage created by the position of an individual in a structure of relationships is what is defined as “social capital” (Burt, 2005). The core idea of social capital theory is exceptionally simple: social networks have value (Putnam, 2000). Firstly they have value for the people in it, but they also have value for the society in which they operate.

Few scientific concepts have gained as much notoriety in recent times as the concept of social capital that we now see it being used in various scientific fields, from information systems (Bresnen, Edelman, Newell, Scarbrough & Swan, 2004) to economics (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004) and political and social sciences (Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2002). The concept emerged in the field of social theory and had its first systematization in the works of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988).

The notion of capital is often present in social and political discourse, and has an elevated position in our society. By capital we mean the investment in resources that have value in a given historical and social context. The way that capital is acquired and reproduced in order to obtain a return is one of the central problems of our time, particularly when considering different facets of capital, such as human or financial facets (Field, Schuller & Baron, 2001).

When we speak of “social capital” we assume that the characteristics of our civil society are crucial to the health of our communities, our society, our economy and ourselves. The “capital” that is spoken of here is not material or monetary in nature, but nonetheless constitutes an important asset, particularly because it provides the basis for a social cohesion that facilitates cooperation, provided that it is mutually beneficial for all involved.

Social capital is an intangible asset that can be the possession of an individual or a feature of a collective structure. Different dimensions of this concept are often conflated and we should start by distinguishing between definitions of social capital at an individual and at a collective level.

2.1 The individual vs. the collective

The individual-level notion of social capital was first claimed by Bourdieu (1986), whose definition of social capital suggests that the concept has two elements: Firstly, the relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by other members of the network, and secondly the amount and quality of those resources. According to his definition, the amount

of social capital to which an actor has access depends on both the quantity of the network connections that she or he can enlist, and the sum of the amount of capital that each network member possesses. This definition clearly separates the sources of social capital – the network connections – from its effects, namely the rise in inequality that troubled Bourdieu (Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009).

Individual claims were also put forward by Coleman (1998) albeit with some collective components, who suggest that there are different types of resources embedded in social structures, namely trust, information and norms. Although he is more focused on social structures, Coleman also considers individual actions within structures a key aspect of social capital. Ling (2008) distinguishes between the quantity and/or quality an actor (individual, group or community) can access or use, and the influence his location on the network has. This renders the distinction between the individual and collective levels of social capital less visible by reinforcing the nature of the resources made available via the network. Individual-level claims stress the ability of the actor to secure benefits via social structures, suggesting that social capital is to be regarded as social resources that are accessible through participation in various types of social networks (Rostila, 2011).

The process of making individual resources available to others through social relationships does not assume that social capital is “owned” by individuals. As Coleman (1988) suggests, social capital, unlike other forms of capital, is inherent in the structure of relations between individuals. This difference between actual and potential resources – the ones the individuals use and the ones that are available on the network – assumes the pre-existence of a relation as a condition for social capital to be used. That is why the term “individual social capital” is in fact misleading, as social capital is always relational, although it can be used to achieve individual ends.

Why then has the more “collectivist” view on social capital become so prevalent? The idea of “participation” played an essential role in this process via the work of Putnam (2002). Putnam claims that social capital is created through citizens’ active participation in organizations and groups but is in itself a set of features of social organizations – like trust, norms and networks – that can help via coordinated actions in creating a better society. Trust is central in Putnam’s notion of social capital. He claims that a group whose members manifest trustworthiness and place trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a group that is comparable but lacks trust. Putnam goes as far as to claim that even basic forms of interaction make people more likely to

participate by increasing trust and adherence to social norms. The attention he gives both to the formal (i.e. participation in organizations) and the informal (i.e. socializing with friends) always assumes that social capital is a collective good, one that is non-exclusive in terms of consumption and that is publically available, though something inherent to the structure of social relationships. That is why we can then talk of a systemic type of social capital that emphasizes social capital as a feature of larger social structures or organizations rather than a consequence of individual actions within the structure.

Systemic social capital (Lin, 2008) is based on a system of trust and morality that cannot be produced individually by each actor in the network, but rather it follows the structural nature of the global network itself, building upon the commitment that everyone has in respecting the rules of systemic trust and morality, to contribute through their private investments to stability and growth of the whole. The distinction between relational social capital versus systemic social capital tries to overcome the purely collectivist concept of social capital (Ling, 2008) that sees in the same an opposition to a more individualistic model of capital.

This view of social capital no longer focuses on social networks and the position of an individual in the network, but on the value of all the features and benefits that an actor can obtain and control (Enns, Malinick & Matthews, 2008) through his presence in a web of network relations (Esser, 2008; Burt, 2005). Each individually considered actor can invest in its relational capital on three levels: an increase on a positional level, with the opening of relations with other individuals or networks, an increase in the confidence level of the other subjects in these networks, and an increase in the number of bonds with others, depending on their overall performance.

Systemic capital is situated “above” relational capital and cannot be exclusively created by the relationships and bonds that are established within it. Systemic capital is part of a level of control based on the overall reliability of the system, as well as a compulsory system of morality. Contrary to relational capital, systemic capital depends on the closure of a systemic network and generates the actors that comprise a dependence on it. We can then talk of collective social resources of varying forms, although the features of collective resources differ from those at the individual level. It is these collective resources – rather than coordinated action and/or its determinants (i.e. trust, norms, social engagement, etc.) – that constitute the core of collective social capital. While information and sociability are the simplest levels of relational capital, marked by low positional ties, in the

higher levels of systemic capital we find the values and norms that shape the attitudes of actors and that ensure network stability (Esser, 2008).

The introduction of this formulation of the concept of social capital “socializes” the concept of resources and emphasizes the importance of social relations, control and trust as conditions for the production of any other kind of capital. In addition, it establishes the concept of social capital as having an individual dimension and a collective dimension, respectively marked by relational capital and systemic capital. Nevertheless, these definitions do not specify the outcomes of social capital at any of these levels since that, by focusing either on individual actions or on collective determinants (i.e. trust and norms), they tend to leave aside the exact nature of these social resources. In order to overcome this, numerous classifications have tried to verify how social capital can be validated and measured in different social contexts.

2.2 Outcomes of social capital: the community

In the previous section we have discussed the transition of social capital from an individual asset to a feature of social structures and the establishment of the distinction between relational and systemic social capital. This movement was part of an attempt to make social capital an explanatory tool for different kinds of social relationships and resulted in either a too optimistic view of social capital that associates the concept with all good things in social life, or a too simplistic view, that stresses the oppositions between individual social capital – the one associated with individuals and their personal advantages – and collective social capital – collective cooperation and coordinated actions.

Suggestions that social resources of different forms might be at the core of collective social capital (Hampton, Haase, Hite & Wellman, 2001) have evolved to formulations of the concept that try to overcome the separation between the individual and the collective levels and focus on social resources (Rostila, 2011). This perspective tries to overcome the previous opposition between collectivism and individualism in the context of a network of interactions by presenting social capital rather as an indicator of cohesion and stability in a community. Putnam focuses both on the community and the individual in a non-exclusive way by stressing at the same time formal forms of social capital (i.e. membership to a charity organization) and informal ones (socializing with friends in a club). The emphasis this view put on social capital as a feature of social organizations, implies we have to find ways of distinguishing between the social resources, the collectively coordinated actions and the elements that facilitate the articulation

between the individuals and both. In order to try to do so, classifications were envisaged that distinguish between structural and cognitive types of social relationships that would result in different outcomes in terms of social capital.

The structural component is the extent and intensity of participation in associations and other forms of social activity (the resources), whereas the cognitive component relates to people's perceptions of interpersonal trust, solidarity and reciprocity. The structural one would have a private and a public side (Haase, Wellman, Witte & Hampton, 2001):

- Network - the network of social relations. This would be the private side;
- Civic Engagement (participatory) – the sense of trust and shared norms among actors in the network. This would be the public side.

The cognitive component corresponds to interpersonal trust, the ties that keep the network members together, or if one prefer, what make a community more than the sum of its members. This would be the attitudinal side of social capital.

The structural dimension is clearly the most complex one. On one side, we can look at it as the private side of social capital, since it stands for the frequency and nature of personal contacts with others (Hampton & Wellman, 2003), while on the other side, we can associate this structural component with the forms of participation in communities that civic engagement articulates. Under this formulation, we would have a structural side of social capital that would include different types of social relationships that occur in a network, and where social contact and civic engagement would be elements contributing to one of the main outcomes of social capital: the communitarian experience. This experience of the community would no longer be based on locality, but on a network of social ties based on interpersonal relationships.

The framing of the communitarian experience as an outcome of social capital assumes that both formal and informal social interactions involve participation as long as they happen under the structural civic engagement “umbrella”. Even if we would forget the obvious fact that not all forms of informal social interaction include participatory social involvement within a community, it is even clearer that being part of a social network is not predictor of an influence to participate (McClurg, 2003). It is because of this fact that the communitarian perspective, with its focus on social resources and its equivalent – the community, tends to centre its attention on the elements that can facilitate or lubricate the associated social relations but somehow neglects the purposes for which the individuals are using these relations. Putnam's

horizontal conceptualization tries to overcome this gap between the “private” and the “public” side of social capital by emphasizing the idea of social capital as a “public good”.

The classification of different forms of social relationships along the structural and cognitive approaches to social capital, points to the relevance networks have for the understating of social capital, but also to the importance individual interactions have in promoting collective engagement. Moreover, these perspectives help us to shed light on how individuals move within and through the social organizations and structures of networks.

One of the prerequisites of social capital seems to be network closure (Burt, 2000). In a closed network, the position of an actor, and its ability to draw on the resources contained by members of the network, will eventually result in the satisfaction of his wants, but, as Putnam verified, this does not automatically contribute to community coherence. Following this, he claimed that we can introduce another important distinction, between different facets of social capital based on forms of relations that individuals establish in function of their position in a community and the ways they channel resources inward-looking or outward looking (Kim, Subramanian & Kawachi 2006). These forms are *bonding*, *bridging* and *linking* types of social capital.

2.3 Bonding, bridging and linking – sources of social capital

In the previous section we have seen how the communitarian experience was framed as an outcome of social capital via the distinction between cognitive and structural types of social capital, and how this points to different forms of social interaction and participation that are reinforced in the structural perspective via individual involvement that is facilitated by network conditions. The most important among those forms are the individual positioning in the network and the relations and uses of resources that result from that. The identification of the components of these structural forms of social capital seems to be essential if we want to understand how the resources are appropriated by individuals and the ways social capital outcomes are generated.

The importance the bridging, bonding and linking system of classification assumes, results from the relevance networks have for the study of social capital and its sources. Burt (2000) argues for the difference between brokerage and closure to introduce two possible ways of understanding social capital as a result of the structure of the network. On one side, he talks of the “structural hole” argument by which social capital is created by a network in which people can

broker connections between otherwise disconnected segments. On the other side, he talks of network closure – a network of strongly connected elements – as a condition for the creation of social capital. Burt's definition emphasizes resource availability in function of the structure of the network while others, such as Putnam, emphasize trust and reciprocity and introduce the bridging, bonding and linking concepts in order to distinguish between different forms of social relationships. So, while some look at the structures of the networks, others look at the forms of the relationships.

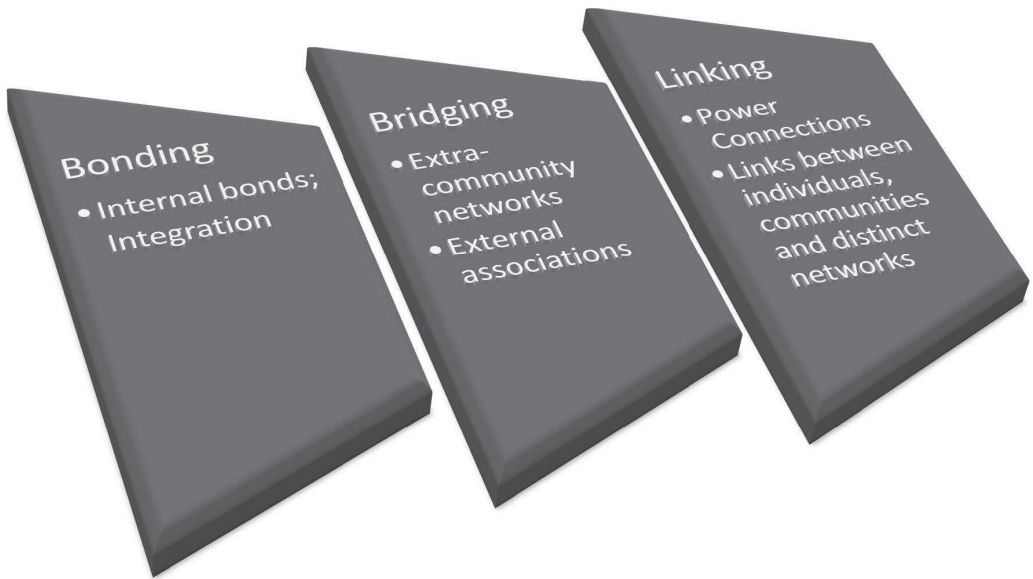
We can summarize these two main approaches by stating that if we focus on the resources embedded in the network and the relations between the subjects, we may find two basic types of social capital: relational and systemic (as discussed before). This perspective supports viewing social capital as both an individual attribute and a property of the collective – the social network – and this is why we should call it the “network” approach in opposition to the more social-oriented perspective implicit in the communitarian view. The salient feature of this second approach is that social capital is conceptualized as a group attribute, i.e. as a property of the organization or the community, as opposed to a description of the individual members who belong to the group. We can easily verify that the communitarian perspective follows the “social cohesion” orientation by being much more interested in the participatory types of social capital, while the network perspective will be much more interested in verifying how resources are accessed, and in measuring the amount of resources embedded in a given network in a moment in time. This implies we should give attention on the sum of current and embedded potential resources, derived and available from the social network of relationships possessed by an individual (Hampton & Wellman, 2003) by considering the interaction that happens in the network as more relevant than the participatory outcomes of the process.

Regardless of whichever position we favour, the explanation on how certain resources become available to individuals is relevant from the stand point of the social cohesion perspective while the understanding of how the individuals access those resources is valuable for the network perspective. Both perspectives, by assuming social networks are relevant, also assume that the connections between the individuals that integrate those same networks are a relevant object of study. That's why bridging, bonding and linking classifications of social capital are relatively consensual. Putnam (2000) for instance views this relevance from the standpoint of the importance social connectedness and interpersonal trust have as components of social capital in a given community,

while Lin (2001) will only look at personal forms of interaction and verify how individuals access valuable resources through their social networks.

However, if we focus on the structural side of the relations that constitute the social networks, we will find three sub-functional types of social capital – *bridging*, *bonding* and *linking* (Kim, Subramanian & Kawachi, 2006).

Figure 1: Types of functional social capital



The distinction between *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital is one of the most exploited in literature (Putnam, 2002; Burt, 2005; Rostali, 2011). *Bonding* capital is used to characterize networks with strong internal bonds and *bridging* is used to characterize networks with important external ties (Figure 1). Simultaneously, another particular type of capital called *linking* has been developed with regard to ties of power that are constituted within networks. *Linking* social capital refers to norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society. Hence, *linking* social capital actually refers to relationships that would otherwise be grouped together in the *bridging* category as they also “bridge” people to dissimilar individuals.

2.4 Interaction and participation: from the micro to the macro level

All the approaches to social capital we have been discussing have in common their focus on relationships. The approach may vary between those that focus on relationships that people have with each other, those who try to understand how those relations become stable structures that are maintained over time, others who try to detect how potential relations materialized, and still others who try to isolate the elements that facilitate or lubricate these social relations. In order to understand the connections between interaction, participation and social capital we must start with the assumption that interaction and participation are simultaneously sources and outcomes of social capital.

Our discussion on the different dimensions of social capital started by identifying the antagonistic relationship between individual and collective-level social capital and then looked at social resources as a conceptual linkage between the two levels. By focusing on social resources we were able to verify how different authors either centre their attention on the characteristics of the social networks that foster the accumulation of social capital as a consequence of the coordinated actions and the level of trust that reigns in those communities, or on the processes that allow for the channelling of those resources across the networks. This distinction between a micro and a macro level of analysis was once again present when we discussed the possible forms of organization of the relationships – the structural and the cognitive components – where both the individual and collective levels were subsumed. This was also mentioned when we related the structure of networks and the nature of relationships with the three different types of social capital – bridging, bonding and linking – that evoke again a difference between a micro level of interactions between subjects and a macro level of participation in the values of the collective. By evoking this distinction we were able to identify two general perspectives on social capital, the so-called “social cohesion” perspective and the “network” perspective. The first one is clearly focused on the collective outcomes and resources, while the other is more interested in the attributes of the social network at both an individual and a collective level.

We can draw on this distinction to affirm that network theories assume that both formal and informal modes of social interaction integrate social capital and are a feature of the individual quest for resources, while participation stands for a particular mode of interaction that implies involvement at a collective level and is determined by features (i.e. trust) of the network. Although the network perspective is in most cases more interested in the sources of social capital, it

tends to envisage participation as an outcome that results from the structure of the network (i.e. less dense networks will facilitate individual participation).

From this perspective exchanges are emphasized as the core element of social interaction (Haythornthwaite, 2005) and any type of exchange or interaction is known as a relation. Pairs who maintain one or more types of relations are said to maintain a tie. Across a set of individuals, person-to-person connectivity builds into social networks. Such networks reveal how resources flow and circulate among these individuals, and what subsets of individuals are more connected than others. The ties maintained by pairs can range from weak to strong according to the types of exchanges, frequency of contact, intimacy, duration of the relationship, etc. In all cases it is the relation between individuals that matters.

In order to understand the role of social interaction we must start by stating that not all forms of social interaction influence behaviour and not all of them involve group membership. Social interaction stands first of all for the exchange of information at an interpersonal level. This basic informal form of social interaction may result in participation when there is an increase in interpersonal trust and adherence to social norms. Participation then arises as group involvement and formal social interaction. Social capital would result from both these formal and informal interactions in accordance with the dimensions at stake. The problem is to understand when social interaction results in involvement and when does it not. Hampton and Wellman (2003) claim that the diversity of the network and the social settings where the interactions occur are the key explanatory factors.

If social interaction is the propeller of social relations, their settings will maximize interaction the more diversified they are, though allowing the subject access to more information. More information prompts participation, but if this happens via similar relations then diversity will hinder it; even high involvement will not result in higher levels of social capital. We can see that social interaction is at the core of the notion of social capital but a clear distinction should be made between informal and formal forms of interaction. Informal social interaction is ubiquitous in the sense everyone engages in social actions while strict associations between formal interaction and involvement may lead us to consider participation as an effect of interaction. In order to overcome this we should look at the impact network resources have on participation. It is at this point that the media present themselves as a central element to this process (see Figure 2) since they constitute a social setting that allows for informal forms of social interaction that result in participation without formal involvement.

This network perspective is counterbalanced by a social cohesion perspective, where participation is no longer regarded as an individual resource but as a social resource that results from the public structural nature of the relationships since these integrate *the network*, *the norms*, and *the values and expectations* shared by members of the collective, and the sanctions – punishments and rewards – that ensure network stability and the respective norms. In this case, interaction diminished in favour of the role participation plays as both a source and an outcome of social capital.

We can summarize this part by saying that the different dimensions we have just discussed suggest that participation is a particular type of social resource that is formed when a relationship is based on trust in the context of a collective structure, while informal and formal interaction stands for the network that supports the social resources. Interaction and participation are structural for social capital but their formulation varies substantially according to the view – network or social oriented – that we take on social capital. Modes of social interaction are present at both the individual and collective levels of social capital as features of the network that in some cases includes a resource that is participation. Why then is participation often regarded much more important in the context of social capital theories than interaction (Hampton, Lee & Her, 2011)? Because it is assumed that social involvement exposes people to community norms and promotes interpersonal trust, factors which in turn make civic engagement more likely. The previous discussion shows that without the micro-level of informal social interaction this macro-level of participation is not feasible (McClurg, 2005).

In the following sections we will examine the intersections between social capital and the media and try to verify how they relate to each other, either promoting or diminishing these different forms of social interaction and participation that are at the core of social capital.

3. The media and social capital

The development of communication technology during the past century has altered how individuals connect with their personal networks and how they conduct different social interactions. By focusing on whether or not using communication technology weakens relationships by replacing in-person contact with less rich forms of contact, we assume that media technology is an external force which affects social relationships via changes in modes of interaction. If interaction stands for exchange we would have a double

movement: on one side we would be able to exchange more, and in this case the media would trigger interaction and ultimately propel social capital, but on the other side these new forms of informal interaction prompted by the media would diminish face-to-face interaction though reinforcing weak ties instead of the strong ones of the traditional communities. It is this central role the media apparently have in promoting interaction and participation, that changes in the different functional types of social capital (see Figure 1), that we will discuss in the following section.

Although the initial settings of the early theorists of social capital, including Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) were rather vague, they shared between themselves the principle of the social network as a set of features that enhanced the performance of individual and collective actors located in them. As we have mentioned, the concept has evolved in different directions, with some readings showing social capital as the total resources available to enable individuals to pursue their social interactions (Putnam, 2000), while others (Lin, 2001; Burt, 2005) further emphasize the role of social capital in determining the relative position of each subject in a network and the benefits that result from this position and their interactions (Hampton et al., 2011). Whichever perspective is adopted, they all agree that the maintenance and reproduction of social capital depends to a certain level on the social interactions of members of a network, though the media could be firstly regarded as a facilitator to those interactions, one that fosters the interactions and beliefs that feed the commendable cycle of connectedness and trust.

It is from this assumption that many of the work on social capital clearly follow a cultivation perspective that sees in the media a mechanism of social cohesion and social capital build-up (Beaudoin, 2009). In the cases when a negative role is attributed to the media, like for instance in the case of television with Putnam, once again we have an effects-oriented approach that isolates specific forms of media consumption as predictors of social capital decline. The topic of technology and media is clearly present in most work on social capital that follows the social cohesion perspective (Shah, 1998), particularly when focussing on forms of mass mediatized communication, but the recent rise in internet use and consumption as once again sparked great debate on the influence the media have upon community building and maintenance (Hampton & Wellman, 2003).

The central role of media in our society has been the subject of many studies and theories that attempt to verify the centrality of media in relation to the

whole social structure and to the relevance of their forms of mediation to the processes of communication and subjective interaction. Access to technology seems to become synonymous with unique processes of social engagement and transformation of our collective and individual identities (Katz & Rice, 2002). From the means of past mass communication we have moved to more individualized and diverse forms of communication. In this way the experience of mass media occurs in the context of an environment marked by great tensions between the fragmentation of uses and technologies promoted by the subjects and the market, and continued pressure for centralization by different political and economic actors (Couldry, 2009), while the internet puts forward new questions at both a local and a global level (Hampton & Wellman, 2003).

Technological evolution has obviously called for new conceptions of the relation between the media and social capital, and from negative perspectives depicted for instance in Putnam's (2000) attribution to big screen television of the responsibility for the decreased values of social capital in the North American society (Maras, 2006), we move on to approaches that see in the internet's potential for interaction new opportunities for civic engagement (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Other authors (Blanchard, 2004; Katz & Rice, 2002; Ling, 2008) seek new ways to use these communication media that possess properties that are more individualized and conducive to social interaction, such as the internet or mobile technologies, perceiving in them signals that force us to consider the consequences that using these means might have for the levels of social capital that are depicted by a community, particularly with regard to their impact on the community interactions. The apparent mixing of processes between entertainment and information, and the original forms of use and consumption of these media, highlight the need to consider involvement and productive participation in them, as potential aspects of social capital, and eventually moulded shapes of cultural participation that the collective or systemic formulations of the concept cannot handle (Maras, 2006).

The attention being given to social interaction and forms of participation does not diminish because of the movement from mass to individualized media, but the role assigned to the media seems to vary, along with its relation with interaction and participation. These differences result from the positions we respectively assigned to interaction and participation in the previous section. While interaction stands for a more individual feature, participation stands for a more collective condition. In this way, interaction would stand for the individual use of a media in order to establish a relation, while participation

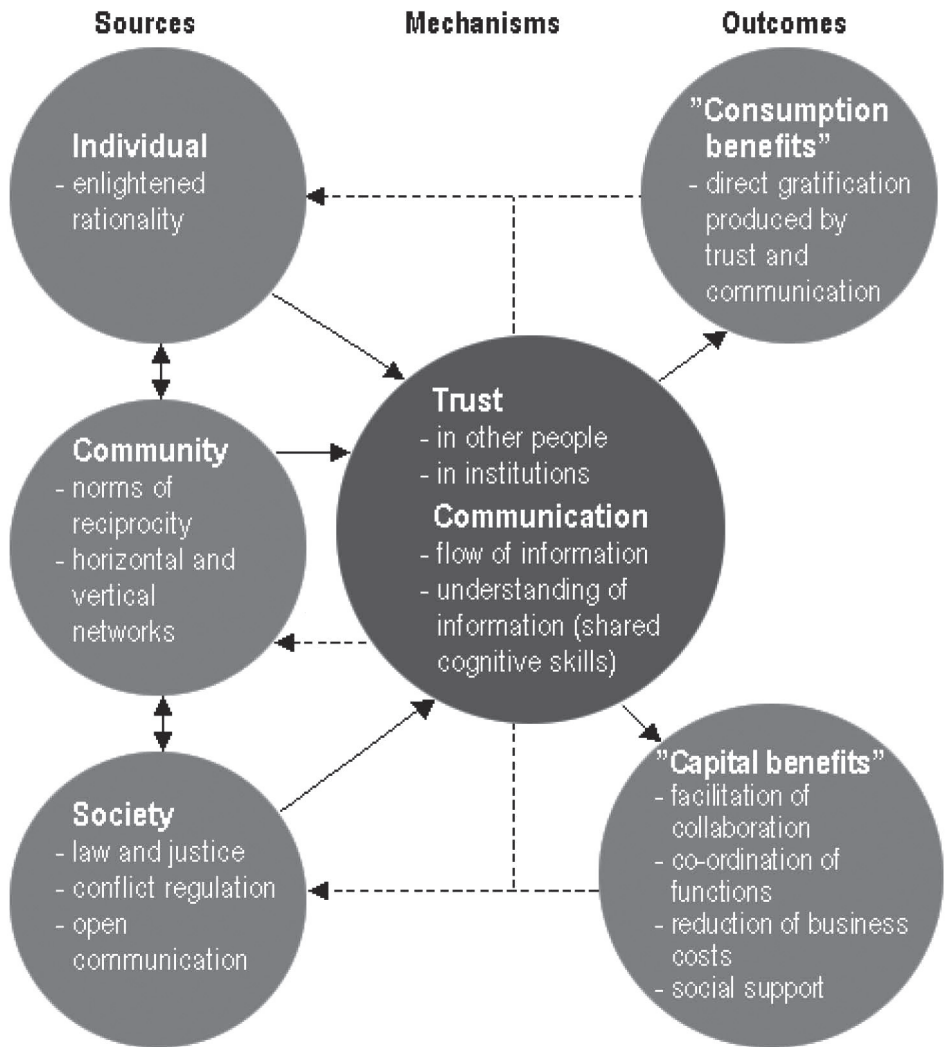
would stand for the frequency of access to the network. Interaction would involve personal ties while participation would involve relations with media technologies that are provided to the individual. Interaction could support both bridging and bonding types of social capital depending on the nature of the ties, while participation would mostly be associated with bonding types of social capital. As we have mentioned, by introducing new forms of interaction and settings for participation, the media put themselves at the centre of this process.

As we can see in Figure 2, the mechanisms of social capital creation and its outcomes have communication and trust at their centre. Trust stands for participation while communication stands for the interactions the media allow for. If we take a more network-oriented approach, we would have – as a basic source of social capital – interactions at an individual level. If we take a more social approach, we would consider trust as the core element prompting communities and society in its entirety to act and develop ties. On the other side of the diagram we have consumption benefits as a direct outcome of individual interactions, and capital benefits as a more collective outcome.

Figure 2 once again points to the very different nature of the individual and collective views on social capital, and positions the media's role in the process more at the level of interpersonal interactions. The media's participatory role is related to the outcomes of social capital, while interaction with others via mediatised processes is clearly a conditional source of social capital. We can verify that the sources of social capital point to the bridging, bonding and linking classificatory system, the central mechanisms are structural and cognitive forms of relationships, and the outcomes are either from a more individualistic nature, or from a more socialized nature. The central role we have previously assigned to social resources could lead us to consider that the media would constitute a factor external to this system that would affect the mechanisms of social capital. This is the perspective that focuses on the components of social capital and considers various factors that may have contributed to their change over time (Putnam, 2000; Rasanen & Kouvo, 2007). This perspective would emphasize trust and reciprocity as core elements and look at participation as an outcome of the process. If, on the contrary, we were to focus on resource availability, we would then have the media as an internal element of the system intrinsic to the relation between the individuals and the gratifications derived from consumption. These two distinctive views assign to the media completely different roles as either enablers or disablers of social capital. Each perspective

will also result in a different comprehension of the role interaction and participation has in the process.

Figure 2: Sources and outcomes of social capital



3.1 Enabling or disabling social capital: the role of interaction and participation

From Figure 2 we can derive that social capital refers to the creation of goods through the allocation of resources that can be used for immediate consumption or to support the generation of other assets that generate a flow of benefits to a group over time. This definition implies that the formal and informal rules that coordinate the production and maintenance of social capital in institutions should be in line with the norms of reciprocity and trust that govern social networks. The figure also distinguishes between the micro-level of analysis present in the more individualistic oriented formulations and the macro-level present in the communitarian view. The disabling views of the role that media have on social capital take a top down approach and state that forms of media use distract the individual from participating in the collective. This is the time displacement hypotheses (Veeger & Pelzer, 2009) that positions participation as a mechanism for the creation of social capital but also a structural outcome. The enabling view does not follow the pessimistic route and affirms that media consumption is positively related to participation and trust because it opens individuals to the world at large and roots them in a larger social network. Here, interaction with the media precedes participation, and individual interaction over the network becomes more relevant.

The central issue for the relation between social capital and media use is the verification whether media use contributes to a more socially disconnected society or, by opposition, reinforces integration and civic engagement. We further also have to distinguish between the non-communicative interactions that characterized mass media and the more engaging approaches of media like the internet.

The factors that seem to influence the enabling or disabling function of the media are: a) the density of the network; b) the level of resources available and c) the level of reciprocity and trust (Glanville & Bienestock, 2009; Beaudoin, 2009). The density of the network will vary with the amount of interactions, with online media supplementing existing off-line interactions (Hampton et al., 2011). The level of resources will be determined by access to technology, which includes not merely the availability of technology but also the skills of users and the existence of information that is relevant to the user (Rasanen & Kuovo, 2007). Reciprocity follows from access and points to the power structures that facilitate individual interactions in the network generating trust as an outcome. The emergence of the internet paradigm boosts all these three

domains and once again brings individualistic and collective paradigms into a clash with each other.

The existence of competing paradigms on the role that the internet and related technologies play against social capital, is directly associated with the emergence of studies that relate social capital to information technology and discuss how to measure it in this context (Lin, 2001; Blanchard, 2004). On the one hand, the internet enhances less face-to-face interactions, so it apparently lowers values of social capital. On the other hand, it seems to have a positive effect on levels of participation in public life (Blanchard, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007).

In their work on the social consequences of using the internet within the American society, Katz and Rice (2002) show the existence of a relationship between the activities conducted on the internet and those that occur outside, but, like other authors (Blanchard, 2004), they do not check the existence of a direct negative relationship between levels of social capital patented by a face-to-face community and the activities that its members conduct online.

The work of Katz and Rice (2002) is one of the most relevant publications on the relationship between the internet and social capital, and one of the first to integrate all three dimensions discussed above. In this work the authors come to the conclusion that social factors and the attributes of information and technology interact to create an environment that is classified as transparent in the relations between people, information and ideas, which is highly connected and a generator of externalities, where the interaction is voluntary, and where the content and the collective resources and benefits are dependent on participatory involvement and collective interests. High values of sociability were found in other studies on the internet (Rasanen & Kuovo, 2007; Hampton, 2011) but since interactions are both formal and informal and result in different levels of participation, one may argue that the collective view is prevalent and that structural collective elements mould participation, although they are dependent on the ties created via informal interactions (Boase, 2008).

The conclusions that Katz and Rice (2002) draw are in line with other investigations that indicate that the internet is not contributing to any form of decline in social capital, but they also did not find an opposite relationship, and the controversy lies in how these technologies complement, replace or expand face-to-face interaction (Valenzuela, et al., 2009). The existence of a virtuous circle that uses technology to enhance social interaction and its outcome of collective social capital, appears to be essentially a relational configuration and

to be dependent on pre-existing weak ties, even in cases dealing with activities that require high effort (Damasio & Poupa, 2008). In this case, the density and resources of the network would be prevalent and the individualistic interactions would be either the enabler or the disabler of social capital.

The mediated environment described in Figure 2 encompasses individual activities and media consumption with broader processes of modelling social participation. The role of media in our society integrates the communication mechanisms that foster interpersonal interaction and generate different ties, but also several participatory activities that are often depleted in the very process of mediation and that result from the nature of the media network itself and subjective participation in it.

4. Conclusions

In this article we set out to discuss the relation between social capital theory, the concepts of interaction and participation and the role we might assign to the media in the context of social capital theory. We started by discussing two opposite approaches to social capital – the individual and the collective one – and moved on to different classifications that try to overcome this antagonism, either focusing on the nature of the relationships at stake, or on the structure of the networks. At this stage we associated social interactions with behaviour patterns that occur at a more micro level, while participation was related with involvement at a more macro structural level.

We then turned to discuss medias' relation with social capital and postulated that there is a clear difference between actions that involve media use to promote interpersonal exchange and interaction with the technology *per se*. We have noted that in this last case we are faced with forms of participation that are dependent on network conditions. This points to the fact that the development from a mass mediated environment into a more individualized set of media would eventually prompt original forms of participation. In this context, we have postulated that interaction precedes participation and is of a more individual nature, particularly when considered in its informal nature. Formal forms of interaction are subsumed by involvement of a participatory nature, but they are only an outcome of social capital, not a source of it.

We have also noted that two general approaches of social capital emerge – the social cohesion approach and the network approach – and that both the modes of interaction and participation, and social capital's relation with the

media vary when we take one or the other position. We have postulated that media's role in social capital is highly influenced by forms of use, trust and the structure of the networks. When scrutinizing the sources and outcomes of social capital, we once again came back to an individualistic versus a collective view on the process but introduced a particular form of relation between social capital and the media. This relation results from individual appropriation of communication technologies to develop relations and ties, as one that forces us to put the communication process at the core of social capital generation and dissemination. Media technologies that permit individuals to use multiple communication technologies in conjunction with in-person interaction to maintain contact with their personal networks are a pre-condition of social capital generation and further participatory processes. Though, it is not the network structure (i.e. the internet) but the use of particular tools (i.e. mail) in order to generate ties, that better describes the dominant social interaction processes that occur in the context of social capital generation. Levels of participation will be dependent on the nature of those ties – weak or strong – and the direction – inwards or outwards – individuals channel them. Whether this affects social stability and connectedness, and generates different degrees of civic engagement is something unclear. The fissures between the different formulations of social capital that were discussed here, do not allow us to provide a definitive answer.

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Applying genre theory to citizen participation in public policy making: Theoretical perspectives on participatory genres¹

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Summary: This research is aimed at constructing a theoretical framework for the study of citizen participation in public policy making, based on genre theory. Drawing on various approaches to genre (rhetorical analysis, literary analysis, sociolinguistics, media studies, organisational communication, user interface design, and computer-mediated communication), this paper suggests a series of theoretical perspectives on participatory genres, a notion freely borrowed from Erickson (1997) and applied to the methods, activities or applications of citizen participation in public policy making (e.g. consultations, petitions, citizens panels, opinion polls). The proposed theoretical framework takes into account the contexts of participation (conceived as both situations and communities) as well as the interrelationships between participatory genres, and focuses on the repertoires of elements (Lacey, 2000) that characterize participatory genres in terms of 'why', 'how', 'what', 'whom', 'when' and 'where' (Orlikowski & Yates, 1998). It is argued that approaching citizen participation in public policy making through the lens of participatory genres is valuable to both researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: citizen participation, public participation, e-participation, public policy making, genre theory, participatory genre

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1. Introduction

This research is aimed at constructing a theoretical framework for the study of citizen participation in public policy making³ based on genre theory. (Electronic⁴) policy participation is an inter-disciplinary research area primarily covered by political sciences, political and social philosophy, and to a lesser extent, public administration, sociology, information science, communication science, and computer science (Sanford & Rose, 2007). Policy participation research mainly follows a normative and evaluative agenda: most researchers in the field focus on the strengths and weaknesses of participatory methods as implemented in specific participatory projects, identify the factors that shape the participation process and influence the outcomes, evaluate the results in light of a range of criteria, and eventually advise the practitioners on how to improve the inclusive, informative, interactive or decisional dimensions of (among others) citizen participation (Macintosh, 2007; Sanford & Rose, 2007). Although we do not strictly follow the dominant agenda of policy participation research, this article intends to contribute to the research on the successes and failures of citizen participation, on the reasons for which citizens do participate or not, or participate in a different way than the one expected and promoted by the organisers of participatory projects.

The starting point of the proposed approach is the idea that “genres of participation specify particular but recognisable social and semiotic conventions for generating, interpreting and engaging with embedded practices with and through media” (Livingstone & Lunt, forthcoming: 5). The practices in question here concern the elaboration of public policies. More precisely, we propose to consider as *participatory genres* (Erickson, 1997) what is usually referred to as participatory ‘methods’, ‘activities’ or ‘applications’ (e.g. consultations, petitions, citizens panels, civic juries, opinion polls, online debate forums) in the field of policy participation (e.g. Abelson et al., 2003; van Dijk, 2009). Although we borrow the notion of participatory genre from Erickson (1997), our theoretical propositions diverge from his point of view in several respects.

³ Meijer and Bekkers (2009, cited in van Dijk, 2009) distinguish between *political participation*, *policy participation* and *social participation*. Media participation (Carpentier, 2007) could be added to this list. This article focuses on policy participation, defined more precisely by van Dijk (2009: 2) as “taking part in public affairs by both governments and citizens trying to shape these affairs in a particular phase of institutional policy processes, from agenda setting through policy evaluation.”

⁴ This research started out from an interest in *electronic* participation (and more specifically *online* participation), but it soon became clear that focussing excessively on this area would lead to underestimating the hybrid nature of citizen participation, which often rests not only on digital technologies but also on conventional media as well as co-presence.

In the first place, participation in this article refers to public policy making rather than computer-media communication (even if the former sometimes relies on the latter). We also consider participation as both a technological and social construct. Though Erickson expresses this view as well, it seems to lose its meaning when he deals with genres, as their participatory dimension seems hardly dependent on social aspects. Finally, Erickson only vaguely defines participation by the blurring boundaries between production and reception, which, as explained later in this article, is not sufficient to capture the nuances of citizen participation in public policy making.

Although drawing on various perspectives on genre theory (rhetorical analysis, literary analysis, sociolinguistics, media studies, organisational communication, user interface design, and computer-mediated communication), the proposed theoretical framework is fundamentally informed by a pragmatic approach which allows thinking policy participation in terms of conventions replicated, negotiated, contested or transformed by a range of social agents (governments, administrations, organised groups, individuals, citizens) positioned in diverse contexts (Armengaud, 1985). The proposed framework intends to draw one's attention to the stakeholders' assumptions about the meaning and practice of participation, on the misunderstandings that can arise between them, on the tensions and conflicts between different cultures of participation, in other words, on participatory genres as 'organising structures' (Orlikowski & Yates, 1998) of the interactions that occur in the context of citizen participation in public policy making.

2. The concept of genre at the crossroads of disciplines

Our aim here is not to develop genre theories, even though we need to dwell on them. We will present genre theories in a brief and selective fashion, focusing on several essential concepts for the study of participatory genres in the elaboration of public policy. Bakhtin provides some underlying concepts in this context. In particular, he developed the concept of *discursive genre* in 1953. Bakhtin describes discursive genres in everyday life as "relatively stable types of [...] utterances" (Bakhtin, 1986: 60) within a given *sphere*. An utterance⁵ is characterised by three interdependent elements: a thematic content, a linguistic style and a *compositional structure* (e.g. utterance size). The term 'sphere' refers to the socio-historical context of utterances, i.e. essentially to the field of activity

⁵ Bakhtin's notion of utterance refers to a unit of communication – from dialogue response to novel – identified by a change in speaker.

where these utterances emanate from, and to the social groups defining the language rules. Bakhtin (1986: 78) argues that socialisation includes learning the genres within a group, “from the concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us.” We are largely unaware of the fact that words are fashioned by different genres but their role in communication is just as essential⁶. These allow speakers to anticipate the length and structure of a speech, how an utterance will conclude, etc. The genre also determines the impact of an utterance on the listener. Bakhtin (1986: 79) states that “if we had to originate them [discursive genres] during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible.”

In her seminal essay “Genre as social action”, Miller (1984) takes a view which is close to Bakhtin’s position, while also defending an absolutely pragmatic approach whereby genres facilitate social action: “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (Miller, 1984: 151). Thus, genres emerge “in the conventions of discourse that a society establishes as ways of ‘acting together’” (Miller, 1984: 163). Furthermore, a genre (and its impact) is indissolubly tied to a *recurring social situation*. Miller explains that the recurrence of a social situation is not an objective given, but rather a social and cultural construct. It is a construct, on the one hand, because it is created by typification (Miller refers to Schutz’s theory)⁷, and socio-cultural, on the other hand, because it is an intersubjective event, a definition accepted within a given community. The emphasis on social situations in pragmatic genre theory has led researchers to speak of a *situated* approach (e.g. Kjellberg, 2009).

Within the same rhetorical perspective, Bazerman (1994) puts forward the concept of *genre system* as a way of grasping a type of genre *assemblage* (Spinuzzi, 2004) which rests on the idea that several interdependent genres can structure a complex interaction by coordinating actions according to a given sequence. In such a system, each genre restricts the range of possible genres that are mobilised afterwards. For instance, Orlikowski and Yates (1998) discuss work meetings (the communication sequence begins with an invitation and the agenda of

⁶ Bakhtin (1986: 65) writes: “There is not a single new phenomenon (phonetic, lexical, or grammatical) that can enter the system of language without having traversed the long and complicated path of generic-stylistic testing and modification.” Bakhtin nevertheless emphasises that specific genres in certain spheres of activity allow more freedom for individual expression (e.g. literary genres, as opposed to technical or military genres).

⁷ “It is through the process of typification that we create recurrence, analogies, similarities. What recurs is not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but our construal of a type” (Miller, 1984: 157).

the meeting, and concludes with the minutes of the meeting) and scholarly articles (the interaction begins with a call for contributions and concludes with the publication). The concept of genre systems meets the pragmatic-linguistic notion of *interactive context*, which is defined, according to Armengaud, as “the chain of speech acts in an interdiscursive sequence [...]. One speech act ensues from another, but it is specified by a sequential constraint. The chain of speech acts is something regulated” (Armengaud, 1985: 61 – our translation).

This pragmatic approach to genres has been applied by Orlikowski and Yates (1998) to collaborative work in organisational context. Their concept of genre (a memo, a report, a work meeting, etc.) articulates the following propositions: a genre is a type of communicative action recognised by a community (an organisation in this context) as appropriate to accomplish a given action or attain a specific objective. Objectives in this sense are not individual motives but rather social constructs resulting from situations encountered and collective conventions; finally, a genre is recurring, be it habitual or routine, or strategically used to achieve a specific communicative action. Furthermore, a genre as an ‘organising structure’ in Orlikowski and Yates (1998) involves six communication dimensions: ‘why’ – the socially admissible objectives of the genre system and of the genres it is composed of; ‘what’ – the content of the genre systems and of the genres it is composed of; ‘how’ – the formal aspects of the genre system and of the genres it is composed of (e.g. the medium, the linguistic elements); ‘who/m’ – the participants (their identities, status, roles) involved in the communication; ‘when’ – the temporal delays (deadlines); and finally ‘where’ – the place where a communication event takes place.

In media studies, the text-centred approach as an extension of literary analysis contrasts with a reception or usage focused approach inspired by social sciences. In both cases the concept of genre plays a central role. In *Narrative and genre* (2000), Lacey develops a concept of genre which is a good example of the literary approach to media studies⁸. Starting from the notion of genre as “the idea of grouping similar texts together” (Lacey, 2000: 132), Lacey focuses on genre as “‘organizer’ of textual components” (Lacey, 2000: 134). Thus, each genre is defined by a *repertoire of elements* “which mainly consists of characters, setting, iconography, narrative and style of a text; these elements offer the basic schema of a genre” (Lacey, 2000: 133)⁹. Lacey explores each element

⁸ We must nevertheless emphasise that Lacey’s (2000) theory is more elaborate than our extremely short summary might reveal, notably because it takes into account the audience and the media institution.

⁹ However, Lacey highlights that a specific text only imperfectly embodies a genre, that it is always both similar and different to the generic model.

characterising the repertoires of specific genres (e.g. film noir, science fiction) according to a classifying approach ensuing from literary analysis. He observes that this perspective distinguishes itself from other approaches (inspired by the social sciences) insofar as it analyses texts and their genre independently of social agents (audiences, institutions) and interactions. One of these alternative approaches briefly outlined by Lacey, consists of seeing genres as cultural conventions, as shared knowledge acquired through day-to-day interaction (with others as well as with the media) and serving as resources in production, interpretation and evaluation processes. This approach to genres underlies media audience research as implemented, for instance, in Livingstone and Lunt's study of talk shows reception and participation (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994).

Starting in the 1990s, a trend of research on new media genres (Internet genres, digital genres) aims at studying "how technological changes trigger the formation of new genres, which in turn may affect the genre ecology of a larger domain such as the Internet" (Herring et al., 2004: 2). Some researchers attempted a general analysis of Internet genres (e.g. Crowston & Williams, 2000) while others restricted their studies to online conversational genres (e.g. Erickson 1997) or to blogs (Herring et al., 2004; Kjellberg, 2009), to report solely on salient topics. Minimally, these works define genre in terms of regularity in form and substance (e.g. Erickson, 1997), whereas some follow in the footsteps of Orlikowski and Yates (1998) with a maximalist definition of genres following the six dimensions described above (e.g. Kjellberg, 2009). The role of technology in genre formation is at the heart of this research field: Erickson (1997) argues that technology is an integral part of the situation and that as such it shapes the genre. Other authors consider technology as a (formal) constitutive element of the genre itself (Breure, 2011; Orlikowski & Yates, 1998). Overall, research on new media genres emphasises the hybrid nature of digital genres, as well as their variable and even profoundly unstable character (Livingstone & Lunt, forthcoming).

Also the concept of community is central to (situated) genre theory and is treated in a variety of ways. Hymes (1991 [1973]) defines as *linguistic community* a group of human beings sharing the same rules of grammar and rules of language use (which includes genres). In media studies, an *interpretive community*, or what Anderson calls a *strategic audience*, gathers readers, viewers or listeners with similar interpretive strategies (thus including the same generic categories): "The strategic audience is one bounded by a set of interpretive

strategies. I belong to an academic audience *if and when* I practice the interpretive strategies of that community. [...] It is the community that develops the strategies, provides the means for dissemination and instruction, and supervises particular performances of them” (Anderson, 1996: 87 – emphasis in original). In the field of speech analysis, Swales (1990) proposes the concept of *discursive community*, to which he attributes six dimensions, as summed up by Kjellberg (2009: 11–12): “discourse communities have a common public goal; have mechanisms for intercommunication; use their participatory mechanisms for feedback; own or possess genres; use a specific lexis; and constitute groups of discourse expertise.” Kjellberg’s (2009) research on the scientific blog genre extends the concept of discursive community, articulating it with the concept of *epistemic culture* put forward by Knorr Cetina (1999) who was referring to research laboratories. Kjellberg claims that the scientific blog genre is at the crossroads between scientific culture in general (with its values and practices, such as knowledge exchange, peer criticism, etc.) on the one hand, and that of particle physics researchers (who, for example, were precocious in adopting the Internet and use several acronyms incomprehensible to the lay person) on the other. Beyond the nuances that these different approaches bring to the notion of community, we find the same central idea whereby a genre exists only to the extent that it is recognised and adopted as such by a given community. Access to genres (recognising or performing a genre) requires knowledge and know how – in this regard, Swales (1990) talks of *repertoires of genres* – which are not innate but acquired by belonging to specific groups, participating in certain institutions, or accessing particular discourses (Bakhtin, 1986; Bazerman, 1994; Hymes, 1991).

3. Participatory genres in public policy making: a theoretical framework

Now that we have briefly outlined some important concepts in genre theory, we will engage in the main section of this article, the aim of which is to develop a theoretical framework to study genres of citizen participation in public policy making. In the first instance, we will suggest how to apply the concept of context which (as we saw above) is crucial to (situated) genre theory. Secondly, we will develop a theoretical framework of what we suggest to call the repertoire of elements of participatory genres in public policy making, as inspired by Lacey (2000) and Orlikowski and Yates (1998).

3.1 The contexts of public participation: situations and communities

As explained above, Bakhtin related the concept of genre to that of context. Subsequent genre theories, especially those referring to situated genres, highlight the role of context in the usage and interpretation of genres: a genre is effective in performing a given action with respect to a specific context, and the context provides individuals with useful knowledge and *savoir-faire* for recognising and mobilising genres (Bazerman, 1994; Swales, 1990). The distinction between genre and context is purely analytical. These two concepts are complementary viewpoints useful for thinking about the relationships between the (human and non-human) actors in any participatory process. The same participation component – for instance the technology or the audience – can be thought of as an element of either the genre or the context, as both concepts relate to different but interdependent roles played by this component in the participatory process. As an analytical tool, the notion of context – it would be more appropriate to use the plural – leads to a consideration of the environment in which the genre is enacted or interpreted.

On the one hand, the context influences the practicable or recognisable genres (notably their form and substance), not only on the scale of a specific participatory event, by constraining the range of available options (genres accessible to the participants, genres appropriate to the context), but also on the scale of the history of citizen participation, as participatory genres evolve over time due to contextual transformations. On the other hand, the use of a genre shapes the context, reinforces or transforms the framework for interactions and interpretations (Armengaud, 1985). From a strategic point of view and in certain conditions, it is thus possible to change the context by implementing alternatives genres. In line with the pragmatic typology of communication contexts proposed by Armengaud (1985), we explore two contextual levels of usage and interpretation of participatory genres in public policy making: the *situation context* and the *community context*.

Armengaud's (1985) *circumstantial, factual, existential, referential* context includes "speakers' identities, their physical environment, the place and time of the talks" (Armengaud, 1985: 60 – our translation). The notion of circumstantial context applied to citizen participation in public policy making – we also use the term *situation* – draws one's attention to the social, material, spatial and temporal aspects of the here and now of participation. The situation restricts the range of appropriate participatory genres and, at the same time,

serves as a resource to recognise, to infer the genres performed in the interaction (Bazerman, 1994).

A first dimension of the situation that is relevant to the study of participatory genres is the state of the power relations between the actors (Carpentier, 2007): the use of a participatory genre is indeed the outcome of a power struggle, precisely because a participatory genre (re)affirms the power relationships between participants. While the utopia of full participation conceives the latter as the royal path towards more horizontal relationships between rulers and ruled, existing research is ambivalent in its conclusions. Although it has been shown that policy participation encourages decision-making transparency (Sclove, 1995) and protest against institutionalised, hierarchical structures (Ion, 1997), some authors argue that there are drawbacks in sharing power (e.g. Arnstein, 1969), and much research emphasises that participatory initiatives tend to reproduce (or even reinforce) existing power relations, i.e. in favour of those in (institutionalised) power (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2007; Ridell, 2005; Vedel, 2006).

Another situational element which is often emphasised in the literature on citizen (electronic) participation in public policy making is the technology (infrastructures, applications, interfaces): it induces, facilitates or hinders certain participatory genres, influences their interpretation by the participants (Erickson, 1997). For example, Sæbø, Rose, and Flak (2008: 416) note that the introduction of technology in a participatory event can have three effects: “1. more or different people can participate; 2. the effect of the activity is magnified or focused at new actors; and/or 3. the form of the activity itself is altered”¹⁰.

The nature of the audience is another relevant situational element, which is largely dependent upon the communication tools being used. By ‘audience’ we mean the *ratified* and *non-ratified* participants, i.e. all those who have access to the (physical or virtual) participation space, and this even if, as Goffman (1981: 138) – who was writing about radio and television back then – would say, participation occurs *vicariously*, with *imagined recipients*. For example, Erickson (1997) points out that the audience of the text-based, online conversational salon *Cafe Utne* is anonymous (no face-to-face, no visual representation of the participants) and of an unknown size (as well as those who post messages, there is an unknowable mass of lurkers who are just reading the messages posted by others).

¹⁰ Regarding the last point, we can give the example of electronic voting via the Internet, a consequence of which is to reduce to a congruous portion the ritual dimension of voting (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2007).

Still other situational elements are relevant in the context of a theory of participatory genres in public policy making. We can also mention the participation territory (local, regional, European, global) and the participation place (for example, the fact that a debate forum is hosted on the website of a political group or institution, on the website of a mass media, or on a personal website, is far from irrelevant). The situational elements should be given more careful consideration in the research on citizen participation – they should be better distinguished in cases studies and better integrated in current theory.

When it comes to macro-contexts or what Armengaud (1985) calls the *presuppositional context*, we saw above that situated genre theories call upon the concept of community. The issue of communities is not alien to research on citizen participation in public policy making, as witnessed by the recurring recommendations to organisers of participatory projects to identify clearly the features of their ‘target audience’ (cultural codes, computer skills, etc.): “Assuming all citizens to be the target audience immediately causes difficulties because of the diverse nature of such large audience” (Macintosh, 2003: 43). And further: “any e-engagement system must be adapted to the culture and traditions of each OECD country” (Macintosh, 2003: 102). In the same order of ideas, Desages and Godard (2005) argue that the biggest hurdle encountered by the institutionalisation of the citizen participation movement is that it does not rest on a community of shared meaning. However, as suggested by a review of the relevant literature, where one can hardly find references to communities (Sæbø, Rose & Flak, 2008), further research is needed in order to grasp the roles of communities in citizen participation in public policy making. What are the preferred participatory genres of a given community? How do communities differ in their apprehension of participatory genres? And first of all, how does one draw the boundaries of a participatory community? These issues (among others) call on the notions of *political competence*, *political community*, and *political culture*. For example they lead to taking into account the conceptions of democracy (van Dijk, 2000) prevailing within a given community, and embedding each preferred participatory genres.

3.2 Participatory genres as repertoires of elements

We propose the idea whereby participatory genres in public policy making are *organising structures* (Orlikowski & Yates, 1998) characterised by more or less specific and socially accepted *repertoires of elements* (Lacey, 2000). The repertoire of a participatory genre may be analysed in terms of the six dimensions of genre

identified by Orlikowski and Yates (1998) – i.e. why, how, what, who/m, when and where – that we suggest to explore through various sub-dimensions. Figure 1 below synthesises the (sub-)dimensions considered in this article. The model is intended to serve as an analytical tool: organising a series of concepts and hypotheses on participatory genres, it aims at guiding the researcher towards potentially relevant (sub-)dimensions to distinguish “definite and relatively stable typical *forms of constructions of the whole*” (Bakhtin, 1986: 78 – emphasis in original) and observe the way they are performed, reproduced, negotiated, contested, or transformed. We believe that this framework can lend itself to a synchronic approach, focused on a specific participatory event in one point in time (for example with an aim to evaluation), or a diachronic approach, where it is a case of studying the evolution of participatory genres over time (the repertoire of a participatory genre is an interdependent system, thus any change affecting one of the elements can transform the whole genre).

We do not claim exhaustiveness: the empty cells in the figure as well as the dashed line suggest, on the contrary, that other relevant sub-dimensions could be brought to light, based on existing literature (which could not be covered extensively in the scope of this article) and new empirical studies with this theoretical framework as their starting point. Furthermore, these (sub-)dimensions are not necessarily all relevant to characterise participatory genres: a given genre only combines certain elements along certain (sub-)dimensions. Finally, following Lacey (2000), we can put forward the hypothesis whereby a given participatory event unavoidably gives an incomplete picture of the generic model. In other words, participatory genres can never be observed in their ‘raw’ state but only certain elements of their repertoire are salient and shape the unfolding of participation.

Figure 1: Analytical framework of the repertoire of elements of participatory genres

Why	How	What	Who/m	When	Where
Participatory purpose	Degree of participation	Sequence of genres	Ratified participants	Frequency	Location of activity
	Communication medium	Type of problem	Legitimated initiator	Duration	Location of access
	Communication flow	Type of focus	Discursive positioning		
	Communication style				

Why

The *communicative purpose* is a crucial notion in genre theory. Swales (1990: 58) defines a speech genre as “a class of communicative events, the member of which share some set of communicative purposes.” Kjellberg (2009: 9 – emphasis in original) highlights that Swales “defines genre as the constrained and conventional ways we use to fulfil a communicative purpose. Communicative purpose is thereby a way to describe the aim or aims of a genre, roughly answering the question of *why*.” The notion of communicative purpose refers to socially admissible objectives within a given community, not to personal or particular motives. Hymes (1986: 61) distinguishes in this respect the *purposes-outcomes* (or *ends as outcomes*), which are “conventionally expected or ascribed”, and the *purposes-goals* (or *ends in view*), which are “purely situational or personal.” For example the communicative purpose in the online conversation lounge *Cafe Utne* analysed by Erickson (1997) is to have a polite and friendly discussion with others. It should be noticed that genre theory is ambiguous as regards the theoretical relation between purpose and genre: some authors consider the purpose as a constituent of the situation (Kjellberg, 2009), others approach it as an element of the genre repertoire (Herring et al., 2004; Orlikowski & Yates, 1998; Ridell, 2005), others make it a separate component of the theoretical framework (Hymes, 1986), and still others remain evasive on this issue (Erickson, 1997).

References to the purposes of participation are not absent from the existing literature on citizen participation in public policy making¹¹. Van Dijk (2009) distinguishes the aims of governments and administrations, on the one hand, and those of the citizens, on the other. Among the purposes pursued by the former, van Dijk lists notably the reinforcement of their legitimacy, the improvement of the quality of policies and services, the connection with citizens, and the survey of public opinion. As for citizens, van Dijk mentions influencing the political agenda, obtaining information on a public issue, and controlling the governments or administrations, among other purposes (see also Macintosh, 2003). These aims are being referred to in the commonly accepted definitions of many participatory genres. To give a few instances: a petition aims at influencing the agenda of decision-makers by suggesting

¹¹ However, according to Sæbø, Rose and Flak (2008), the issue of participatory purposes receives little attention in the research on (and the practice of) citizen e-participation in public policy making. On the one hand, the philosophical, normative study of participatory purposes only informs empirical research on e-participation in a partial and erratic manner. On the other hand, practitioners in e-participation hardly ever clarify the purposes of their initiatives, which is detrimental to the success of the latter and hinders their evaluation (see also van Dijk, 2009).

problems or challenges to be addressed, a survey is used to measure the state of the public opinion at a given point in time, a consultation aims at giving the opportunity to the stakeholders to express their point of view on a subject matter. As a consequence, we suggest that the purpose of participation, or participatory purpose, should be approached as an element of the repertoire of participatory genres in public policy making. What are the purposes that communities attribute to participatory genres? Is a participatory genre generalist (i.e. appropriate for accomplishing several different purposes) or specialist (i.e. appropriate for accomplishing a very specific purpose)? To what extent does a participatory purpose create expectations about the other elements of the participatory repertoire?

The fact that Ridell (2005) and van Dijk (2009) distinguish the aims of the governments or administrations and those of citizens reminds us that, as a constituent of a genre, participatory aims are cultural conventions dependent upon communities – hence the importance of distinguishing (summarily at least) governments and administrations on the one hand, and (lay) citizens on the other. This means that misunderstandings or even conflicts can emerge in any participatory event, due to different visions of what the participatory purpose is or should be. Moreover, participatory purposes can be negotiated by the stakeholders who often have particular motives and interests. The situated approach to participatory genres makes it possible to take into account the way in which these particular motives and interests come into conflict or resonate with the socially or discursively ascribed purposes. Beyond the noble and socially agreed aims of participation – reinforcing democracy, giving voice to lay citizens, etc. – there are very often particular (and more or less dissimulated) intentions such as producing one's own advertisement in a period of electoral campaigning and the famous NIMBY syndrome. If the particular or personal motives, or interests become too salient, they can interfere with the participatory purposes and raise tension or conflict between (and among) the stakeholders.

How

Genre theory defines genres by formal regularities. For example, online conversation lounges are characterised by the usage of text, the structure of messages, and a linear conversational thread (Erickson, 1997). Orlikowski and Yates (1998) argue that the form of a genre includes material (i.e. the communication medium), structural and linguistic/symbolic aspects. Herring et al. (2004) include as structural elements of the blog genre the types of pages

(e.g. archives), of software (e.g. Blogger), of functionalities (e.g. a calendar) and of links (e.g. links to other blogs). In Kjellberg's (2009) study of scientific blogs, the form of the genre is defined in terms of verbal and visual elements.

In this article, we suggest that the formal or structural elements of participatory genres in public policy making can be characterised along (at least) four dimensions. Firstly, it is appropriate to come back here to the conceptual debates regarding participation to the extent that, as we suggest, they can clarify the procedural dimension of the 'how' of participatory genres. The debate on what participating means has led to several models of the degrees or levels of participation, often in the form of ladders.¹² In a now seminal paper, Arnstein (1969) draws a distinction between (i) *manipulation* and *therapy*, which refer both to non-participation, (ii) *information*, *consultation* and *placation*, which are forms of symbolic participation (tokenism), and (iii) *partnership*, *delegated power* and *citizen control*, which endow citizens with an effective decision-making power. Although critical of the ladder metaphor, Carpentier (2007) distinguishes between *access*, *interaction* and *participation*, where the latter associates the public with power relations in decision-making processes, in the context of media participation. Van Dijk (2009) proposes a participation ladder in public policy making that includes five gears: *information*, *consultation*, *advice*, *co-production* and *co-decision* (see OECD, 2001, as well). We wish to put forward the idea that the degrees or levels of participation are related to the 'how' dimension of the repertoires of participatory genres.

Thus beyond the nuances introduced by each model, we find some recurring types of degrees of participation, such as to inform (or to be informed), to advise (or to express a point of view), to co-produce and to co-decide. In this respect, there is a wealth of examples of participation failure in the literature (e.g. Damay & Delmotte, 2009; Davies & Gangadharan, 2009; OECD, 2001) that we suggest to reinterpret as the result of a disagreement on the definition of the degree of participation. To take a recurring example in the literature, citizens who are enthusiastic about the thought of being 'associated' with an important political decision 'participate' in a consultation at the end of which they discover that the decision was taken without them, the decision seeming far removed from the worries they had expressed, and the decision-makers being reticent about how citizens' inputs were taken into account. There are numerous possible reasons for this disagreement about the expected degree of

¹² Participatory intensity, as well as the difficulty involved in implementing participation, increases as we climb the ladder.

participation, including an insufficiently explicit participation procedure, a lack of citizen knowledge about institutionalised participatory genres, or a profound political frustration not to be able to effectively contribute to decision-making as an 'active' citizen.

A second dimension of the 'how' of participatory repertoires concerns the communication medium. Participatory genres can indeed ascribe appropriate communication tools. New communication possibilities opened up by information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been added to face-to-face encounters and traditional communication tools such as paper and postal mail. Can we consider ICTs an integral part of the repertoires of participatory genres? The fact that there is a field of research (and practice) centred on e-participation can lead to think that the computerisation¹³ of citizen participation is far from marginal, or even that citizen participation *has* to be electronic nowadays. In a way, ICTs have bugged into citizen participation like in any other sphere of human activity, at least discretely in the back office of participatory events, or more perceptibly for citizens each time they are called to use ICTs themselves. On the other hand, the existing literature suggests a great diversity of practices requiring the relationship between participatory genres and communication tools to be explored in depth. Certain participatory genres, such as the online debate forum, are obviously characterised by a communication medium which is more or less clearly defined. But what about other participatory genres whose contours are less defined? In which context does a given participatory genre involves the use of a certain communication medium? For example, the territory of participation influences the choice of the communication medium: on a European scale, involving a large public across nation states is hardly conceivable without the internet (Dai, 2003), which means that in this case online media are largely, although not exclusively, constitutive of the genre, whereas on a local scale, co-presence remains the primary mode of participation, even if the administration anticipates using online communication tools (such as websites, email or electronic forums).

There are (at least) two more dimensions of the 'how' elements of participatory genres suggested by research on citizen participation. On the one hand, participatory genres can be formally characterised by a more or less specific style of communication. For example, the work of Marcoccia (2003) shows that online political debate forums can be characterised by several recurring features

¹³ Computerisation does not necessarily has as corollary remote access, as witnessed, for example, by electronic voting, which requires that citizens physically attend electoral offices. We will come back later to the issue of remote access.

(e.g. presentation of the self influenced by the absence of specific addressees, blurring boundaries between speaking and writing, as well as between interpersonal and mass communication) that together constitute what we call a communication style. This might be the same for other participatory genres. On the other hand, participatory genres can structure the communication flow between stakeholders according to three models: either participation takes a transmissive form, where a message is transmitted in a unilateral way to citizens, or it is reactive, according to the 'return of information' model from citizens to decision-makers¹⁴, or otherwise it takes an interactive form, where a dialogue between stakeholders is sustained. In this respect, participatory projects that invoke the notion of deliberative democracy engender substantial expectations in terms of interaction (Damay & Delmotte, 2009) but often the situational constraints restrict their implementation, as in the case of the Estonian debate forum TOM, the technical features of which reduce communication to the reactive genre: "the website is not fostering discussion – although users can post comments on the original ideas, and give their support to these ideas by voting on them, the ideas remain fairly formatted and the system features do not allow the author of the ideas to react to the comments, and engage in a discussion about the proposed changes to their ideas. The author does have the time and opportunity to modify the proposal, but the lack of two-way communication nevertheless reduces the deliberative potential of TOM [...]" (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2007: 179).

What

The idea that a genre involves regularities in substance is central to genre theory. On a theoretical level, substance usually refers to thematic content (Bakhtin, 1986; Erickson, 1997; Kjellberg, 2009) but on an empirical level, its recurrence in the objects being studied is not always manifest or even true. Kjellberg (2009: 13) observes for instance that the great thematic diversity in scientific blogs (thoughts or personal events, research notes, etc.) makes it difficult for the researcher to define the genre 'scientific blog': "The variety of content makes it harder to talk about the blog as a single genre, but perhaps it is precisely this that is a defining trait of the research blog genre." As for participatory genres in public policy making, we propose an examination of their substance in terms of sequence of genres, type of problem and type of focus.

¹⁴ The OECD (2001) uses the word *consultation* in this case.

Up to now, we assumed that each participatory method, activity or application could be thought of as *one* (more or less specific) genre. However, in light of the above-mentioned concept of genre system (Bazerman, 1994), it seems judicious to approach these also in terms of sequences of interconnected genres. In other words, the content of a participatory genre can be considered as the sequence of genres that constitute it as a system. The consultation example is undoubtedly the most telling, but the rationale developed here can be applied to other (systems of) participatory genres. The OECD (2001: 23) defines consultation as “a two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to government. [...] Governments define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process, while citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions.” As suggested by this definition, a consultation constitutes a system of genres because it consists in a relatively stable and constraining particular sequence of genres: i. announcing the consultation and the theme tackled, ii. informing the stakeholders (about the parties involved, the salient issues, the socio-historical context, the technological aspects, etc.), and iii. submitting a questionnaire soliciting the opinions of the participants. The feedback from decision-makers to citizens could be considered as a fourth genre of the consultation system. Indeed, existing research insists on the importance of informing citizens about the results of the consultation and the use by decision-makers of their inputs – the lack of feedback from decision-makers to citizens might otherwise increase the ‘consultation fatigue’ similar to voters’ apathy which is currently worrying many governments (Macintosh, 2003; OECD, 2001).

At first it seems irrelevant wanting to associate participatory genres to thematic contents. However, research on citizen participation in public policy making shows that participatory genres could have preferred types of problems that can be addressed: ethical problems vs technical problems; general and abstract problems vs specific and concrete problems (Abelson et al., 2003). Similarly, van Dijk points out that online social networks are primarily aimed at leisure and sustaining social relationships, and that generally “they do not engage with the sphere of official public policy making” (van Dijk, 2009: 17). What kind of issues are supposed to be addressed in the framework of a given participatory genre? Does the type of problem on the table generate other generic expectations? Does a given participatory event fulfil the expectations of the genre in terms of problems discussed? For instance, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2007: 178) expresses some concern about the content of a (supposedly)

debate forum launched by the Estonian state whereby citizens can make suggestions about legislative amendments: “One of the risks of participatory and deliberative initiatives that aim to support a representative democracy is that they exclude more controversial issues from the debates.”

A relevant variation of the ‘what’ of participatory genres in public policy making might be called the type of focus: participate *to* what? The literature distinguishes between several phases in the public policy making cycle, and each of them could be the focus of a participatory event. For example, Aigrain et al. (2007) identify six stages: the state of affairs and the identification of the problems, the identification of what is at stake and the evaluation of priorities, the identification of available options for public action, the legislative formulation and deliberation, the policy appropriation and implementation, and policy evaluation. Van Dijk’s (2009) more conventional analysis distinguishes five phases (the first one groups the two first stages identified by Aigrain et al., 2007): agenda setting, policy preparation, decision making, policy execution and policy evaluation (see also OECD, 2001). According to van Dijk (2009), citizen (e-)participation essentially focuses on agenda setting, policy preparation, and policy evaluation (van Dijk argues that participation in decision making and policy execution is hardly compatible with representative democracy). Beyond this general observation, other questions are worthy of exploration: What are the preferred foci of participatory genres?¹⁵ Does the (declared, recognised, inferred, ...) focus of participation bring about other generic expectations? Does the fact of attributing a genre to a participatory event help in clarifying the type of focus?

Who/m

By extension to Orlikowski and Yates (1998), we propose the hypothesis whereby a participatory genre identifies, in a more or less clear and stable way, what Goffman (1981) calls the *ratified participants*, i.e. those who, unlike non-ratified participants, also known as *third participants*, are recognised by the stakeholders as having full right to participate in the current interaction¹⁶. Drawing on Abelson et al. (2003), we suggest that participatory genres in

¹⁵ Macintosh (2003) emphasises that a consultation is meaningful only if a whole range of possibilities is still open, which is specifically the case upstream from the process, at the moment of defining an action programme or analysing opportunities, risks, and solutions. Since then, if a participation event occurs late in the stage of policy implementation, its ‘truly’ participative nature can be put into question by the citizens who, having merely to decide on practical details, regret not being able to call into question general orientations.

¹⁶ Damay and Delmotte (2009) use the concept of *legitimate participant*.

public policy making can define preferred types of participants, which can be characterised in several ways: ‘random’ citizens (e.g. public panels) vs ‘representative’ citizens (e.g. public juries); anonymous citizens vs identified citizens; the broad public (e.g. public juries, surveys) vs a specific social group (e.g. focus groups, citizen forums); an expert public vs a lay public¹⁷; participants ‘by rights’ (e.g. referendum) vs ‘ad hoc’ participants; individual parties vs collective parties (i.e. organised groups).

Orlikowski and Yates (1998) inspire a second hypothesis about the ‘who’ dimension of participatory genres: the latter identify the legitimate initiators of the participatory process. Van Dijk (2009) notes that Web 2.0 technologies have facilitated the (re)deployment of citizen initiatives in e-participation, whereas until recently, participatory projects emanated almost exclusively from governments and administrations. In her analysis of a local electronic forum, Ridell (2005: 39-40) emphasises the same idea when referring to what she calls the *civic queries* genre: “In contrast to opinion polling and other Gallup-like surveys that are reported and also conducted by mainstream media and that are often seen on municipal web sites, the questions in *Civic queries* are defined, formulated and asked by grassroots actors.” If certain participatory genres rest to a large extent on the initiatives of government or administrations (e.g. consultation, electronic voting), others give more space to citizen initiatives (e.g. electronic petitions¹⁸, electronic communities), and still others may emanate from governments/administrations as well as from citizens (e.g. electronic forums, electronic campaigns).

Finally, according to a third hypothesis inspired by Goffman (1981), participatory genres, through the modes of address underlying discourses (particularly those of the organising authority), position the participant in policy making in a certain way – as client, user, citizen, activist, public or other – not only in relation to the organising authority, but also in relation to other participants (see also Livingstone & Lunt, forthcoming). Ridell (2005: 36), in her analysis of *civic genres* in a local electronic forum, asks a question that we wish to consider as well: “we can ask how interaction is conditioned, framed

¹⁷ As demonstrated about talk shows on television, participatory genres change the boundaries and hierarchies between experts and lay persons (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). The growing significance attributed by decision-makers to survey results also reflects the rise to power of the anonymous, ‘ordinary’ individual.

¹⁸ It is interesting to mention the case of the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) insofar as this participation instrument, set up by the European Commission, introduces some confusion (and suspicion) in the petition genre. Indeed, a petition is traditionally seen as a citizen initiative, which is thus not led by any institution. The ECI, however, is strictly supervised by the European Commission. As in this case petitions are invited and regulated by an official institution, it is no surprise that the ECI is confusingly perceived by the public as a ‘legislative initiative’.

and organized in the production and discursive practices of the [...] genre and in what kind of social actor roles does the genre-related mediation posit people: are they approached and addressed as an audience observing social reality from the sidelines, or as public agent, potentially interested in taking an active part in shaping that reality.” In this respect, existing research shows that despite the democratic potential of ICTs, citizen participation in public policy making still seems to be dominated by a top-down approach aimed at facilitating access to administrative information or the expression of public opinion, confining the ‘participant’ to the role of *client* (of a government or an administration) or *user* (of a policy), rather than approaching the citizen as a *partner* (OECD, 2001) or *co-producer* (Macintosh, 2003).

When and where

Genre theory suggests (at least) two theoretical hypotheses for thinking about the temporal dimension of participatory genres in public policy making: these could be characterised (1) by either an ad hoc or permanent nature (a conference is a one-off, a public panel is consulted several times a year), and (2) by a habitual duration (for example, filling a questionnaire takes a few minutes, it takes a few hours to participate in a focus group, it could take several weeks or months to take part in a debate forum) (OECD, 2001).

Furthermore, a genre structures the communication space, prescribes the locations (off or online) appropriate for a given interaction. For instance, Orlikowski and Yates (1998) discuss the case of email addresses where to send conference paper proposals to, a snippet of information that scholars expect to see in any call for papers. We propose to make the location of the activity one of the elements of the repertoires of participatory genres in public policy making. At the local level, for example, participation is expected to take place at the city council or in some official location of local politics (when it concerns face-to-face participation), or on the website of the local council or other competent administration (when it concerns remote participation). At the European level, one can say that the EUROPA website is constitutive of many European participatory genres.

Given the increasing possibilities for remote access to participatory events, it seems appropriate to take into account the ‘from where’ of participation, in other words, to dissociate the location of the activity from the place where the activity is accessed. If the two locations are fused in face-to-face participatory genres, on the contrary, they are materially dissociated (but still interdependent)

in their remote implementation, as access to the (online) activity location takes place from another location, typically from home or from work, but also more and more from indefinite public locations, because of the diffusion of mobile communication technologies.

4. Conclusion

Genre theory provides a rich conceptual framework for research on citizen participation in public policy making, not only because it helps in exploring further important questions raised, but also because it raises new questions. Looking at participatory methods, activities or applications as typified repertoires of more or less specific, stable and socially shared elements, provides a theoretical framework of citizen participation in public policy making, which can serve the purpose of definition and typification. It can also be used (in a translated form) as an analytical framework for studies interested in the transformation of citizen participation. Moreover, drawing on the idea that participatory genres are 'cultural interfaces' (Ridell, 2005) through which we give meaning to participation, undertake actions or engage in communication, it becomes possible to study the social conventions and organisational semiotics of participation (their explicit or implicit, univocal or equivocal, stable or unstable, consensual or conflictual nature), the role of diverse contexts in using and interpreting participatory genres, and the communicative actions of the stakeholders who struggle to prescribe a genre, to negotiate participation within a genre, to contest a genre and promote an alternative one, in other words, to shape citizenship and democracy. The participatory genre approach also emphasises the fact that the democratic potential of ICTs is not only a technological or bureaucratic issue, as many elements come into play in participatory repertoires, as well as diverse contexts within which participation takes shape and meaning (e.g. institutionalised power relations, dominant visions of democracy, political and communicative skills of the public, etc.). The theoretical framework proposed here is still in its embryonic stage, but the objective of our article has been to prepare the ground for further theoretical and empirical research on participatory genres in public policy making.

Practitioners of citizen participation in public policy making can draw several lessons from the participatory genre approach, the first of which being that citizens/participants are members of diverse communities within which certain knowledge and know-how on participation, citizenship and democracy are available. Furthermore, the approach suggested here invites the organisers

of participatory projects to negotiate and clarify with the stakeholders the elements of the genres they wish to implement. The literature is indeed unanimous on the fact that organisers usually come against the *procedural*, *political* and *conceptual* vagueness of citizen participation (Blondiaux, 2004). The notion of participatory genre draws the practitioners' attention on the fact that their identities, discourses and behaviours (among other factors) shape – be it intentional or not – the participatory framework, organise the interactions, generate expectations among the citizens in the light of which the participation process and outcome will be evaluated. Approaching their field in terms of participatory genres can help the practitioners in adapting better the participatory projects to the participatory contexts, in discussing and clarifying their plans with the stakeholders, in analysing and evaluating the successes and outcomes of their initiatives, in other words, in playing an active role in the improvement of citizen participation.

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Parameters of online participation: Conceptualising civic contingencies

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Summary: The new online media obviously offer very impressive opportunities for participation. Yet, we need to specify more carefully what we mean by participation, and try to illuminate its key elements. Thus, after first presenting some overarching, scene-setting perspectives on participation and digital media, this presentation offers five basic parameters of participation, a conceptual framework intended to be empirically useful. The five are: trajectories, modalities, motivations, sociality and visibility. Each parameter has some further subcategories; for example, I suggest three basic trajectories: consumption, civil society and politics. These obviously are entangled with each other in the real world, yet the distinctions allow us to focus on political participation as a specific form.

To what extent and how participation is realised depends on many factors. Here I highlight the notion of contingency, underscoring the point that a complex interplay of conditions and circumstances both make possible and delimit political participation. I look at three sets of contingencies: institutional features of online media (illustrated with a brief look at Google), attributes of the mainstream online environments that have a clear hegemonic character, and established social patterns of use that can also impact on this environment. For the latter, I highlight what I call the solo sphere as an emerging feature of online political participation – the tendency towards isolated, individualised communication.

I then run these three types of contingencies across the five parameters to arrive at a preliminary perspective on how the online environment both facilitates and deflects political participation of the non-mainstream kind.

Keywords: participation, democracy, internet, citizens, civic engagement

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1. Introduction

Deriving from several different fields and discourses in the social sciences, the notion of participation remains somewhat fluid, varying with the contexts of its use. In media and communication studies, especially where social and political engagement is on the research agenda, lack of clarity or fixity is notable; moreover, just how it is used can have ideological assumptions and implications, as Nico Carpentier discusses in his article in this issue, as well as in his recent book (Carpentier, 2011). In this article I will not attempt to offer a once-and-for-all definition, nor offer an inventory of possible usages, though I will be hovering in the same theoretical space as Nico Carpentier, namely those forms of democratic theory that underscore the importance of maximising or at least optimising civic participation. My aim here is to explore, against the background of the new web environment and its affordances, what I take to be central aspects of participation and to probe the conditions that both make possible and delimit such features of participation. This emphasis on the contingency of social phenomena admonishes us to ask why things are the way they are, and perhaps how they might otherwise be; it encourages critical (self-) reflection on the social world, on practices, and not least on power relations.

In the social sciences and in the study of history, it is traditionally axiomatic that phenomena should be understood within their specific circumstances; one should contextualise as far as possible all socio-historical situations, events, and developments. Over the last few decades, the concept of contingency has become quite prominent in this regard, due at least in part to the writings of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (see, for example, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, 2011). A useful secondary source is found in Smith, 1998. Its relationship to critical media research is explored in for example, Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007; Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Dahlberg and Phelan, 2011). In developing their post-structuralist/post-Marxist theoretical framework, called Discourse Theory (not to be confused with discourse analysis), Laclau and Mouffe have given contingency a prominent position, and in a sense radicalised it. Among their premises is the idea that all of our practices as well as our knowledge are predicated on particular circumstances, and that there is no ultimate foundation or ground to the social world. Perceived stabilities or permanence will always prove to be temporary. While I will not be working strictly within their framework, I find useful this emphasis on the contingency of social phenomena, particularly as we consider approaches to participation and its circumstances.

I have sketched the general contours of one such orientation elsewhere (Dahlgren, 2009), where I use the framework of civic cultures to examine how various forms of media may function in a positive or negative manner in regard to citizens' political involvement in democracy. In the present contribution I strive to become more specific by unpacking what I see to be key elements of online-based participation itself – its fundamental parameters – and by looking at how net-related contingencies may impact on them. The notion of participation is central to our understanding of both media audiences and civic agency/practices today. As media and societal circumstances evolve, so must we try to update our understanding of participation.

In an initial scene-setting section I offer some general reflections on democracy, the evolving media landscape, and participation. From there I establish five key parameters of participation; these are analytic constructs but are also intended to provide clues for empirical studies. Thereafter I sketch how some major contingencies might impact on these parameters of participation. In the final section I pull together the various strands of the discussion.

2. Democracy, media, participation

2.1 Dilemmas of democracy, problems of participation

Democracy is not simply a universal and static phenomenon; its specific character varies under different and evolving circumstances. Its vitality, indeed its functionality, and even its very survival, cannot be taken for granted. It is an historical project, criss-crossed by contestations between those forces that would in various ways constrict it and those who seek to broaden and deepen it, not least by enhancing participation. Elitist ideals of democracy are still very much with us, even as they are continuously being challenged by visions of more inclusive and effective citizenship. Even within Europe and the EU there are significant differences in regard to political traditions, notions of citizenship, assumptions about openness and access, conceptions of what constitutes civil society, and so on.

A major problem for participation (and democracy generally) is the tendency for accountable political power to diminish from the formal political system under the onslaught of neoliberal versions of societal development. When market dynamics come to be seen as the most democratic force in society, the opportunities for meaningful civic participation become eroded. And,

from a rather different angle, it is also clear that governments at all levels have decreasing margins of manoeuvrability in an increasingly complex globalised world. Practical issues of governance can thus also set limits to what can be accomplished within democratic systems – and thus lead to efforts to restrain participation.

Existing ‘democracy’ does not automatically guarantee extensive civic participation, either in parliamentary or extra-parliamentary contexts. Democracies rest their reputations on, among other things, the right of all citizens to participate in political life, and they obviously encourage more – and more independent – civic participation than authoritarian regimes. Yet even within democratic systems with universal suffrage we see mechanisms at work that can delimit participation. Democratic systems offer varying patterns or structures of opportunity for participation: access to and impact within public spheres can vary a good deal. There are a number of factors that impact on how participation actually functions at any particular point in time for any particular group. The extent to which civic agency is present of course depends on the initiatives that citizens themselves take, but such agency is always conditioned by circumstances. Thus, any perceived lack of participation cannot be seen as simply a question of civic apathy, but must be understood in the context of late modern democracy more generally. Democracy is being transformed as its social, cultural, and political foundations evolve, and the character of participation is a part of these large developments.

2.2 Systemic constraints and opportunities

Constraints need not be formal or official, but can function latently, and it is often difficult to confront such mechanisms via traditional politics precisely because they are not formalised. They are an expression of entrenched power relations that are not accountable and often not visible within the context of ‘normal’ politics. Indeed, the lack of participatory opportunities in many political settings lies at the heart of the dilemmas of contemporary democracy. One of the consequences of systematic, long-term exclusion is a sense of powerlessness and cynicism. The rhetoric about citizens ‘abandoning’ the political system can be turned on its head: in many cases it is a question of the political system abandoning its citizens, marginalising their voices in society’s public discussions, while at the same directly or indirectly blaming them for the moribund character of democracy.

While the contingencies for participation within democratic societies need not be unchangeable or unchallengeable, they tend to have a certain degree of stability, becoming entrenched and contributing to the overall character of the political system. Thus, enhancing participation often becomes de facto a political struggle against existing power arrangements. Moreover, given that these constraints and opportunities are often group-specific, they tend to shape the political experiences and horizons of specific categories of citizens. Yet, to underscore systemic obstacles to participation does not mean that citizens always simply act in accordance with the prevailing structures; these can be challenged, altered, or significantly expanded. Power relations and the prevailing hegemonies that shore them up are always to some degree at risk; they can never be fully taken for granted.

2.3 Media participation

The web provides extensive civic potential; there is a wide array of participatory forms available – what I call civic practices (Dahlgren, 2009). At the same time, it is important to understand that these media, and citizens' use of them, while playing an ever more important role in shaping civic cultures, cannot simply cancel or completely compensate for systemic mechanisms that obstruct participation. Further, we should not forget that with the contemporary media landscape there is an enormous competition for attention that politics and the public sphere face within: in late modern society, the opportunities for participating in consumption and entertainment are overwhelmingly more numerous, more accessible, and more enticing for most people. This pattern has been augmented especially for younger people via the internet.

Power relations within the media, between various media, between media and non-media institutions, and between social groups who make use of the media, have been explored since the dawn of this field of study (for a recent treatment, see Corner, 2011). Constellations of power are inevitably played out on the net, in an endless series of large and small, ever-shifting patterns. Online media are a part of the larger social and cultural world, intertwined with the daily lives of individuals as well as with the functioning of groups, organisations, and institutions. These media offer possibilities that are harnessed and mobilised in varying ways across the societal landscape, and thus impact on the strategies and tactics of everyday life and the frames of reference that provide them with meaning. Especially for young people in Europe and elsewhere, the web is not just something they 'visit' on occasion in order to seek something

special, it is increasingly a central terrain of their daily lives. Even if politics is a minor online activity when compared with other uses, online media have become highly significant for participation.

Discussions on this theme often lapse into various discourses about internet 'users', which can easily interject – often inadvertently – a perspective that is psychological-reductionist in character. This can be related in part to the impact of informatics and Human Computer Interaction on audience studies. These fields tend to approach digital media from the horizons of individual actors rather than social patterns. Moreover, the idea of individual users fits neatly with the commercial logic that markets the hard- and software. Use thus becomes framed as merely a question of individual free choice, ignoring precisely the social and cultural conditions at work for various groups. Thus, while a user perspective can certainly be helpful, it is important that it is framed by larger socio-cultural horizons. The media landscape today offers more and more powerful, less expensive, and easier to use tools; access and collaboration are increasing, and we are evolving from mostly media consumers to many media producers. From the standpoint of participation, these are indeed impressive and historically unprecedented participatory possibilities. Yet the technology and architecture of the internet in itself take on relevance here, in both facilitating and obstructing various kinds of communicative actions; these too become part of the contingencies of participation.

3. Five key parameters of participation

When we think about the notion of participation, some idea of a doing comes to mind, a sense of agency. Much of such agency is manifested as some form or other of communication. We might dichotomise, and think in terms of participation vs. non-participation, or perhaps try to gauge the intensity of participation. Such ideas are on the right track and certainly be useful. Here, however, I would like to further probe the concept and elucidate five basic parameters of participation that might help us think about it in a more detailed way. Each parameter seeks to specify a definitive attribute about online mediated political participation, but also comprises many possible elements. Thus, they can hopefully also offer some ports of entry for empirical work. I take up in turn five central parameters of participation: trajectories, modalities, motivations, sociality, and visibility.

3.1 Trajectories: where it's going

The issue of whether people are participating mainly 'in the media' or in society more broadly 'via the media' can probably never be conceptually or empirically fully established, given the media's entwinement with social worlds beyond themselves. The media mediate, and via them we are linked to social realities beyond our immediate here and/or now. The extent to which people valorise the media experience itself in relation to that which it connects them will remain a somewhat open question, but certainly elucidating the motivations and intentions of participants will usually give some indication of what they experience as primary. In terms of specifying the direction or trajectory of engagement, for our purposes here, with a focus on democratic participation, it will suffice to use three basic trajectories of participation, which are of course often mutually entangled: consumption, civil society, and politics.

In this scheme 'consumption' is a vast, almost catch-all trajectory that comprises societal participation via commercial logics. This trajectory is intended to point to participation through market relations that offer us that which we need to survive and that which we might desire: the promise of satisfaction and pleasure. It is most commonly exemplified by the many forms of shopping and the commercial variants of popular culture and entertainment. Together this no doubt accounts for a majority of online participation. While my concern in this article lies more with civil society and politics, it should be understood that consumption is always embedded in an array of macro- and micro-power relations, and that there are always some democratic horizons present in this trajectory, even if they often remain at a distance. Thus, poverty, for example, can at some point be seen as an exclusionary mechanism that raises democratic issues in relation to consumption. Also, politically motivated consumption explicitly links politics and consumer behavior (see, for example, Micheletti, et al., 2003; Barnett et al., 2010) even if it remains very much a minority phenomenon.

As a major element of this trajectory, popular culture, for its part, cannot simply be dismissed as 'mere consumption': it increasingly overlaps with public spheres (see, e.g., Street, 1997; van Zoonen, 2006; Riegert, 2007). It usually has an accessible, welcoming character that can express significant democratic values; it invites participation, offering easy access to symbolic communities, to a world of belonging beyond oneself. This can at times be preparatory for civic participation by offering what Hermes (2005) calls 'cultural citizenship'. Also, popular culture invites us to engage – with both our hearts and minds – in many questions having to do with how we should live and what kind of

society we want. It allows us to process, to work through positions having to do with contested values, norms, and identities in a turbulent late modern socio-cultural milieu.

With 'civil society' I signal a trajectory that in some way or other involves free association for common purpose; normally such interaction is seen as existing outside of both the market and the state (see Edwards, 2009, for a handy starting point on this topic). For example, dealing with friends, colleagues, communities, associations, and social networks for non-commercial purposes are all a part of civil society. There is an almost infinite realm of participation in meaningful and pleasurable activities around sports, music (e.g. amateur contributions on YouTube), fandom, wikis, and so forth. Conceptually and empirically the seemingly simple attributes of civil society as residing beyond the market and the state can quickly become complicated and ambiguous, but the idea of civil society emphasises that in a democracy people can exercise the freedom to interact in pursuit of their shared interests.

Another feature of civil society is that it is defined as operating beyond the confines of the private sphere of the home, i.e. it embodies the important notions of publicness, visibility and transparency. While the concept of civil society suggests that the purposes and goals of such groups need not by definition be directed at politics, and most often are not, politics is never far away from civil society. With its quality of publicness, civil society can be understood as a prerequisite for the life of democracy. In their classic study, Cohen and Arato (1992) see civil society as inherently contested terrain and as a foundation for the public sphere. For example, engaging with the news media is part of civil society in this view; the act of keeping up on the news – in the role of what Schudson (1998) calls the monitorial citizen – must be viewed as an element of citizenship. Thus, the trajectory of civil society in a sense always holds open the door towards the trajectory of political participation.

On another level, the entanglement of the three trajectories can be grasped via the conceptual distinction that Mouffe (2005) makes between politics and the political. By the political she means antagonisms that can in principle arise in any social context, mobilising identities of 'us' and 'them' in conflicts over symbolic and/or material resources. She sees politics as society's more institutionalised form of managed conflict – that ideally should proceed via democratic norms and rules. While this distinction may prove empirically slippery at times, the notion of the political is useful in understanding that popular culture and civil society are always sites of potential conflict, i.e., where the political

may emerge. In other words, via the emergence of the political in these two trajectories, it is quite possible for participation to veer into the third trajectory, that of politics. Just exactly at what point the political turns into full-blown politics may be difficult to ascertain, yet the general distinctions between the three trajectories should still remain a helpful analytic compass.

Politics, as our third trajectory of participation, is at least relatively clear in signifying institutionalised involvement in public conflicts over resources or other interests, even if what politics means today and the forms that it takes is evolving. In this trajectory we find formal electoral politics as well as the many versions of alternative, extra-parliamentarian politics, working in a range of settings, including advocacy groups, social movements, lobby groups, NGO's, social media networks, and so forth, in local, national and transnational contexts. Despite the heterogeneity, we should keep in mind, however, that politics, at least in statistical terms, remains very much the minority trajectory.

3.2 Modalities: its communicative character

Participation involves communication; communication via the technologies of the digital media can take a variety of forms. Here too one can foresee an extensive inventory of specific categories, but for starters I think it can be useful to make a simplistic duality to signal what is in fact a complex spectrum, namely *textual*, linear, and rational modes vs. *multi-medial*, affective modes. Again we are faced with a good deal of indecisive manifestations to deal with, but the attempt to specify the modality can be useful for several reasons. For one thing, there is an extensive ongoing debate about the status of traditional text-based knowledge and the capacity to read texts. These debates are found not only within educational contexts, but also in discussions about journalism, democracy, public knowledge, civic skills, and not least deliberation and communicative rationality. Knowledge is a key dimension of civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009), and its forms and strategies of legitimation are in transition, not least as a consequence of electronic media (see Carr, 2010, for a lively intervention on this topic). Our democracy is a product of Enlightenment thinking (even if we can trace some roots back to ancient Greece); how will it fare as the modalities of communication move into what we might call post-Enlightenment forms? Are we heading towards a post-Enlightenment democracy, and if so, what will it look like?

3.3 Motivation: participation's intentionality

All human action has some sort of intentionality behind it, even if this resides at an unconscious level. The subjective predispositions behind participation offer another significant parameter of analysis. It need not be psychologicalistic or reductionist in its approach, but can rather search for patterns of motivations and perceptions that are socially situated and specific to various categories of actors. Some version of a Bourdieu-inspired approach to habitus is one way of proceeding, where the predispositions for participation are framed within a broader profile of social location, practices, values, and so forth. A more focused analysis on the motivations behind civic participation has been developed by Amnå (2010) and his colleagues in Sweden, based on their interviews with civically engaged young people. In trying to pinpoint the subjective grounds for of engagement, they identified a number specific motivational sources. I have modified the categories, to simplify the scheme, reducing their six categories to four:

- *Interest*: this is an extremely broad category and can of course be refined in very detailed ways, but is still significantly distinct from the other three. It is cued by the perceived potential for satisfaction deriving from everything from basic curiosity, to a drive for knowledge as well as the seeking of pleasure.
- *Efficacy*: this reflects a confidence in one's ability and a sense that participation is something amenable, within reach, that can be successfully enacted. At bottom it has to do with a sense of empowerment.
- *Meaningfulness*: here we enter a more complex disposition, where the rewards are perceived in rather private normative, cognitive, and/or affective terms.
- *Duty*: this motivation has to do with a sense of obligation, loyalty, or solidarity, some kind of social value that resides beyond the self.

We can expect most of these subjective grounds to be present in most cases, though often one will dominate over the others. Unravelling them from each other and tracking down their social origins may at times be a challenge, but the effort can tell us important things about the contingencies of participation. Thus, empirically we would try to illuminate how constraints and opportunities impact on each of these subjective grounds of participation.

3.4 Sociality: keeping it going

Participation is fundamentally a social act, based in human communication, and contingent upon sociality. All too often analyses ignore the importance of sociality in stimulating and maintaining participation, how interaction with others actually serves to support (or not) participatory activities. In other words, social interaction is a prerequisite for the maintenance of participation. The parameter of sociality is potentially quite large, since it can in principle touch upon many attributes of communicative interaction in the context of participation. We know, for example, that communicative ethics and basic civility are not always as they should be in discussion forums, and there are still at times unsavoury patterns of communication directed at women and other groups. At the same time we also find much sociality that is supportive, expressive of community, and empowering.

Given the potential vastness of this parameter – basically the theme of interaction/sociality is a large subfield unto itself within communication research – it would be wise to initially establish some boundaries to keep it under manageable scope. A few analytic steps can be helpful in this regard. First of all, if ease of social interaction is a factor in the emergence of the political, it would be useful to develop some basic map of the communicative capacities of various digital platforms. There is already an extensive literature to draw upon, but we must also allow for the ever inventive abilities of people to do creative new things with technologies, so this would not be an exercise in establishing any essences of any medium, but rather a general starting point and orientation for differentiating the basic technical affordances for the interaction. For example, visual Skype contact offers quite a bit richer possibilities for deepening sociality, than, say, Twitter. Baym (2010) offers a detailed analysis of how the reach and capacities of various digital media can impact on interaction, their modes of social cues, their temporal structures, their mobility, and other features that serve to facilitate social connections.

From here we can begin to consider the specific cultures of different groups (who may be defined in a variety of ways) and thus avoid the pitfalls of universalist horizons of sociality. This moreover opens up the door for comparative research on sociality among different forms of participation and different groups of civic agents. The actual practices of sociality can in turn be analysed from a variety of angles, looking at, for example how they contribute to:

- *functionality*, i.e. what is perceived as basic, bedrock correct behaviour towards the other;

- *affinity*, which involves looking at degrees to which caring and identification with others is expressed;
- *trust*, which has to do with the willingness to take risks with others whom one does not know really well; and not least
- *responsibility*, which has to do with a sense of obligation towards others.

Analyses of interaction could tell us how, in communicative terms, these dimensions are communicatively accomplished online.

I would further suggest that since networks and online social capital play an important role in shaping sociality, the attributes of the famous 'loose bonds' is an important theme that deserves to be incorporated in the effort to better understand sociality. Questions arise, such as how we should understand the threshold of sociality in the context of networks with loose bonds, and what degrees of social proximity/distance are deemed most suitable? What is perceived as the minimal sociality needed to keep participation going in the context of loose bonds? Much research awaits.

3.5 Visibility: where it ends up

The goals of civic and especially political participation are usually expressed in mostly instrumental ways: groups wish to have some impact on for example, opinion, legislation, government policies, or corporate behaviour. At other times, the goals may be more expressive: to give voice to a group, to offer a performance, or manifest a collective identity. In all cases, however, we can say that there is in fact an interim goal in participation, not least in regard to digital media, namely visibility.

The notion of visibility does not imply a simple either-or state of being socially 'visible' or 'invisible', but rather points to complex, social, technical and political arrangements. These can establish what are termed regimes of visibility. In a recent stimulating exposition of this theme, Brighenti (2010) suggests two basic models of visibility that are pertinent for the present discussion. First, the public sphere is a mode of visibility where one can *be* in public, that this is where the 'synchronicity of attention' can be said to (in its better moments) give rise to a certain regime of democratic visibility.

The second model is the public realm of social visibility, of interaction, where the gaze and recognition of general or significant others becomes central to the constitution of self, of identity. I would call this 'intervisibility'; it relates to general perspectives as Meade's idea of how our sense of self emerges through

interaction or the 'presentation of self' à la Goffman. It also has a more specific dimension that concerns the encounter with strangers, a public mode of interaction that involves optimal distance, recognition, but not intrusion. This is the terrain of civic interaction, and links up with the sociality of loose bonds – where, not least on the net, strangers become visible to each other in various degrees in order to cooperate.

Being visible in public can involve varying cultural sets of postures, behaviours, roles, expectations, but what is of primary interest here is the basic logic of each model and a potential tension between the two in regard to participation. How these two forms of visibility negotiated, how they relate to each other in practical cases become questions for empirical research. There are also other regimes of visibility that can have significance for participation. The spectacle, for example, may at times be of participatory significance; it exists in separately and distinct from normal everyday life and is intended to break with it in some way. In a more negative manner, regimes of visibility associated with discipline, and surveillance can make the lives of citizens accessible by centres of power for purposes of control. We have also the hegemonic visibility of state- or corporate-based power, as well as the reverse: the hegemonic invisibility of centres and agents of power. From the perspective of democratic participation, however, public sphere visibility and social intervisibility remain the real payoffs of participation.

However, we know today that as a result of many factors, the internet and other communication technologies may or may not function well in providing the democratic visibility required for a well-functioning public sphere. For example, issues regarding digital divides, access to decision-making via the net, the isolation of the 'echo-chambers' of like-minded 'public sphericles', and so forth all play a role. There are also two basic research questions that need to be pursued: how does visibility circulate in digital networks (or, how does such visibility become networked), and what are its basic features? These visibilities can in a sense be seen as pre-conditions for the parameter of sociality: with an absence of visibility, there is no sociality. Exploring such visibility can take us into rather detailed analyses of web architecture, the attributes of specific platforms and tools, as well as patterns of use.

The historical context of these regimes of visibility is the emergence of the network as the new social topology – and as a part of the new mode of global capitalism. We find here a mix of flexibilisation, decentralisation and de-hierarchisation on one hand, and heightened inequalities, cleavages, and overall

worsened social conditions on the other. The web and its ancillary technologies offer possibilities for engagement, but to what extent their use can enhance democratisation is still an open question. Not least it is clear that they can also be used by power centres to maintain control over the citizenry. Some observers, such as Castells (2010) continue with a politically optimistic view, while pessimism is voiced by many others. From his studies of visibility, Brighenti (2010: 93) splits the difference:

New media make users more vulnerable to surveillance and other forms of control. Perhaps never before has the distinction between empowerment and vulnerability, between recognition and control, been thinner.

These five parameters of participation – trajectories, modalities, predispositions, sociality and visibility – can no doubt be further specified conceptually and pursued empirically. In the following section, however, I look at some institutional and social contingencies of online participation; I cannot be exhaustive in this, but I hope to suggestively illustrate how these contingencies can impact on the various parameters of participation.

4. Contingencies of online environments

The prevailing structures of established power are increasingly mediated, negotiated and challenged via online media. The contingencies of these media – the factors that both facilitate and hinder participation – are many and complex. Here I simply suggest three categories: institutional features, environmental attributes, and social patterns of use. These (and no doubt others) interplay with each other. For the institutional features, I look at Google; environmental attributes are illustrated by the overall dominance of hegemonic, mainstream political horizons on the web, and in regard to social usage I take up the tendency towards individualised, isolated web practices as a characteristic of online political participation. With each category of contingency I briefly elucidate some key implications for the various parameters of participation, as described before.

4.1 What a friend we have in Google

Google is a major phenomenon that has very quickly become a decisive force in shaping how the web operates and what we can do with it; in many ways it is an utterly astounding development. At the same time, as some writers

indicate (see, for instance, Cleland, 2011; Stross, 2009), Google has become the largest holder of information in world history, both public and private, and has devised many ways to use it. Locked into fierce competition on several fronts with its competitors, especially Microsoft, on a number of fronts, it has taken major steps in establishing its premier position on the web. The company established itself largely through the small text ads that accompany search results, but have grown into a global power. This an enormous concentration of power is largely unaccountable, hidden behind the cheery corporate motto 'Don't be Evil' and built on the considerable trust that it has managed to generate. But increasingly very serious questions are being raised, about copyrights and privacy, about how it is using its information, about Google's own agenda in striving to organise knowledge on a global scale.

Today, its famous Algorithm, a complex system for ranking search results, matches ads to the search parameters and Google auction those ads to the highest bidder. It is thus involved in the surveillance business, but not so much of the political kind, rather it gathers private, sellable databases. These are generated with our formal consent, but often via discrete, friendly strategies. What does Google do with all this content? What will it do? What happens with all the content of Gmail? (Or, to take another major actor that claims legal rights over all the massive content it controls, Facebook?). Further, we are to be offered the grand meta-archival system of 'cloud computing', which will entrench its informational power all the more. In the meantime, we are all strewing personal electronic traces all over the place. There are not, however, left in messy, random piles, but are gathered up, stored, sold, and used. For the moment, if I buy a book online, I can live with the offers that arise and say "Hi Peter! If you liked X, you'll enjoy Z..." But what if societal and political circumstances change, and such information can become significant in circumstances beyond consumption patterns?

These kinds of features of online reality may not per se create constraints in our use of the web – though we should no doubt be more concerned about what kind of information about ourselves we are making available to whom. Rather, it is the socialisation to not reflect on these issues that may prove to be most significant for the future. Discipline works largely by establishing patterns of thought and behaviour, and can be seen as a power-driven form of socialisation. Foucault suggests that discipline is participatory; we often more or less willingly participate in disciplining mechanisms. This seems to be very much the case in our daily patterns of use online. Google is in the visibility business,

and simply the way search hits are recorded and displayed (and financially modified) no doubt tends to detract from the visibility of political participation in mainstream online environments, especially of the non-mainstream variety (as do, of course, traditional news values).

In keeping with this, the trajectory of consumption would be the one most facilitated, the civil society of shared interests (at times themselves consumer-based in some way) would fall in second, and participation of politics the least likely to be noticed in this Google-driven regime of visibility. The architecture of the web, with its multimedia capacities, tends to work against the continued development of the linear, textual modality of communication, a point underscored by Carr (2010), who observes a decline in book reading among many heavy internet users. And while the motivational foundations for participation would readily include those of interest, efficacy and perhaps meaningfulness, a sense of participatory duty would most likely most often have to be supplied by the user him/herself, derived from other horizons.

4.2 Dominance in mainstream media environments

The original vision, and to some extent the character of the early internet, with its communitarian ethics of equality and participation have long ago faded. Today, the mainstream within politics and economics has migrated to the net, and is manifestly visible in its form and architecture (e.g. commercial portals), even if one can still actively choose to go to alternative online spaces. This dominance, this hegemonic presence, affects the scale of visibilities for alternative/oppositional voices. It is easy to understand how alternative political participation becomes entangled in prevailing regime of visibility. In striving for visibility and mass media impact, they must adapt to the regime, which raises difficult issues (for example, the alter-globalisation movement has a presence on YouTube; see Askanius and Uldam, 2011, for an insightful analysis). Discursive hegemonies are a part of contingencies of these communicative spaces.

If we look at blogging, we see comparable patterns, even if they are not as clear-cut, given the broad range of materials we find in the blogosphere. The popular image of the wild and sprawling blogosphere, an unfettered arena of diverse voices expressing all manner of views, is somewhat misleading. For one thing, most bloggers are not political; much of it is personal, social, identity-based. And political blogs generally have small readerships. In a US study, it was found that only 16 percent actually had some connection with news and politics; a large group, 37 percent, were about the writer and his/her experi-

ences (Caslon Analytics, 2011). In the US, there is a top-10 'A-list' of political bloggers; these turn out to be quite privileged, mainstream people who have symbiotic relationships with journalistic and political elites (Davis, 2009). Mainstream blogging extends the mainstream. Further, there is also a rather ephemeral quality to the blogosphere; most blogs are abandoned soon after creation, ca. 70 percent within the first month (Caslon Analytics, 2011), and few are regularly updated. As for Twitter, while 87 percent of the US population is familiar with it, less than 10 percent use it.

Such contingencies must be understood as a complex outcome of several tendencies, having to do with patterns of behaviour within populations, the perceptions of constraints and opportunities, the difficulties of reaching audiences, gaining and holding their attention is what one presents is indeed a minority perspective. It is important to understand that difficult contingencies for participation can derive not just from the explicit imbalance of power relations, but also from simply broader impediments of sociological reality. This may well be why many people increasingly find it easier to be politically effective and mobilise opinion within the more bounded confines of formalised social networks, such as Facebook, even if such spaces will rarely have impact on the greater society, the sense of efficacy in smaller, delimited contexts may help explain why Facebook is becoming a significant site of the public sphere.

This hegemonic character of mainstream online environments impacts on visibility, obviously enough, as well as certainly promoting consumption over politics, and thereby also making duty a less likely form of motivation. The dominance of market relations in this environment speaks for a prevalence of functional sociality plus a minimum of trust, though we should never exclude the possibility that affinity and even a sense of responsibility may arise in particular circumstances. Again, we trying to elucidate tendencies; we should not expect empirically neat and air-tight categories.

4.3 Slipping into the solo sphere

Despite the generally low presence of politics on the web, the significance of online media for political life is clearly growing. Especially when young people do turn to the political, the net environment has a central position. At the same time, there usually needs to be links between the on- and offline experiences; at some point political participation via the web needs to be complemented with other forms of connection to the political world. The net environment needs to help connect them to the political world beyond the screen itself. Yet it could

be the case that the daily habits of online life are making the connections beyond the net less likely to take place. For example, much social life takes place online; it has become an important platform for social life for millions of people around the world. In the context of late modern individualisation, the intensity of identity work and the self as a reflexive project, there is a massive amount of online presentation of self going on, via Facebook and other locations. We see a form of what we can call personalised visibility emerging, which includes self-promotion, self-revelation. When (especially) younger people do turn to politics, it seems that the patterns of digital social interaction increasingly carry over into the political.

Papacharissi (2010) argues that while digitally enabled citizens may be skilled and reflexive in many ways, they are also generally removed from civic habits of the past; one could say that we are witnessing an historical rupture in the traditions of political culture and participation. For example, it is not so obvious among the young citizens of some democracies that demonstrations in the street are necessarily an appealing or effective form of civic practice (and they may well be right about that in some cases). Thus, according to Papacharissi, much civic behaviour today has its origins in private environments, which she suggests is giving rise to a new 'civic vernacular'. I think this analysis is definitely on the right track, but while she labels this setting for political engagement as the private sphere, it seems to me that this term may be misleading. It readily evokes the traditional, cozy family or home milieu. This is no doubt a part of the setting, but I would call it instead the solo sphere, to indicate its historically new character. The solo sphere can be seen as a historically new habitus for online political participation, a new platform for civic agency.

From the networked and often mobile enclosures of this personalised space, the individual engages with a vast variety of contexts in the outside world. We need not launch into any discussion about essentialist distinctions between on- and offline realities; it suffices to simply indicate that they have to some extent different affordances, cue some different kinds of social skills, and most importantly offer differing spaces of social interaction, with often differing implications. These contrasts can be significant for political participation. It may be that for some groups, the online setting, with its powerful technical affordances, discourages engagement beyond itself. Papacharissi (2010) argues that it fosters a retreat into an environment that many people feel they have more control over; a networked yet 'privé sociality' emerges. To the extent that this is true, it is understandable, yet it may also be introducing a historically new contingency

for participation – which may in turn signal a new kind of democratic system in the years ahead. Yet we need not spend too much time with the crystal ball, trying to predict the future. There is plenty to do in the present.

The solo sphere takes form as a result of use patterns, and grows in a snowball-like manner, establishing a particular character to the online environment that spills over into political participation. Thus, even in the context of the political trajectory, the drift towards personalised visibility may put meaningfulness in the limelight over efficacy or duty as a motivational drive. That actions are experienced as personally meaningful is of course something positive, but in the context of online politics, if it becomes easy to say “I’ve done my bit and that feels good” because the technology easily facilitates such involvement, this normative self-appraisal may well deflect thoughts about duty and genuine efficacy. There is a risk that politics can lapse into an issue of personal identity rather remaining a challenge for collectively intervening in the social world and contesting power relations. In the sociality of the solo sphere, functionality is prime: one needs to have a minimal interactive smoothness. Certainly the other three dimensions may also (and are) promoted, but I would suggest that the development of affinity and especially trust and responsibility – so essential for the vitality of civic culture – are hindered by the socially-generated contingencies that promote the solo sphere.

5. Weighing the parameters and contingencies of participation

The kinds of contingencies I sketch above are merely indicative of the many kinds of factors that impact on political participation in online settings. These factors do not just set obstacles, they also facilitate – but in some ways more than others. Moreover, we should remember that the online world is hardly static, but rather in constant transformation. So, analytically we are always dealing with a moving target. The discussion so far does not lend itself to any hard and fast conclusions, but we can still make a few observations.

If we look at the three main trajectories established at the start, there is not much to suggest that online contingencies per se are going to encourage more political participation. It may well be that we will see an upswing in online political participation, but I would suspect that this would derive from developments in the larger, structural arrangements of power and politics, e.g., the emergence of crises that may serve to politicise people in more intense ways than normal. I think we can count on the continued expansion of the consum-

erist trajectory, with the civil society trajectory perhaps growing as people find more things to do publically together and share with each other via the web. Participation in the civil society trajectory may also grow through its ambiguous border with consumption, e.g. enthusiasts in many areas may publically share an interest which still involves the acquisition of various goods, that may in turn also signal status and group membership – fandom around movies, TV series, stars, lifestyle buffs oriented towards specific sports or other activities requiring equipment or artefacts, connoisseur collectivities focused on food, drink, art, and so forth.

I will not pursue the parameter of communicative modalities too far, since it opens up such a potentially vast discussion about the fundamental conditions for human thought and knowledge. However, I would note that of the two modalities – linear/textual and multimedial, the latter is on the ascent, and evidence suggests the former is in decline (we hear alarmist reports from schools all around the world, particularly in regard to the boys). Undoubtedly we will need at least a few decades of historical perspective to sort out the implications of these developments.

I suggested that the parameter of motivation, or predisposition, could be treated as four distinct dimensions: interest, efficacy, meaningfulness, and duty. In the participation in consumption and to a great extent in civil society, interest and efficacy are prime movers, so to speak. Political participation does not appear to be manifestly enhanced by online contingencies if no pre-disposition does not already exist, but where it does (mainly in the form of meaningfulness and duty), the web remains a great facilitator. The dimension of meaningfulness can be said to be placed centre-stage in the context of liquid late modernity generally, where the existential grounds for how we live our lives increasingly comes into question. Yet, it is difficult to say to what extent this motivates participation in any of the trajectories, or if it plays a bigger role in one of them compared to the others. However, duty as a motivational factor is no doubt less operative across the board; it is clearly most needed to move people into political participation. Again, the horizons of late modernity, with its individualisation (and in some cultures ironic sensibilities) suggest that political participation may continue to have weak motivational grounding among large sections of the population.

The sociality required for political participation is mostly of the kind associated with loose bonds. It needs a basic functionality, its affinity needs just a minimal threshold and does not have to be extensive for civic cooperation. A

degree of trust, the type that we extend to strangers with whom we are cooperating politically, is crucial, as is a sense of responsibility towards others, towards democracy, towards the cause at hand. There is an enormous capacity for online sociality, within all three trajectories. The growing tendency for engagement in politics to go via the solo sphere, is however, a dark cloud. It would seem to stand in the way of politically relevant sociality, given the emphasis on the personal and private.

Similarly, the emphasis on personalised visibility may be in tension with the necessary democratic visibility of the public sphere. On a broader level, the struggle to gain visibility for any politics outside the mainstream currents will of course remain a challenge, for all the traditional reasons. The web still allows for unlimited establishment of online spaces, and groups and movements can happily exist in their digital ghettos – but without making much of an impact on the larger political arena. And yet, we have seen how certain issues, hovering under the surface in some fairly remote corner of the web, may suddenly ‘go viral’, emerging in the mainstream media and altering political constellations. Political efficacy, however, would require something more than the hope for such random good luck.

Online media offer enormous possibilities for political participation, but they also present their obstacles. The distinct parameters of participation should be seen as conceptual starting points; they will always require up to date empirical grounding. Likewise, the contingencies of the online world are continuously shifting, and need to be specified concretely. Yet, if we can manage to analytically illuminate the ongoing interface of these two horizons we should be in a better position to understand the contingencies of the politically possible, to research them, and to navigate them constructively.

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Competing by participation – A winning marketing tool¹

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Summary: In the new media and communications context audiences are more empowered than ever to make their voices heard. Audiences, consumers are actively influencing the marketing activities of firms and brands. In the new dominant logic of marketing, firms are constrained to engage in complex processes of exchange with their consumers. To be able to keep up with the competition and media noise, it is crucial for companies to involve their audiences, potential consumers. Consumer participation in this context does not end with special attention for the brand, as companies turned to electronic word-of-mouth and other interactive messages concerning the company. Consumers themselves not only create advertisements and broadcast them in favour of or against organizations, they also create new products via a number of co-creative procedures and they are pushing the organizations to launch new pricing models. Therefore the scope of user-generated content is rather diverse from a marketing perspective. By generating an overview of the participation phenomenon in marketing and marketing communications literature, this article endeavours to reconcile the related taxonomy used in the business and marketing literature by an extended summary and explanation of the key terms. This will allow us to conclude that the most important central theme of the very diverse literature of audience participation lies in the fact that it is inspired, facilitated, established or maintained by the participating corporation as a core element. As such, participating corporations manage to extract a source of additional satisfaction and thus an added value that in a long term can be transformed into a competitive advantage.

Keywords: participating audiences, user-generated content, marketing value

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1. Introduction: The marketing response to new challenges – an urge for participation

Marketing language frequently uses the shorter term “audience” when referring to the target audience of a brand, a product, a service, etc. In the traditional business setting marketers, companies, organizations create the marketing messages, advertisements for their target audiences, in order to persuade, remind or attract them. Briefly put, the world of marketing communications worked in the same way as the general communication flows: the organization controlled the messages, created the content and the audiences consumed them. Regarding advertisements and promotional messages, a common belief is that people do not appreciate them, and that everyone is trying to avoid them. However, in the present media context, users, audiences, consumers themselves do create advertisements and broadcast them in favor of (or against) a brand, company or organization.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that market value is increasingly co-created by both the firm and the consumer. These two authors highlight that this new consumer role is noticeable and apparent in a number of ways. The new consumers have better, larger and quicker access to information and these knowledgeable consumers can make more informed decisions and influence the decisions of other consumers more strongly. They have a global view about firms, technologies, prices etc. as well as about other consumers’ actions and reactions. The traditional barriers disappear in the network society and the thematic consumer communities are revolutionizing emerging markets and transforming established ones. The power of consumer communities stems from their independence from the firm; consumer networking inverts the classic mass type of marketing communication, making it interactive and democratic. Consumers may experiment with products and develop new ones thanks to the platform the internet is providing them with. Activism changes as well, as consumers are able to better discriminate when making buying decisions and experiences by emboldening each other to act and speak out. Firms are no longer autonomous product designers, producers and marketing messengers, of a business necessity, they are led to resort to interaction with consumers for co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

At the same time, new media and communications platforms offer a far broader potential for cooperation between engaged consumers and firms than ever. Complex processes of creative exchange can be initiated between the two parties, during which individuals become ever more empowered in relation to

the firms, while they should ‘only’ be their consumers. The emergent “service-dominant” logic of marketing criticizes, not without avail, the traditional marketing paradigm of viewing buyers as passive consumers and advocates to include buyers in the value creation process by involving them in the logics of value creation by asserting that the consumer is always a co-creator of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). One example of this change is Time Magazine’s 2006 December issue, the front page celebrating “YOU” as the person of the year. The millions of people participating in social network platforms and creating content (Grossman, 2006) are strong indicators of the turnaround in the logic of successful marketing thought.

To understand the participation phenomenon and its importance for marketing and business scholarship and practices we have to start from the understanding of participation and related notions and concepts in connection with marketing and business studies. The aim of this article is first and foremost to identify and reconcile key terms in marketing communications literature related to consumer–firm exchanges using new media and communications platforms. After having examined the cluster of participatory concepts used in marketing in the first part, we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of participatory practices in the second part of our article.

2. The concept of participation in marketing

2.1 Activity-focused notions of participation

We can identify a wide range of concepts that encircle audience “participation” in marketing or marketing-related (e.g. consumer behaviour, marketing communications or management) literature. This cluster of participatory notions includes very different concepts that differ at the level of participation required (e.g. involvement, prosumer), whether they focus on the process (contribution, co-creation, collective buying) and how the output of the process of participation is seen (user-generated content, consumer-generated advertisements, viewer-created content, e-word of mouth). All of these notions imply a (power) relation with audiences, which can be seen as the defining component of the phenomenon of participation. In Figure 1 we summarize the most frequently used notions relating to the participation phenomenon. The activity-focused taxonomy emphasizes the activity of the consumer or the active role of

the consumer while the output-focused taxonomy concentrates on the result of the audiences’ or consumers’ participation.

Figure 1: Notions of participation in the marketing literature

Activity-focused notions	Output-focused notions
involvement engagement participation presumption produsage co-creation co-creative labour consumer empowerment crowdsourcing contribution	user generated content consumer generated advertisement self-generated advertisements DIY advertising viewer created content e-word of mouth user-led innovation

Notions of participation in the marketing literature show different points of the company–consumer encounter interface, all fulfilled through mutual communication and resulting in a valuable outcome whether this concerns information, new ideas or sharing experience. In the next sections we introduce the participation-related notions one by one, emphasizing the differences and specificities of the concepts.

First we discuss the core concepts providing insights and approaches of participation, based on consumers’ action and their role as actors. Following that, we discuss the activity-focused notions in the marketing literature related to consumer participation and then the output-focused notions resulting from the preceding activities.

Involvement

Kotler et al. (2009: 255) define consumer involvement as “the level of engagement and active processing the consumer undertakes in responding to a marketing stimulus”. Marketing literature differentiates products and buying decisions as being high or low involvement, and states that high involvement consumers are more likely to process large amounts of cognitive information (Greenwald and Leavitt, 1994). Other consumer researchers consider that the essential characteristic of involvement is the level of personal relevance (Celsi and Olson, 1988). Involvement is first of all linked to the buying pro-

cess and marketers are exhorted to use different marketing strategies in case of low and high involvement products. In marketing communications literature, involvement can be defined as the importance people attach to a product or buying decision, the extent to which one has to think it over and the level of perceived risk associated with an inadequate brand choice (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007: 70). Consumer research examines more deeply the involvement phenomenon in marketing. Most agree that involvement refers to consumers' subjective perception of the personal relevance of an object activity or situation, and they emphasize that involvement is a psychological state experienced by a consumer in a given situation (Peter and Olson, 1990: 85). Of course it is important to recognize that people may be involved in many ways. In summary, the term involvement in marketing is related to the consumer–product relationship resulting in felt involvement, which is influenced by intrinsic self-relevance (consumer and product characteristics) and situational self-relevance (situational context and product characteristics) (Peter and Olson, 1990: 88).

Engagement

Schultz (2007) redefines marketing as constructive engagement and emphasize the importance of a macro-level focus providing the possibility of constructive engagement (both political and managerial) ending in long term benefits, win-win outcomes and enhanced marketing systems. The theory and subsequent policy of constructive engagement argues for pro-social interactions among individuals, groups, firms, communities, and/or countries that are enmeshed in polarized and frequently intractable or destructive conflicts. In a constructive engagement, negotiation, cooperation, and exchange are important components, contrasted with control, consumption and authority.

Marketing communications play an essential role in fostering engagement by providing “the means by which brands and organizations are presented to their audiences. The goal is to stimulate a dialogue that will, ideally, lead to succession of purchase. Complete engagement.” (Fill, 2005: 9). It also means that marketing communications are an audience-centred activity (Fill, 2005). Other marketing researchers argue for developing a grounded understanding of consumers, considering consumer behaviour with engagement as a necessity when developing consumer relationships (CRM) that allow for an ideological disposition to interactive engagement and learning (Mitussis et al., 2006).

Of course new media and the internet as a platform have distinctive capabilities for customer engagement, including interactivity, enhanced reach,

persistence, speed, and flexibility (Sawhney et al., 2005) and provide a unique opportunity for organizations to use these capabilities to engage customers in collaborative co-creation processes. We can see that the engagement concept includes macro and micro level perspectives as well, and that it has a clear process and activity focus from the side of the firm resulting in a special company-consumer relationship and purchase. This is different from involvement which is an intrinsic psychological feature proper to each consumer.

Participation

From a marketing point of view, the concept of consumer participation itself has also been used. In this context it is defined as “the degree to which the customer is involved in producing and delivering the service” (Dabholkar, 1990: 484). Extending this construct, Meuter and Bitner (1998, cited in Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) distinguish among three types of service production: firm production, joint production, and customer production. Firm production is a situation in which the product is produced entirely by the firm and its employees, with no participation by the customer. Joint production is a situation in which both the customer and the firm’s contact employees interact and participate in the production. Customer production is a situation in which the product is produced entirely by the customer, with no participation by the firm or its employees. Bendapudi and Leone (2003) provide a chronological review of the literature on customer participation in production which shows that participation in production has already appeared in the marketing literature as early as 1979. It seems that consumer participation is attributed mainly positive aspects, though a number of studies also imply that it can be a double-edged sword for firms (e.g. Chan et al., 2010). Consumer participation can enhance customers’ economic value attainment and strengthen the relational bond between customers and employees and may increase the stress level of them. The notion of participation in marketing and business literature highlights participation in production processes. However audience or consumer participation may have a wider scope even from a marketing point of view, including brand value building through participatory practices, generating participation through communication, as well as building loyalty through participation.

One must note that the concepts of involvement, engagement and participation are highly interrelated. The marketing literature often resorts to using one in order to define the other. The main difference, as we endeavoured to outline, is on the focus and nature of the activity involved. Thus while engagement

has a process and activity focus which stems from a calculated effort of the firm, involvement is more consumer-related and can be one effect of a firm's engagement activity. A high level of consumer involvement will eventually affect the mode of consumer participation which thus acts as a measure of success for a firm's engagement activity.

Prosumption

The goal of marketers and companies is to sell their products and services to people rather than performing these services for themselves (McKnight, 1977), which generates a clear contradiction between marketing and the producing consumer phenomenon. This shifting role of consumers to producers, facilitated by electronic technology, had already been predicted in 1972 by McLuhan and Nevitt (1972: 4). The term "prosumer", a portmanteau formed by contracting either the word "professional" or "producer" with the word "consumer", was introduced by Toffler (1980). Through the new do-it-yourself pregnancy kit in the early 1970s, the rapid diffusion of self-service solutions (ranging from self-help movements, to self-service fuel pumps, self-service supermarkets, electronic banking etc.), the third-wave consumer became independent and had higher levels of control over their consumption. Toffler (1980) suggested a future economy in which "leisure time" is redefined as "unpaid work": people will never hold a full-time job, but spend extensive time "producing" their own goods and services with immensely enhanced self-helping technologies. He envisioned a do-it-yourself economy where the number of consumers declines as everyone produces more and more things (products) for themselves. This concept was provocative enough to attract the attention from other authors, including Philip Kotler (1986). First of all, Kotler criticizes the empirical evidence used by Toffler and adds that if Toffler is right then marketers will face a highly frustrating future. In addition, Kotler (1986) states that prosumption activities will have to have four main characteristics: high cost saving, requiring minimal skill, consuming little time and effort, and yielding high personal satisfaction (e.g. house painting). Marketers have to focus on those products and services which do not meet these requirements (e.g. car repairing). Modern computers will allow people to take part more in designing products as well. Kotler (1986) proposes to look for opportunities in order to facilitate prosumption activities like creating better tools for prosumers and simplifying the products.

We agree with Kotler that very few people will opt for 100 percent prosumption as they will be more attracted by the hedonist, easier living lifestyle

provided by growing economies and subsequent welfare. But more importantly in this context, Kotler (1986: 512) identifies two clear types of prosumers: the Avid Hobbyist “who fill their leisure time with one or a few dominant hobbies” and the Archprosumer “who practice a lifestyle of ‘voluntary simplicity’ that is closer to nature and produce many things themselves”. He concludes that marketers should not protect the exchange but facilitate the pursuit of human satisfaction and emphasizes that Toffler’s raised some worthwhile issues for marketers to consider. Even though Kotler analyzed the notion of “prosumer” as it was used by Toffler, we argue that prosumerism may have different levels ranging from Toffler’s view of producing as many products and services as possible, to participating in the production flow as a consumer, and being part of producing for others as well.

Xie et al. (2008) provide a theoretical model of consumers as co-creators of value through empirical research supporting prosumption. According to their definition, prosumption consists of “value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences.” (Xie et al., 2008: 110). This definition is consistent with the notion of “value co-creation” (Lusch and Vargo, 2006: 284), but wider than Dalbhokar’s (1990) notion of participation, and more in line with Meuter and Bitner (1998, cited in Bendapudi and Leone, 2003).

Produser

Bruns (2009) says that Toffler’s image of the prosumer (1980) still has considerable influence on our understanding of the collaborative processes of content creation. He states that Toffler’s prosumer is “clearly not the self-motivated creative originator and developer of new content”. According to Bruns (2009), the terms “production” and “consumption” do not correspond well with the creative and collaborative participation of consumers: “In the user communities participating in such forms of content creation, roles as consumers and users have long begun to be inextricably interwoven with those as producer and creator: users are always already also able to be producers of the shared information collection, regardless of whether they are aware of that fact – they have taken on a new, hybrid role which may be best described as that of a produser” (Bruns, 2008). In his produsage model, Bruns (2008) stresses that the traditional production – distribution – consumption models include the notion of prosumer as well, whilst maintaining the traditional industrial value chain. In contrast, in postindustrial or informational economic models the production of

ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment, breaking down the boundaries between producers and consumers. This new context enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge – frequently in a hybrid role where usage is necessarily also productive and participants become producers. The outputs of produsage processes are not discrete products but rather quickly developing and growing revisions of exciting content (e.g. Wikipedia).

Contribution

User-contribution systems consist of active and passive types of possible contribution, providing various types of user input that are valuable for others. Active contribution covers audience or user participation in content creation and social networking. Consumer contributions have clear advantages at the level of cost, scalability and competitive advantage (Cook, 2008). The contribution concept of Cook (2008) is in line with Schultz’s (2007) concept of win-win results of marketing collective engagement. The motives behind contribution may be that it is a practical solution providing immediate reward (e.g. access to extra services), social rewards (being part of community of common interest), reputation, self-expression or altruism. In Figure 2 we give a summary of consumer and corporate benefits of contribution in different processes. We can see that consumer contribution in different company processes results in better information, entertainment, personalization or sense of ownership on the consumer side, while the company gains as well through improved satisfaction, increased loyalty, awareness, engagement or through potential cost effectiveness.

Figure 2: Consumer (user) and company benefits through contribution

	Consumer service	Marketing	Human resources	Capital investment	Design & Development	Production
Consumers	Immediate better information	Info & entertainment, sense of community	Empowerment	Fine tuned, personalized services	Recognition, sense of ownership	Entertainment, sense of ownership
Company	Improved customer satisfaction	Increased awareness and loyalty	Employee engagement	Reduced cost of capital, revenue from subscription service	Reduced costs	Inexpensive talents, huge advertising value

Source: own summary based on Cook (2008)

Co-creation

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2002) mention a connection of co-creation between consumers and companies, and we have seen that Lusch and Vargo (2006) also use co-creation of value when defining the basics of new marketing logic. In this consumer-centric view the consumer is an integral part of the value creation system. The consumer may influence where, when, and how value is generated; they need not to respect industry boundaries in the search for value; they can compete with companies for value extraction; and multiple points of exchange can be identified where the consumer and the company can co-create value. Payne et al. (2008) make no distinction between participation in production or co-production (see Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) and co-creation (Lusch and Vargo, 2006). They propose the usage of the latter term and concept.

Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) argue that the concept of co-creation and other contemporary notions have to be introduced into mainstream economic discourse while one ought to put aside the undifferentiated concepts of users and platforms. They claim that rather than defending or attacking the cult(ure) of participation, mass creativity or co-creation, one needs to approach the socio-economic implications of these emerging trends in a more critical way (van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009).

Co-creative labor

Consumers' participation has a clear labor aspect as they ensure free (or very cheap) labor for firms, as Terranova (2000) states in her article "Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy". She argues that there are tensions and contradictions around participation as being pleurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited. The Time article mentioned earlier also mentions that these activities position creative consumers as "working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game" (Grossman, 2006). Others argue that we have to carefully consider this topic, how work or labour terms are reshaped and negotiated within the context of emerging co-creative relationship for mutual benefit by participants themselves (both professional and non-professional, commercial and non-commercial) (Banks and Deuze, 2009). We may also cite the notions *playbour* which also describes the phenomenon of merging free time, entertainment activities (play) and work (Kücklich, 2005) as well as *game labour* or *fun production* (Humphreys et al., 2005). These new

forms of cooperation and participation of the consumers provide a new source of labor for the firm (not only for profit-oriented companies but also for the public, NGO and other non-profit institutions). These concepts provide an understanding of the participation concept from a workflow and labor point of view and thus clearly identify the importance of participation in human resource management as well.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing relates to labor as well, being a novel form of outsourcing which is well-known and frequently used business solution to solve non-core competence-related functions of firms. Non-vital, non-regular business functions or one-off tasks, traditionally performed by an employee, and later outsourced to a contracted business partner can today be offered to an undefined, large group of people or community (a “crowd”), usually in response to an open call (Howe, 2006). Crowdsourcing is a process where companies outsource a work for a generally online community and offer payment for anyone within the crowd who completes the task the best and fastest. Crowdsourcing thus accentuates the mass participation aspect so that “the crowd” appears as a participatory agent.

The potential for the future use of crowdsourcing in marketing was identified in three areas: product development, advertising and promotion, and market research (Whitla, 2009) while Alberts et al. (2010) argue that crowdsourcing is a potential and relevant marketing research tool, however agencies and advertisers have to use it carefully. Brabham (2008) identifies the user-generated advertisement as a typical form of crowdsourcing.

Consumer empowerment

The literature on consumer empowerment puts the emphasis on consumers’ efforts to regain control of their consumption processes from suppliers. Suppliers may achieve success by trying hard to empower consumers through researching and providing what consumers want. It is claimed here that consumers feel empowered when they are able to enjoy the consumption process. In this view buying is not a simple process of obtaining products but also experience and enjoyment. Providing an agreeable marketing environment and relevant information may be a factor of success due to subsequent consumer

satisfaction and empowerment (Wright et al., 2006). Some results indicate that consumer empowerment can be understood as voting by consumption. This approach views consumption as an ethical/political domain where participating consumers characterize their consumption as empowering. However, it provokes some tension between consumer power and sustainable living (Shaw et al., 2006). This interpretation of consumer empowerment was provided by Shankar et al. (2006) who question the liberal view of consumers' empowerment and argue that choice is the product of disciplinary power and that more and more choice can lead to choice paralysis. Foucault's concept of the technology of the self allows for a more sophisticated understanding of the fluidity of power relationships between producers and consumers (Shankar et al., 2006). A technology-oriented view and strategy is launched when consumer empowerment is reflected in the development of information-based consumer-centric marketing strategies that seek to enable but also control delegation. These kinds of marketing strategies are enhancing the familiarity and use of information technology by consumers, underlining the uncontrolled nature of the consumer empowerment process (Pires et al., 2006).

We have seen that the consumer empowerment concept stresses the control aspect of consumer participation and reveals the significance of handing over control into the hands of consumers. Consumer empowerment talks about a conscious, active and control-loving consumer who is able to and wants to use the control and power s/he has gained in the consumption process.

All notions of participation indicate that there is an exchange between the company and its consumers or audiences, which is expected to result in some beneficial outcomes that could be a product, an idea or a message. In our point of view these notions are not different, but all focus on different aspects of the interaction and exchange, whether it is located at the level of the consumer or on that of the market, or whether it focusses on the production or consumption process, or on the level or amount of contribution made by and expected from the audience.

In Figure 3 we give a summary of the used terms and their major focal points in relation to processes and outcomes involved, as they were discussed before.

Figure 3: Activity-focused notions of participation and their scope

Notion	Process / Activity	Result
Involvement	Consumer interest, motivation	Successful choice
Engagement	Conversation / communication / interaction between company and consumer	Successful exchange
Participation	Production (company and consumer together; consumer alone)	Product relational bond
Prosumption	Production by the consumer	Producer consumer corporate facilitation
Prodsusage	Productive usage	Continuously developing content and meaning
Contribution	(Corporate) input transformation (by audiences)	Rewards (immediate, social, reputation, self expression)
Co-creative labor	Working roughly for free	Mutual benefits for company and consumer
Co-creation	Integrated corporate and consumer creation of value	Mutual values
Consumer empowerment	Consumption process controlled by consumers	Consumption as empowering enjoyment, experience
Crowdsourcing	Community creation for corporate call	Content created by community

2.2 Output-focused notions of participation

The output-focused concepts of participation highlight the result or achievement of participation. In these cases it is not the role or the action of consumers (or the audience) which relates to the concept of participation, but the output achieved by them.

User-generated content (UGC)

UGC stands for user-generated content, and in the majority of cases deploys digital media technologies. Content created by users can correspond to every traditional type of content, including content accessible via professional media services (text, image, audio and audiovisual content). UGC is generally located in the public domain or under a “Creative Commons” license, which offer content creators a simple set of standardized ways “to grant copyright permissions to their creative work” (Creative Commons, n.d.)

User-generated content is ubiquitous in e-media and e-marketing, and its rapid growth contributed to creating some of the most successful digital brands, like YouTube or Wikipedia. Audiences are more and more becoming used to consuming content that is generated by “ordinary”, non-professional, or amateur people, even more when some UGC starts to resemble professionally produced content. Despite UGC’s extraordinary growth, advertisers and advertising agencies still remain hesitant to venture into this unproven context. Their concerns stem from a fear of intruding on a “consumer” environment, a lack of understanding of UGC users and their behaviour, and a lack of control over the context in which their advertising gets exhibited (Clark, 2007 cited by Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). The emerging quantity and consumption of UGC forces academic and market research to provide implications for advertisers through a comprehensive analysis of their business models and the interactions among key stakeholders (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008).

Figure 4: Typology of UGC classification and examples

		Psychological Motivation for Engaging in UGC Creation			
		Rational		Emotional	
		Knowledge Sharing	Advocacy	Social connections	Self-Expression
Platform base	Group	Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)	Issue-centric communities (e.g. Rachel Ray Sucks community)	Multiplayer online games (e.g. Socio Town)	Virtual presences (e.g. Second Life)
	Individual	Blogs by experts (e.g. askanexpert blog.com)	Consumer reviews (e.g. Epinion)	Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	Consumer creative inventions (e.g. Jumpcut)

Source: Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008

Regarding the motivations for creating UGC, the positive attitude towards UGC and consumption of UGC were found to have relevant explanatory power (Daugherty et al., 2008). User generated content clearly focuses on the content output of consumers' participatory production, while it includes all types of content independently from the goal and motives of content creation or the form of the content (text, image, film, etc.).

Consumer-generated advertisement (CGA)

Consumer-generated advertisements can vary from modifying elements of a company's advertising material (e.g. by distorting the meaning, the imagery, etc.) through uploading original variations on a theme of a company's advertising material (e.g. humorous, subvert variations called spoofs [i.e. the practice of subvertising]) to proposing original materials in order to, for example, close a gap in a company's advertising campaign.

Berthon et al. (2008: 7) define consumer-generated advertisements as "any publicly disseminated, consumer-generated advertising messages whose subject is a collectively recognized brand". They base their notion on two main determinant factors: subjects and disseminations. They argue that even though consumers may create ads about almost anything (themselves, their families, their friends, etc.) consumer-generated advertisements have to be specifically targeted at collectively recognized brands. The nature of a brand as an asset makes the issue of consumer-generated brand ads so critical. The dissemination is crucial as CGA may affect a brand only if it is collectively disseminated through some form of media. Figure 5 provides a typology of CGA based on one hand on the relationship towards the official brand message (i.e. whether it is assonant or dissonant with it), and on the other, on whether it addresses the brand in question in a negative or positive way.

Figure 5: Types of consumer-generated advertisements

		Underlying message about brand	
		Negative	Positive
Nominal relationship to official brand message	Assonant	Subversive (the surface text is in accord with the official brand message, but the subtext of the ad is clearly negative, often use parody to subvert and undermine the dominant brand message)	Concordant (surface text and subtext are in accord; nominal text of the ad is in agreement with that of the brand message, underlying subtext or message is positive in attitude towards the brand)
	Dissonant	Contrarian (clearly off-message and implicitly negative towards the brand, undermine, question, or attach a contrarian meaning to the brand message)	Incongruous (the surface message is dissonant with that of the official brand message, the underlying text is generally positive towards the brand)

Source: own illustration based on Berthon et al., 2008: 14

It is critical for advertisers not only to understand and follow CGA but also to do so with any feedback on consumer-generated advertising appearing in the form of ad-hoc comments and discussions on content-hosting sites (Campbell et al., 2011). A lampoon of a brand’s ad might as well be categorized as “concordant” when the message is not necessarily negative and deteriorating, and both the audience and the responding firm might wink and nod, the firm accepting a criticism and carrying on with their own brand building. In case the consumer-generated material is inevitably deteriorating to the firm (i.e. anti-branding), which occurrence is more likely in the case of well renowned brands (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009), then the firm should classify it as “subversive” and respond accordingly. “Contrarian” and “incongruous” types of CGA are less of a direct threat to the firm in the sense that although the message conveyed is not in accordance with the official communication and messages of the firm, it cannot be directly retraced to and tallied with by the audience and therefore follows a route on its own as an advertising or anti-advertising message.

The term self-generated advertisement is used by Shimp et al. (2007) in their article examining campaigns which asked consumers to write personal testimonials about their brand-related experiences. Their research shows that

these testimonials positively affect consumers' evaluative judgments, but as the testimonials are motivated by external rewards, participants tend to exaggerate their statements.

The term consumer- or self-generated advertisement describes a specific subtype of user-generated content when involved consumers (not simple users) create specific communication materials (advertisements) related to and talking about a brand or product. However, the message and the relation with the brand is not unequivocally positive and depends on the quality of involvement the creator of the given content has with the brand in question.

Viewer-created content

Audience-created content has a long tradition in the Western media landscape, for example, in the USA with the network of public access television, in France with its long history of community (or 'associative') media, or in Germany with its open channels. Also in a more business-oriented context, channels exist that make use of viewer-created content and/or involve the audiences more directly in their programming structure. Current TV was launched in the USA in 2005 and is a well-know example of a viewer-created content-based (VC2) television channel (see <http://current.com/>). 30 percent of the programs of the independent television channel aired on the web are produced by the consumers or viewers, who are mainly 18-34 years old. The programming is based on short video clip type of content and the channel is paying for the consumers if the content produced by them gets broadcasted terrestrial as well. In addition, consumers may also participate in the programming structure: based on the majority-wins principle they can vote for the programs (Jenei, 2008). For these reasons, channels (be they online and/or offline) resorting to viewer-created content can also be understood as a subtype of user-generated content.

E-word-of-mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication refers to (positive or negative) statements that are made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which are made available to a large number of people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). eWOM can be understood as the extension of traditional interpersonal communication into the new generation of cyberspace. It quickly moved into the spotlight of

marketing and consumer research, specifically focusing on how eWOM influences adoption, buying and consumption (Cheung et al., 2008). EWOM, as part of marketing communication strategies, became a critical tool which takes the target audience and the message creation into consideration (Phelps et al., 2004). Indeed, electronic word-of-mouth present on virtual social media platforms (e.g. discussion boards, user comments of product reviews, news feeds of social networking sites), is similar to traditional commercial sources of information (i.e. in-store information, brochures, etc.) in that they are both impersonal. The difference is that virtual information sources have the advantage of being non-commercial (Jepsen, 2006). E-word of mouth and online consumer recommendation systems form a part of user-generated content as well.

User-led innovation

User-led, user-initiated or user-driven innovation is a phenomenon first observed and described in the 1970s by von Hippel (1978). User-led innovations have a large influence on creative industries (e.g. game industry), where users are highly involved contributors (Humphreys et al., 2005) and participate in content production as well (Bruns, 2008). User-led innovation begins when one or more users of some good recognize a new set of design possibilities – a so-called “design space” – and begin to explore it (Baldwin et al., 2006: 1291). User-led innovation emphasizes the users’ participation in the development and initiation of innovations so their participatory role in designing innovations has to be noted. A specific type of these innovations is *participatory design* where the people destined to use the computer system play a critical role in its development and design process. In this context participation stands in contrast to the culture of specialists and experts (Schuler and Namioka, 1993).

In Figure 6 we show how output-related notions of participation relate and differ, highlighting what corporate consequences, in other words what marketing results, they might bring.

Figure 6: Output-focused notions of participation and their scope

Notion	Output	Result
User-generated content	Text, images, audio or audio-visual content	Less influence and control of businesses, emerging new business models
Consumer-generated advertisement	Amateur advertisements	Advertising messages out of the control of the brand
Viewer-created content	Amateur television content or participation in selection	Cheaper video content, higher viewer satisfaction
E-Word-of-mouth	Electronic recommendation of consumers	Influence on adoption, consumer decision making and buying
User-led innovation	More suitable and consumer oriented innovations	Quicker, cheaper and more consumer suitable innovations

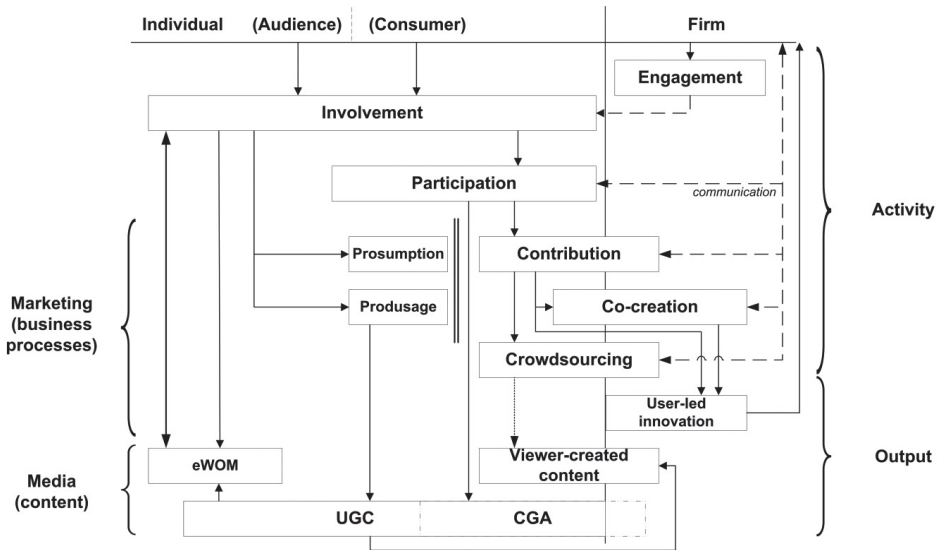
All output-focused elements of participation lead to the conclusion that not only consumers are more than ever empowered to participate at different levels in firms' business processes, but firms are also offered additional grounds for value extraction. A firm that is aware of the available processes for motivating its consumers to participate in a process of mutual creation of value, with all the opportunities and threats involved (see Figure 6), might substantially extract added value and competitive advantage from the situation. Value is created through participation, and in its every manifestation it brings competitive advantages and considerable market value.

2.3 Cluster of participatory notions in marketing

One aim of our article was to give an overview of how these frequently used notions relate, contradict or overlap by differentiating and connecting all the related taxonomy of participation, without adding new concepts to the list. Figure 7 shows the cluster of participatory notions as defined in the preceding part of the article. Our figure represents the complexity and overlap of the different notions. At the same time our summary suggests two dimensions for structuring the participatory cluster. One suggested dimension of study is from the side of the *subjects* of participation: individuals (themselves divided into sometimes overlapping, other times differing roles of audience and consumer) or the firm itself. The other dimension is the *approach* of participation that is either the activity or the output. Overlaps are still present in this model: the notions of

involvement and participation overlap in terms of their subjects while engagement is a complementary notion and uses the corporate perspective.

Figure 7: Relating notions of participation



Source: own illustration

3. Creating market value via participation

3.1 Indirect value

Word-of-mouth marketing is the most important indirect means of creating business value. While searching information, online participatory media sites as forums or blogs replace more and more the traditional information search (e.g. via sales personnel or brochures), although reference groups are still important sources of information (Jepsen, 2006). Therefore online media offer a double incentive for companies to turn to. First, as we mentioned before, eWOM has the advantage of being non-commercial. Product information is largely present on online discussion boards and blogs through largely anonymous participants' discussions and subjective product reviews. Reference groups as another decisive element in consumers' purchase decisions are to be found on social media sites where they share product and brand information under their own name.

It is important for companies to study the cases and contexts where communities generate positive messages related to the company in order to avoid the opposite (Chung and Darke, 2006). Trying to influence opinion leaders' networks and sources of electronic word-of-mouth is all the more important as these subjective pieces of information about a firm's products and services have a direct effect on the other members of the audience (potential consumers) that might generate a level of involvement towards the firm or its products.

3.2 Direct value

At the same time new media offer much broader opportunities for media and non-media firms to (financially) profit from participating audiences. The emerging possibility for audience participation has brought great challenges for media companies. First, data collected by observing registered online users' activities can allow content providers to customize their services even more, in order to better suit and serve users' obvious needs and thus create a market advantage by better serving their clients. As seen in the definitions of the different concepts related to the types of user-generated content, viewer-created content appeared as a source of competitive advantage: "If you can't beat them, join them". As a considerable part of user-generated content uses elements of legacy material, their creators are often on the verge of copyright infringement. Instead of prosecuting creative users for utilizing unauthorized sources, the content industry ought to include participating audiences in their business model.

For non-media firms the facilitated access of a large and diverse number of users and the possibility to integrate them virtually in one space can contribute to solving given business and marketing problems. Crowdsourcing (Howe, 2006) is a possible and quick complement to internal research and development for gaining leads in problems that are judged unsolvable. Moreover, active audiences and supposed consumers that take part in the creation of user- or consumer-generated content are a priceless base of customer information and a source of marketable ideas. Moreover, while businesses' core model stands upon profitability, individual creators of user-generated content do not necessarily follow a market logic. From a predominantly pecuniary goal (i.e. principal or additional source of remuneration) through various combined stances, they can contribute for mere intrinsic interest (Füller, 2007), enjoyment and self-promotion (Berthon et al., 2008) or recognition (e.g. by the other members of a community, by given people, by a prospected potential employer, etc.) as an expected remuneration.

From this varying set of goals, businesses can set up a viable business model: “The main challenge of virtual consumer integration may be to create a compelling innovation experience” (Füller, 2005: 645). This can include providing a community-based, shared set of tools for people in search of recognition or additional revenues to publish the results of their creativity and a surface with the possibility for others to use (e.g. istockphoto.com, or Apple’s AppStore).

3.3 Threats and problems

As much as an online brand community can offer positive business externalities to a firm, as much malevolent user manifestations can harm their business activities³. Consumers are technologically enabled to express their discontent over the internet with very little effort. This, combined with the propensity of human beings to more easily notice and voice negative experiences, makes the internet a facilitator in developing anti-branding, i.e. the systematic brand image erosion of more renowned brands (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009) through anti-fan imagery, spoof videos, and websites. This activity can be personal (e.g. via one’s Facebook message wall) or impersonal (e.g. under an unidentifiable nickname or by spreading an unsigned comic image of the given brand). In the lack of a possibility of personal and/or face-to-face interaction for the firm, an anonymous and impersonal user contribution to brand-related negative content is hardly under the control of the company and can do a lot of harm to a brand. In contrast, a direct complaint to the retailer (i.e. “voice response”), an expression of discontent to family and acquaintances (i.e. “personal response”) and a complaint to higher authority (i.e. “third party response”) are in most cases less visible and thus harm the brand less.

Managing participation at any level or in any process of the organization will lead to a need for more capacity, more working hours, and more resources from the company side. This implies from an economic point of view that participation may have a cost increasing effect at a certain level and/or for a period of implementation and adaptation. As companies and organizations are bounded by short-term cost efficiency, the participation phenomenon might have a limited reception through its short term effects on costs.

Well-designed spaces suitable for audience participation may create a very authentic positive brand image, however, the phenomenon of participation, in any form, requires that audiences be active. However it is likely that not everyone is willing to contribute, therefore in a participatory space active audiences’

³ The threats and problems related to consumer participation at the democratic level are beyond the scope of this article.

views will be overrepresented. Another but related threat is the articulation of the whole audience as homogenous regarding their attitudes towards participation. Consumers and audience members may have different feelings and attitudes towards participation: the “lead user” type of consumers will be expected to be the first to react to a new advertising campaign or generate the highest number of comments on the firm’s social network page. At the same time there are other consumers who do not want or do not have the time, capacity, skill or access to share their opinion, to become a participant actor. More active consumers and audience members might also suppress the voice of the less active or even passive (even though potentially more numerous) part of the audience. This phenomenon may launch a new type of marketing myopia, where companies may lose sight of what their consumers want even while listening to their (participating) audiences. The notion of marketing myopia was introduced by Lewitt (1960). According to him, companies focusing on products rather than consumers would pave the way for a business to fail, as it is a short-sighted mindset leading complacency and a loss of sight of what the customers want. In this new communications setting this implies that a company (or any organization) have to bear in mind that the active audience does not necessarily represent their whole consumer audience.

4. Conclusion

In today’s oversupply of brands, products, services and information, those who are able to involve their audiences win their audiences’ choice. Participation in communication means understanding; participation in the generation of new ideas means commitment; participation in usage means winning and meeting the preferences of the consumers.

The notion of participation is not new in marketing communication, sales promotion and direct marketing applications have required active audience participation for decades, so do the classical media by asking for viewers’ opinion. However, the emergence of web 2.0 and the integration of the internet and classical media shed new light on the notion of participation

From a marketing perspective, it is not the question of involving potential audiences, consumers at the point of planning, production, communication, as the major source of marketing success lies in fact in finding a *form of participation that is in accordance with product and brand concept, that is in line with previous communication messages and is beneficial enough for the audience to contribute to*. If the company is able to establish a favourable space, the company-consumer interaction will result not only in mutual benefits, but also will be

worthwhile for the media to further broadcast about, therefore providing extra media coverage and value. As a result, classical marketing concepts are to be enriched with the notion of the participating consumer. Those market actors who are able to provide inspiring and motivating spaces for contributing audiences will have a structural advantage to become market leaders. At the same time participation cannot be considered as a “magic wand” of future marketers. It has its disadvantages and threats as participation is not the ‘right’ way towards each and every consumer, as they may have different attitudes towards participatory actions. Also participation may affect higher costs for companies through higher needs in human resources, data mining capacity and more complex management challenges.

This article has also attempted to show the diversity of concepts that circulate in the participatory cluster. The main strategy to structure the phenomenon of participation that is proposed in this article is to use an activity and output perspective, while furthermore differentiating it according to its audiences: users / consumers and firms. If we look at the activity-focused notions of involvement, engagement, participation, contribution, co-creative labor, co-creation, consumer empowerment and crowdsourcing, we find processes where *mutually beneficial activities occur but are placed at different stages of the value creation process*. Involvement relates to consumer motivation, engagement means mutual conversation, contribution means intervention in the business process itself at some point by the consumer, etc. Overall, each notion captures one moment of the mutual value creation process. Similarly, output-based notions pinpoint valuable contributions – ideally for both the company and the consumers. These creations mainly are: texts, images, videos, commercials and products. This might suggest that both activity- and output-based notions of participation may be reconsidered, simplified and unified in the future. However, this richness of applied notions underlines the topical importance of the participation phenomenon, which in its current form identifies numerous relevant dimensions of participation for future research.

Companies who are very successful in involving their audiences are often successful in many aspects; they use traditional marketing and marketing communications planning logics that have been improved by creating opportunities for participation by meeting consumers on the internet, creating collaborative tools, engaging consumers in product development and testing, triggering conversations. We believe that the notion of participation is an inevitable marketing tool for any corporate player in any market place.

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Mediated public voices need theory to be heard

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Summary: This article, grounded in the need for critical theory for a better comprehension of the social world, engages with the concept of critical media literacy as an example of a combination of distance and involvement. Critical theory, and more particularly critical media literacy, is seen as a worldly matter that can play a significant role in both theoretical and practical worlds. The article then focuses on the mediation of public voices and the need for critical media literacy to deal with media participation. Motivated by mediatic hopes, audiences, media scholars and media professionals can appeal to critical media literacy to go beyond the barriers of conservatism, intolerance and consumerism. At the same time, all three groups face many different restrictions that impede upon the organisation of critical media literacy, and its focus on participation.

Keywords: critical theory, critical media literacy, participation, mediated public voices

1. Introduction

It has been nearly three decades since Hall's (1982) depiction of the 'rediscovery of ideology' in media studies – the 'return of the repressed' – addressed a shift from the mainstream behavioural approach to the critical paradigm. Media theories using the 1960s critical approach were recovered by the European cultural studies of the 1980s, both of which in turn were fed by the critical social theorists of Frankfurt School (Hall, 1982; Bennett, 1982; McQuail, 1994). From the same period onwards, alternative media entered the media-theoretical agenda, supported by the discussions about public spheres and counter-public spheres (see Fuchs, 2010).

Parallel with these developments, the term 'media literacy' had been evolving within pedagogic and policy discourses, largely as part of a liberal, reformist

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agenda for enhancing the capacity of people – especially the young – to deal with an increasingly dense media environment (for a landmark study on the pedagogic side, see Masterman, 1985; for a policy approach, see EuroMedia-Literacy, 2009). However, as I shall discuss, the notion also began to become incorporated within more critical horizons, partially enabled by the more general developments of the critical agenda described in the previous paragraph, where it serves to uncover what we might metaphorically call the ‘fictional nature of all media’. Even in these contexts, the pedagogic angle remains important, even if it has to face its own ‘critical turn’ (Baran, 2004; Algan, 2007).

This article raises the question about the need for critical theory in understanding how people engage with the media, in particular whether ‘being mediated’ may support emancipation and participation, or whether it inexorably serves the media’s symbolic dominance. In the first part of this article, it is argued that the theoretical framework of critical media literacy is necessary to talk to (and about) our social worlds, as an example of the ‘worldly’ nature of theory, as Said (1983) has stated. Could it be possible to unveil the fictional world of media by means of critical media literacy? Or is critical media literacy merely intended for intellectuals like Hall and Said, allowing them to have a humanistic relation between the world and knowledge? The answer to this last question is obviously negative.

Writing on Hall’s ethics, Scott (2005: 15 – emphasis in original) referred to the foundational grounds that Hall and Said share as being ‘out of place’ intellectuals. They are “intellectuals whose public and *worldly* relation to the world as lived-in, as thought-about, is never *not* oblique, never altogether *at home*, never completely centred in a theory, in a discipline, in an institution, in a nation, in a permanent enclosure of harmonious reconciliations and imagined satisfactions”. One can also draw on Hamelink’s (2008) reflections on ‘being critical’ in this respect: The capacity to ask questions as subjects embedded in society relies on knowledge which transcends commercial and political interests. This involves, we might add, reflections of social relations of power. Conceptually (that is theoretically), against conservative certainties, critical media literacy can open a gate to the worldly theory better than the interventions of basic literacy and mainstream media.

In the second part of the article, I will point out the barriers that critical media literacy, and its defence of participation and civic culture, has to face. Arguably, these barriers originate from alienated audiences, industrialised academies and cynical media professionals. The following barriers are discussed in

this section: (1) the alienation which is reconstructed by consumerist popular culture from the perspective of the audience; (2) the lack of recognition of the importance of critical media literacy and the worldliness of theory, and the lack of translation and access from the academic point of view; and (3) the intolerance towards any kind of theory and the need to acknowledge the social and democratic responsibilities of media professionals from the perspective of media professionals and industries. These discussions, in connection with the first part of the article, mainly aim to broaden critical media literacy as a concept which transcends the horizons of formal-scholarly education and which can extensively challenge the conservatism that constrains the participation of audience, academia and media professionals in the social world.

2. Critical media literacy as worldly interventions

The aim in this section is to highlight the complex relationship between the practical and the theoretical in relation to the social life of citizens. Although common sense often disconnects the theoretical from everyday life practice, theory offers crucial sense-making frameworks about the everyday that highlight the structural components that often remain hidden in the messiness of the everyday. Moreover, these theoretical frameworks provide tools to evaluate and potentially improve these structures of the everyday by generating idealist anchorage points and horizons.

More specifically, critical theory – with its emphasis on social justice, democracy and equality, as summarised by Kellner (1990) – offers a specific relationship between theoretical positions and their social environment, while at the same time it attempts to contextualise or historicise ideas in relation to their roots within social processes. A combination of distance and involvement supports this attempt on the part of critical social scientists, as illustrated by Kejanlioglu (2010: 244) in her depiction of critical social theorists, referring to Martin Jay and Max Horkheimer: “theory is a moment of reflexive self-distancing” and “theory can and must contribute to understanding and changing the world we inhabit.” The interrelationship between theory and practice is therefore present in ‘critical activity’ that is oppositional and involved in a struggle for social change and for a better society without oppression and exploitation (Kellner, 1990).

Theory, as for instance generated by the social sciences, that claims to be completely detached from the social finds itself in a highly problematic position anyhow. In a critique on the logics of traditional so-called value-free social

sciences, Oskay (1976), for instance, turned against ‘abstracted empiricism,’ which he criticised for being epistemologically biased. When theory sets out to discover the hidden source of social phenomena and turns to pure objectivism, it may fall into the trap of the fetishisation of both the research object and the research itself (Adorno, 2009). Thus, theorists must necessarily reflect on their own knowing, their own social location, and the emancipator potential of the analyses they offer; one could say that the refusal to reflect lies at the core of positivism.

The need for a critical theoretical framework which has “to be grasped in the place and the time out of which it emerges as a part of that time, working in and for it, responding to it” as emphasised by Said (1983: 241), calls to mind the phrase “theory is worldly”. The location and the situation have to be taken into consideration in the critical consciousness in order to form a sense of spatiality, without degrading the universality of theory. In other words, theory must be anchored in the concrete, yet offer useful perspectives beyond the particular.

This of course also applies to critical media theory. For instance, in their analysis of the “critical political economy of communications,” Golding and Murdock explain how, aside from any essentialist approach, the critical perspective concerns the material and the symbolic environment and *is* historically located (1992: 17). Critical media theory expresses a concern for material and symbolic power imbalances within the media field, and thus brings in a structural perspective to analyse and evaluate the messiness of everyday media use (and production). Again, critical media theory is worldly, in the sense that it provides these structural, evaluative and contextualised perspectives on everyday life.

In the development of these critical media theories, care should be taken not to simply criticise the daily banalities of mainstream entertainment media, or to disavow the pleasure and hedonism offered by following dominant readings. One should also not forget that media discourses are always to some degree open to interpretation and reflection beyond the intentions of the producers. People can make different, even oppositional meanings out of the same, mainstream content, even if hegemonic patterns are always operative (also in generating pleasure). Daytime television, for instance, despite being labelled as trash by many scholars, is a crucial area for critical audience studies (Livingstone & Lunt, 2001). As it captures a fairly large audience in our mediatised social worlds, popular banality needs to be understood in terms of how media organisations inhabit these worlds; some valuable archaeological findings may

also emerge from what we are often prone to label as ‘trash’. But this does not imply that the critical perspective should be abandoned altogether. When these very same television programmes produce discourses that use, for instance – as is the case in the Reality TV programme *Temptation Island* – anti-emphatic strategies to discipline the participants into almost total obedience, and articulate a “conservative perspective: intolerance, moralization and stigmatization” (Carpentier, 2006: 146), there is a strong need for critical interventions.

Within the broad field of critical media theories, there is a subfield that (more than in other cases) combines a critical mindset with a clear interventionist and worldly agenda, namely critical media literacy. Of course, we should keep in mind that there are many approaches to media literacy, sometimes fed by the juxtapositions of the theoretical versus the practical, and the pedagogical versus the political (Algan, 2007: 68–78; Hepkon & Aydin, 2007: 79–93). Conservative elitist approaches to media literacy aim to protect young audiences against the negative effects of popular texts. In other cases media literacy only becomes seen as an introduction to the concepts of audience and popular culture (Alverman, 2000).

Also, we should keep in mind that the relationship between media and education is old. Education once brought media in the classroom to support creativity, long before media education was developed. Media for education was expected to broaden the horizon of students (Abadan-Unat, 2010), legitimised by a specific (educational) translation of the right to be informed – and communication rights as its expanded version – that allowed for the introduction of news and information about the world in local schools (Topuz, 2007: 15–20). Of course it is important to note that ‘media for education’ and ‘education with media’ are very different from ‘education of media’, ‘media education’ and ‘media literacy’. This difference is mainly situated in the educational focus, which varies from uncritically using media products to show the social, to rendering media products and processes the object of the educational endeavour that aims to (critically) analyse and evaluate their role within the social.

The European policy for media literacy extends the definition of ‘media literacy for all’ to a lifelong media education (CSEM, 2010). The aim of media literacy here is “to increase people’s awareness to the many forms of media messages encountered in their everyday lives.” Developing media competences is one of the key recommendations coming out of the declaration of the 2010 conference of CSEM, where it is emphasised that the ‘awareness’ of the citizens will be achieved through a lifelong education implemented by the collaborative

activities of the educators, trainers, media industries and institutions, educational organisations (school and non-school ones), people responsible for educational policies, research institutions, etc.

Thus, given the broad range of perspectives and emphases that the concept media literacy comprises, an initial task is to try to retrieve those elements that have affinity with critical media theory, and further develop them. In her review of the English language concept of media literacy and its German equivalent – which translates as media competence – Hartmann (2010) argues that the basic, pedagogical side of media literacy remains important. Fundamental literacy and knowledge, as well as the skills relevant for the media environment need to be continued to be taught in settings of formal education. She sees these traditional efforts as essential for promoting the *understanding* necessary for dealing with the media. However, for *creative action*, she concludes that this component is best developed in other environments, outside the controlled institution of the school. This takes us into the expansive world of not just daily media experience, but also peer groups, clubs, associations, and so forth. And certainly, especially in regard to Web 2.0, there is a good deal of media literacy being shared and taught in these informal contexts.

Critical media literacy, in being articulated with critical media theory, places more emphasis on the ideological role of media organisations and institutions, and the (unequal) logics of material and symbolic power that characterise the contemporary media field. Of course the education system itself cannot be placed outside the critical project, and both media and education have long been scrutinised as the ideological tools involved in societal power struggles (Curran, 1982; Hall, 1982; Bennett, 1982). Critical media literacy becomes even more significant in the contemporary societal configuration because of the strong presence of processes of mediatisation. Moreover, as Kellner and Share (2007) argue, critical media literacy is “imperative” because “new information communication technologies and a market-based media culture have fragmented, connected, converged, diversified, homogenized, flattened, broadened, and reshaped the world”. This societal context places substantial demands on individuals, who within the ambitious framework of the creation of new political subjects (Hepkon & Aydın, 2007) should, as (critically) media-literate citizens, master a variety of skills and knowledges:

- Understand how and why media content is produced;
- Critically analyse the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey;

- Use media creatively in order to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions;
- Identify and avoid or challenge media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful;
- Make effective use of media in the exercise of one's democratic rights and civic responsibilities (European Charter for Media Literacy – ECML, 2010).

These are no small demands in regard to the contemporary media landscape. Hartmann (2010) suggests that the celebratory discourses about Web 2.0 at times jump the democratic gun, in that many commentators and users generally seem to assume that the ease of being a 'producer', remixing, sharing, etc. automatically enhances democracy. Such activity requires further, civic dimensions if they are to contribute to democracy. However, the affordances of Web 2.0 are such that the democratic potential is real and very significant; it would be a mistake to dismiss it merely as a clever and exploitative business model.

3. Participation and critical media literacy

It can be seen from the above discussion that the current debates regarding the capacity of critical media literacy to contribute to the construction of a better world are very much connected to the conceptualisation of participation (see also Livingstone, 2008). To use Kellner and Share's (2005: 372–373) words: "Critical media literacy in our conception is tied to the project of radical democracy and concerned with developing skills that will enhance democratization and participation."

The concept of participation is frequently used in the literature on democracy in a variety of ways, as Carpentier has noted (2007; 2011), and "public participation," as one of the most cherished terms, is often critically interrogated in academic literature. Participation's meanings range from mere presence in specific processes or events to the Patemanian definition of participation as equal power positions in decision-making processes. It is used in an optimistic sense with regard to the empowering role of community media in giving voice to *ordinary* people through their participation in media production and organisational management. But participation is also used to refer to the representations of the public in media programmes such as dramas, news, games, art and culture programmes, etc., or in audience ratings. Although these practices are referred to as 'participatory', they can hardly be seen to be beneficial for democ-

racy. Moreover, it is not always clear where participation is located, and what its objective is, as participation in the media and participation through the media (a distinction used by Carpentier (2007, 2011)) often becomes conflated.

Also Hartmann (2010) is quick to underscore that the media landscapes for the most part do not necessarily engage (young) people as citizens, even if the political relevance of, for example, Reality TV programmes may at times become apparent (she refers here Coleman's work on Big Brother; see Coleman, 2007). Media literacy, if it is to be joined to critical media theory – and more broadly, critical social theory – needs to connect with the notions of agency and participation. Her argument weaves together the importance of agency, as an expression of a subject making choices, and participation – the active engagement in issues with media and society. And she reminds us that these considerations also usher us into questions about identity, i.e. the performative sense of self that will facilitate agency and participation – and the factors that can encourage or discourage such identities. Moreover, she underscores the importance of participation – in whatever context – having some kind of consequences if it is to be experienced as meaningful and to be sustained: that it alters the subject and/or the setting in some way. From such reflections, we readily see how critical media literacy becomes implicated in larger issues of democracy and politics, a trajectory that others, such as Kellner and Share (2007) develop still more explicitly.

Critical media literacy thus has to theoretically frame the participation of citizens through the media, which requires a sustainable understanding of the transformation of the world, not just within a structured and sterilised academic sphere but within the social world itself, including its banalities. Critical media literacy also has a crucial role to play in offering interpretative and evaluative frameworks for understanding the possibilities and limits of the (allegedly) participatory process media organise, scrutinising the traces of power imbalances these mediated processes often contain. Both (home) audience members and (future) participants would highly benefit from an in-depth understanding of the wide range of participant management technologies used by media professional. Moreover, also evenly critical knowledge of the existence, possibilities and limits of for instance community media and alternative new media, would be democratically highly beneficial.

In other words, (critical) media literacy is not only intended to help the audience to “develop the skills and knowledge necessary to increase their enjoyment, understanding and exploration of the media,” as it is indicated in the

European media literacy networks (ECML, 2010). If sufficient skills and many channels for participation in the media existed, the globally-formatted television shows involving audience participation would be most instrumental for citizen participation. But in practice, the media participation of *ordinary* people often transforms them into *extraordinary* popular media figures, visible and famous, but detached from politics and the political. The ‘public voice’ of those who gain mediated visibility is only heard by the public itself in very particular ways. To paraphrase Spivak (1988): The participants cannot speak.

Moreover, as mentioned before, we should still be careful not to detach critical media literacy from media production itself, and/or to reduce it to the world of formal education. Also Kellner and Share (2005: 372) suggest the (critical) use of media products, when they suggest that “Developing critical media literacy involves perceiving how media like film or video can be used positively to teach a wide range of topics, like multicultural understanding and education.” This of course also applies to the use of media for “analysing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts.” (Kellner and Share, 2005: 372)

Also the participation in community and alternative media – but also mainstream media – can offer key learning moments. This brings me to the related point that critical media literacy should not be restricted to the formal educational system. There are approaches to media literacy which do not consider media literacy as purely educational issue but see it as a component of social opposition. Activist groups like Independent Media Attempts and Cultural Environment Movement, or projects like the Media Watch Global Organisation have activism-centred objectives, but offer (sometimes explicitly organised) valuable opportunities for learning about the media.

Critical media literacy can thus assist in bringing these theoretical frameworks back into the social world. This is a task which is not easy, but is necessary. Notions like audience and the public sphere incorporate and thereby fulfil the need for “theorizing emancipatory knowledge in terms of the democratization of literacy” (Livingstone, 2008: 60).

4. Moving beyond the borders

The further development of critical media literacy, in support of a more egalitarian, (radical) democratic and participatory society depends on the removal of a wide variety of barriers. These borders are fortified by conservative

politics and the entertainment market, whereas the progressive opportunities of transcending the thresholds might give more life to the public sphere. An (unavoidably simplified) overview of the barriers for mediated public voices can be found in the table below, where I also include the articulation of critical media literacy as a possible site to peacefully overcome these barriers and conflicting interests.

Figure 1: Actors, barriers and strategies

Actors	Barriers	Critical media literacy strategies
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restricted media source • addiction to spectacles • lack of solidarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • productive participation • access in new media • creativity
Media scholars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lost in translation • neglecting theory is worldly • lack of link between research-teaching-training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-reflexivity • knowledge for all • resolve the tension with knowledge
Media professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intolerance to theory • hectic rhythm of the job • lack of respect to profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transparency • humanistic labour • urge for trade unions

Of course, the audience itself also functions as a barrier towards radical democratisation. From this perspective, the alienation (re)constructed by popular (and public) culture offers hardly any opportunities to engage in critical thinking. Mediated voices are often seen as spectacles by the audiences, preventing the construction of solidarity in relation to social issues (as our recent research on audience reception shows, see Türkoğlu (2010)). Discourses that ‘all media are fiction’ or that media texts are too complicated for the audience (and should thus be simplified) does not give much encouragement to the audience to find their ‘own reality,’ even when many different decodings are possible (Hall, 1980).

One should also not overemphasise the role of media in everyday life. *Ordinary* people, as individuals or groups, have to work hard and must have their eyes wide open in order to cope with the rapid changes taking place in their dwelling places, and they often make sense of these realities in dominant-conservative ways. Working days end with mild and sometimes not so mild suffering, which is not always the best possible environment for self-reflexivity. The dominance of conservatism also affects everyday media behaviour, which

can be seen in: (a) learning from a limited number of media sources; (b) enjoying purified entertainment and the activities of media celebrities; (c) leaving all creativity to the advertisers; (d) being continuously dependant on conventional mainstream media; and (e) (if they somehow participate), the loud and sometimes even rude appearances that remain in line with the dominant media formats, combined with expressing bitter prejudice against those who cannot express themselves 'properly'.

Yet, despite all this, we should not despair. Counter-practices, resisting these conservative media practices, combined with critical counter readings of conservative representations, may come from a variety of people, such as activists, feminists, academics, journalists, whether they are *ordinary* people or not. Also many young men and women, active in social media, react against these conservative media realities. But there is still a strong need for (theoretical) frameworks which allow conceptualising our realities differently, in order to transform their reactions into productive participation through the media.

From the *academic* perspective, there are three levels of barriers that work against critical media literacy. These three barriers are related to research, teaching and training. The lack of translations of scholarly work into the common sense is blocking the more open circulation of these frameworks of knowledge. Forms of media education that are committed to expanding critical media literacy in society also require more recognition of their importance within academia, in combination with more support for the idea that theory is indeed worldly. This brings us to the analytical efficiency of the scholar, which should be transferred to research and teaching. Any claim for scientific superiority in relation to social issues may only increase the already existing gap between academia and the social world.

To add an anecdote to this article: I remember the reaction of an audience member when I was giving a public lecture on the 'mediated world.' The similarity of the pronunciation of *mediated* and *fermented* in Turkish (*medyalanma* and *mayalanma*) caused meaning to be totally 'lost in translation' (as Livingstone (2009) also described). Public lectures, as ways of communicating academic knowledge, aiming to provide and stimulate critical media literacy, often end with a mixture of frustration and stimulation for both sides, as was also here the case (even if one may feel that at its worst moments mediation may have a fermenting impact on people).

Moreover, public authorities are not always the best partners for the academics in defending critical media literacy. To give one more example: Following a

series of scholarly conferences on ‘media literacy’ in 2005 (Turkoğlu, 2007), an official pilot project on media literacy courses for the secondary education was planned by the Higher Council for Radio and Television (RTUK). The term ‘media literacy’ was brand-new to the public, and was not even recognised, except by a few communication scholars, despite the fact that the history of media education in Turkey goes back to the 1950s. This ‘media literacy’ project was so conservative in terms of religion, gender and family values, and so poor in terms of its conceptual framework, that neither the teachers nor the students and their parents gained any enlightenment from it. The practices of RTUK did only result in fierce critiques on how was dealt with critical media literacy in Turkey (Gencil-Bek & Binark, 2009).

Also the difficulties of teaching critical scholarly thinking about media to students have increased. It is difficult to convince students that they should do more than just learn the basics of communication and media theories, but that they need to apply these theories in their daily lives so that they can bring social theory to life. As academics in the field of media and culture, we are searching for opportunities for public participation in a better communication environment with the help of critical theory, both inside and outside of the classrooms. The importance of recognising the need for self-reflexivity as the “subjective side of citizenship” is even greater for media students and academics.

Dahlgren (2005: 324) emphasises people’s experience, seeing them as members of society, and the need for meaningful participation for the realisation of a stronger civic culture. This brings us to another debate on the objectives of critical media literacy: Should media schools be intellectually critical or pragmatically efficient in order to meet market demands? It is true that know-how is taught at universities to media students, but the first and only aim of university education should not be just to meet the demands of the employment market.

There have been some attempts to resolve the tension between educational institutions and the media, focusing on citizens’ rights in training programmes such as ‘From the Classroom to the Newsroom’ (OHO), which was organised by BIANET (Independent Communication Network). Here, graduates, academics and journalists were brought together in summer workshops (Tahaoglu, 2010). This part of academia, engaged in training, has a moderating role in the transition period between school and the student’s professional life, with the aim to enhance critical media literacy and citizen participation.

From the perspective of *media professionals and industries*, media-literate students and scholars are confronted with the intolerance of media profes-

sionals towards any kind of theory, even if it is translated into more accessible frameworks. The different timings of facing the ‘moments’ of media processes keep media professionals away from theory.

There are obviously still very good reasons for having old and new media in our lives, although conventional mainstream media have exhibited many problems (for instance their failure as the *fourth estate* – without disregarding some notable exceptions). In order to give critical media literacy a fighting chance, there is a strong need to acknowledge, promote and strengthen the social and democratic responsibility of media professionals. This again will not occur without problems. For instance, the publication of an elaborate declaration by the Turkish Journalists Association on the ‘Rights and Responsibilities of Journalists’ in 1998 was ignored by most of the mainstream media’s popular columnists, as they favoured the workings of the economically globalising media market. In line with McQuail’s (2006) and Nordenstreng’s (2006) reconsiderations on the rights and responsibilities of journalists, journalism can only be considered valid if the occupation is considered as a profession. More than 30 years of weakening the foundations of the Journalists’ Union left too little force for journalists to defend their profession (Sönmez, 2010). Again, there is still room for hope, as – despite the lack of a powerful union – platforms such as the ones aimed at ensuring freedom for journalists (BIA news, 2011; Gazetecilere Özgürlük Platformu (GÖP) built in late 2010) are still operational.

5. Conclusion

Living in a mediated world often negates the directedness of dialogical encounters. Critical media literacy has to some degree flourished within the realm of academia, and there are hopes to further expand the capacity to interrogate the mediated social world to the multitude of the citizenry. It is not just the tendency to define media products as ‘just texts’ that shows a lack of understanding of the importance of media; also the underestimation of the importance of critical media literacy and critical reading structurally weakens our democracies and the capacities for further democratisation and increased participation.

Said (1983: 33) – writing in the early 1980s – drew attention to ‘voices’ rather than texts, when he said: “... something as impersonal as a text, or a record, can nevertheless deliver an imprint or a trace of something as lively, immediate and transitory as a ‘voice’”. Voice, in the context of this quotation, refers to what might be considered as more overt and personalised discourses, which play a key role in producing a viable and pluralist public sphere. Couldry

(2010) argues cogently for the concept of voice as something inherently valuable for the life of democracy, where people have the opportunity to give public expression about themselves and their situations.

New media environments, but also new trans-cultural formats within the conventional mainstream media, seem to have opened up new territories for the diffusion of these voices. Progressive opportunities for being more active, more productive, more critical, and for having more voices heard, in louder ways, can break down the barriers between the audience, academia and media professionals. Critical media literacy, with its prolific intersection of critical thinking, literacy and media, functions as a requirement for participatory democracy, but also offers many opportunities for its enhancement.

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When the museum becomes the message for participating audiences¹

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Summary: This article aims to analyse the notion of participation in the museum context using an audience studies perspective. Museums are increasingly competing for the attention of the public in the arenas of leisure and education, the process of which is part of the commercialisation of the museum institution. In addition, a turn towards interactivity is taking place in museums, and while that might serve well to revitalise the museum and bring it closer to its audiences, it does not sufficiently support realisation of the change of the museum institution into a laboratory-type museum (de Varine, 1988; van Mensch, 2005) – a concept defined through the communicative and democratic aspects of the museum. As is the case with many public institutions, the democratisation of society is increasing the need for transparency and accountability, which in turn has brought public engagement to the attention of the museum. According to Simon (2010), museums need to find a balance between the activities of the museum and audiences: the (potential) need to overcome the shyness of expertise combined with the need to organise the (potential) flood of amateurs.

These different evolutions – the ambiguity of expertise, the move towards interactivity and the need for public engagement – increase the need to understand participation at museums. This paper discusses the ideas of what participation means in the museum context through Giddens' framework of democratising democracy (1995) by looking at the museum through three key roles: as cultural, economic and public institutions, each of which has different reasons for and meanings of museum participation.

Keywords: audience participation, museums, theories of participation

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1. Introduction

The past twenty and more years have been characterised by several significant transitions in society. The ongoing democratic revolution (Mouffe, 2000), intensified by the end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent re-shaping of Europe, the constant discoveries in the area of human biology (and especially genetics), the increased relevance of information and communication technologies such as computers, mobile telephones and the internet are just a few of the more remarkable ones. These processes have also brought a stronger dependency on technology and increased the perception of risk and uncertainty in society (Beck, 2005).

The development and spread of the many variations of the democratic worldview along with new technological facilities has also affected museums, influencing them to become more communicative. Two core processes in museums, digitisation and democratisation, lead museums to focus on the dialogue with its audiences – providing more information is no longer considered sufficient.

The increase of communication and dialogue in museums has several consequences. On the one hand, the vast resources of cultural heritage can and are being made available through digital technologies. On the other hand, the dialogue at the museum level is much broader and has to be seen as part of the general democratisation of society. Democratising knowledge institutions such as museums helps society to come to grips with the pressures caused by general ambiguities in society by providing access to interpretations rather than ready-made solutions.

Museums, which have traditionally been institutions of knowledge and truth (albeit to varying degrees), are experiencing the need to open their collections, exhibitions and educational work in order to better fulfil their role as a public institution within the democratic framework. One way of doing this is by increasing participatory activities within the museum environment, which will be the focus of this article.

Participation is often linked to the concept of interactivity in museums (e.g. Barry, 1998). Indeed, being engaging and interactive, especially through new technologies, is becoming increasingly the focus of museum work (Ciolfi, Scott and Barbieri, 2011). However, this article takes a step further and argues that interaction and engagement are not enough in themselves. Although we discuss interactivity here in passing, we will not focus on this theme. Even if the concept is quite familiar for museums – especially in connection with new technologies – interactivity is generally not used to consciously facilitate demo-

cratic participation in the museum context. Rather it is 'just' a potential tool for engagement, which in reality more often offers support to the educational framework according to which interactive elements in museums are approached as learning tools.

Thus, while within the museum world interaction has the concept of pedagogy as its focus, participation is understood in the context of this article as mutually beneficial, respectful and to a certain extent aiming for balanced power relations, or at least acknowledging the worth of discussion partners. Through this emphasis on respect and partnership, social interaction and participation become located at another, more fundamental, level of democratic support. In this article, we shy away from the minimalist approach to democracy, which would limit it to institutionalised politics. Instead, we take a more maximalist approach and look at the democratisation of society at large, acknowledging the importance of a well-functioning civil society, thus extending the notion of citizenship beyond institutionalised politics.

The concept of 'participation' originally signified the cooperation of institutions and either the community or individuals, although as it has become used more widely, it has lost quite a lot of its meaning. Already in 1970, Carol Pate-man (1970: 1) notes that "any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared" from the term participation. The democratic-theoretical understanding of participation still has its dominance, but in this article our ambition is to extend this notion to museums, in order to understand participation in relation to the variety of roles outlined above. Peter Dahlgren (2006: 24) helps with the clarification of some key terms: "Engagement generally refers to subject states [...] mobilised, focused attention." He sees engagement as a prerequisite for participation, as the latter would be "connecting with practical, do-able situations, where citizens can feel empowered [...] it involves in some sense 'activity'". For Dahlgren (2006), although both participation and engagement are anchored in the individual, they do have important collective dimension as they imply being connected to others via civic bonds.

In her book, *The Participatory Museum*, Simon (2010) argues that with museum participation, the key is to find out what function participation supports. In contrast to many ladder-based approaches towards participation (Arnstein, 1969; OECD, 2001; IAP2, 2007; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2010), Simon indicates that in the context of museums, the different approaches to participation are better understood as a matrix in which in some of these instances the role of the museum is greater, while in some other cases the role of the museum decreases and leaves more control with audiences. Simon (2010) stresses that

it would be wrong to approach any of these participatory ideas as hierarchical, but rather these options are complementary and depend on museum's aims and possibilities. As Mariana Salgado (2009) argues, this does not imply that the traditional museum institution has disappeared, despite the shift of museums from being collection-centred towards being visitor-centred. However, she also sees this shift as the key to museums becoming participation-friendly institutions. McLean (2007) argues that this shift occurred when participation was understood to be part of learning, which differentiated this phase from earlier initiatives in which people are involved in museum activities either through collecting, commenting or interpreting. Thus, in many instances, participation and engagement become seen as either prerequisites or additions to fulfilling various museum roles.

Table 1: Different museum participation possibilities, adapted from Simon (2010)

	Contributory	Collaborative	Co-creative	Hosted
Control over the agenda and over the outcome	Museum	Museum more than participants	Equal/participants more than museum	Participants (with rules and some limitations from the institution)
Number of participants and their commitment	Potentially very many, but limited or no commitment	Smaller numbers, some casual joiners, but most with intention to participate, thus relatively small numbers	Relatively small groups, committed through the whole process	Relatively small groups, who need additional support for their own project.
Participants interaction	Individual interacts with the content of the museum and possibly with other participants contributions	Individual interacts with content and institution and possibly with other participants contributions	Success presumes good interaction with institution and other participants and co-operation	Success relies on good interaction with other participants forming a community or network
Goals for how non-participating visitors will perceive the project	Visitors see themselves as potential participants and see the institution as interested in their active involvement.	Visitors see the institution as a place dedicated to supporting and connecting with community.	Visitors see the institution as a community-driven place. It will also bring in new audiences connected to the participants.	The project will attract new audiences who might not see the institution as a comfortable or appealing place for them.

In the following part, we will firstly give a short overview of museum history and introduce different positions the museum can have towards its audiences from the historical perspective. This will help to ground the discussion of participation in the overall development of the museums as public institutions. This overview will provide insights into how the often-conflicting approaches towards museum work have evolved over time and are still in the process of change. Secondly, different perspectives towards audiences will be mirrored in the discussion of three intersecting fields (cultural, economic and political (public)) that museums operate in. In the third section, we will use core questions from the classic communication transmission model (Lasswell, 1948; McQuail and Windahl, 1993), with a twist on participatory communication focusing on the dialogue between the museum and its audiences. We will discuss the issues of museum participation through the lens of museums, by looking at which roles museums take in audience communication, why museums need to make people more aware of participation and what position is assigned to the participants and audiences in these participatory processes.

Our concern is not with audience motivations and what they gain from participating in public institutions. Rather, we take the normative position that institutions need to support participation. We assume that by looking at these different roles and areas where museums operate, we can better understand and support institutional motivations. Many of the discussions outlined here, centring on the museum institution, could be extended to other public institutions, which are opening themselves towards public participation. In doing so, this article will hopefully contribute to a larger debate on the changing roles of public knowledge institutions in contemporary society.

2. A short and non-comprehensive history of museums

The changing roles of the museum can be exemplified by briefly looking at museum history. As Hooper-Greenhill (1995) explains, the stories of the museum's past are complex and illustrate many conflicting developments. Early museums were cabinets of curiosities with public access for the 'respectable' as early as 530 BCE (McDonald, 2006). In this kind of museum, the owner and his staff opened the doors and displayed the collection for the selected few. Audiences for this kind of institution were relatively closed groups and the communicative potential of this kind of museum was more related to influence and affluence than to knowledge and education. Museums became public institutions only during the Renaissance. This brought the development of a variety

of functions, including socialising and educational aspects, collecting and also preserving and displaying the collections. The functions in the public institutions evolved, resulting in increasing complexity within the museum institutions themselves. Different functionalities of the museum became separated in different departments and thus distanced from each other.

This changed again in the second half of the 20th century when contemporary museums developed an increased coherence in relation to its various functionalities, represented by everyday cooperation at the organisational levels and by the overlapping and co-occurring of various processes. Museologist van Mensch (2005) justifies this change by suggesting that today's museum needs to overcome these departmental differences in order to start thinking in terms of the visitors to whom the services of the museum are oriented.

This was not the only change, for museums have been investigating notions of "ecomuseum" or community museum (de Varine, 1998), "dialogic museum" (Tchen, 1992) and paid attention to the changing relations between museums and communities (Karp, 1992) for over forty years (Pollock, 2007). Thus, they became implicated in what Giddens (1998) labelled the responsibility of public institutions to contribute to the democratisation of democracy. In this logic, public knowledge institutions, such as museums, need to become what van Mensch (2005) calls laboratories and meeting points for discussions and new initiatives. In other words the "sanctum-museum" needs to become a "laboratory-museum" (Mairesse, 2003), respectful of the expertise of the museum staff and its experts, but at the same time open to a continuous dialogue with the outside worlds that sometimes come to visit it. More specifically, a 21st century democratic and reflexive society needs museums that encourage society's publics to attribute meaning to the cultural objects that are on display (Hein, 2006).

At the same time, museums, together with many other institutions, face the challenge of competing for people's time. Entertainment and leisure seem to be universally acknowledged ways of organising this. One common way to achieve attention from audiences is the celebrification of museum objects. Rojek (2001) defines celebrification as the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere, a definition that can also be used for objects. Celebrification occurs in many arenas, and museums promote certain objects in their collection to the celebrity status in the hope of gaining more attention (and visitors). Van Mensch's (idea of a) museum is an institution that is very close to its audience; it can be said that the museum institu-

tion, hoping to gain visibility and connection with its audiences through the celebrification process in fact distances itself from its audiences by making them consumers-worshippers of glorious collections.

These above-mentioned processes occur simultaneously in the contemporary museum: the organisational division of labour (which has become more porous), the celebration of partnerships, and the glorification of objects. This also implies that in different museums, the attention for the audiences and their ways of dealing with the visitor differs. These also impact on the ways that museum institutions allow or disallow participation. In order to capture these diverse and overlapping practices, three fields are introduced, within which these practices are embedded: the cultural field, the economic field and the public field.

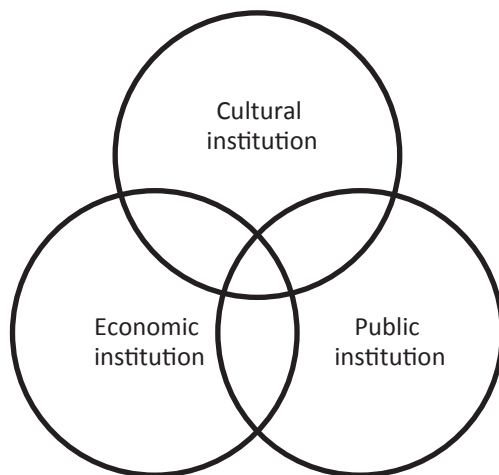
3. Museums in their contesting and intersecting fields

The notion of fields is borrowed from Bourdieu's idea (1998) that different fields carry different operational logics. The framework of fields helps to explain some of the contradictory and overlapping social processes museums seem to undergo. Museums operate on three key fields – cultural, economic and political, fulfilling three key institutional roles: being simultaneously a cultural, economic and political (public) institution (see Figure 1). The related roles, responsibilities and needs are often conflicting. Some of these role changes are emerging alongside the changes outlined in museum history, but as outlined in the discussion about museum history, none of the previous roles have completely disappeared. At the same time, the redefinition of the museum is on the agenda, and museum culture in general is seen in need of reorganisation (Imminga, 2010: 9). Our concerns are then how these different aspects relate to public participation and how they provide reasoning, motivation and support for participation.

As a *cultural institution*, museum roles include preserving, collecting, interpreting and mediating heritage to publics. As a *public institution*, museums are socialising and democratising agents and thus share the role of educational institutions. The third role comes from the museum as an institution operating within the *economic field*, where museums need to compete in the open market for clients' leisure and free time. Here museums need to collect revenues and attract visitors. Even if museums are publicly funded, there is an increasing pressure for additional revenue collecting. DiMaggio (1985) described – over 25 years ago and writing about the US – how museums face many contradictory

demands and that they often operate in paradoxical situations in which they are publicly funded and expected to produce public good and be 'non-profit', while also being expected to compete on the free market. Falk (2009) also places all leisure activities at the same level and describes how for the people, museums are just another place to go. At the same time museums today are increasingly seen as vital parts of the creative economy and their roles and functions are being acknowledged as actively negotiated and fluid. Lord (2007: 8) makes a similar argument when he writes that in order to benefit from the creative economy, museums need to be dialogic and truly open to diversity and interdisciplinary approaches, which would allow them to become cultural accelerators, forums and sites for debates. Otherwise, they might benefit in the cultural economy only through cultural tourism.

Figure 1: Key domains of the contemporary museum



The roles stemming from different fields also have commonalities and overlaps with each other; often the goals and means are shared. At the same time, there are still plenty of other cases where the roles can be conflicting, causing tensions within the museum and between the museum and its communities. In many cases, the interpretations of these institutional roles depend on professional museum workers as well as on their publics. Negotiation of the functions sometimes occurs in peaceful dialogue, whereas in other instances these roles can be sources of intense conflicts either within the museum or between museum and its many stakeholders. Elsewhere, we have discussed some of these conflicts regarding the perception of the roles of the museum in the context of the Estonian National Museum, where the conflicting roles are the interconnected

views of architects, museum professionals and the general public (Runnel, Tatsi and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2010). Enabling and increasing participation in museums can be one way of overcoming the differences of opinions, but many of the expectations are also there to hinder the possibilities of participation.

4. Museum is a voice is a message is a medium

In this article, we look at the museum as a site of participation for different audiences through the lens of the classical communication model of Who? Says What? To Whom? (Laswell, 1948; McQuail and Windahl, 1993). Using this basic communication model helps to structure the elements of participation in the museum context. The focus of the analysis will be framed by the fact that – inspired by Bell (1976) and Bourdieu (1998) – museums are seen to operate in three fields, namely the cultural, economic and political field. They thus carry three different but still co-existing and overlapping roles. The idea behind using these three fields (and they by no means cover all the activities of a contemporary museum) is to distinguish between the different operational logics of the different areas. In many instances the different fields can be either more or less dominating for a particular museum. The three fields, combined with the three topical questions will be used to discuss how museums can deal with increased societal expectations and needs to organise more (maximalist forms of) participation.

4.1 The museum as a communicator – positioning ‘Who?’

If the museum looks at audience participation from the position of the *cultural institution*, then the role of the museum in inviting people to participate may very much depend on the types and identities of the museum. Although one can argue that museums and other knowledge institutions, like libraries and archives, have much more in common than often assumed, then in some of these instances distinguishing between an ethnographic museum, a history museum, an art museum, a children’s museum, science museums, etc. may also be justified. The issue here is that the museum as a cultural institution may have different possibilities and different reasons to invite people to participate. Potential reasons for this cultural institution perspective are the possibility to have visitors add artefacts or stories to the collections, the opportunity to make more engaging exhibitions that are enriched by visitor input, and to involve the visitor in a process of joint cultural production. There are also limits imposed

upon participation, as museum workers sometimes define this process of cultural construction as the exclusive area of their expertise (Carpentier, 2011).

As an *economic institution*, the driving force for the museum would be making money/profit, and that would also be the key motivation for inviting people to participate, if museums decided to do so. Potentially, the cost of organising participation may be deemed too high. However, there might be different mechanisms by which participation would support the aim of money-making. It can be that participation helps to engage and attract visitors and make it more appealing to come to the museum and thus support marketing messages. It may be that with participatory activities, museums keep people longer on their premises and can profit from selling them refreshments. It can also be that participatory activities enable museums to add valuable items to the collections, making the museum generally more attractive. If carefully planned, participation and community involvement may also become important monetary resource through either helping to raise money for a common cause or by helping the museum to save money by outsourcing some of the activities to the community.

Museums as *public institutions* see their participatory role primarily through the need to empower people through participation. Here, civic engagement with the institution might mean that people leave the institution more knowledgeable, with a successful experience, with a sense of value and self-esteem (coming from the fact that a knowledge institution finds individual contributions valuable). The added meanings of participation might come from the interaction with experts, whereas in other instances it is the message from the museum saying that people outside museums carry some kind of valuable expertise the museum needs. Again, this role could potentially work against participation, as museums might decide to stick to the more traditional informational and educational definition of the public institution.

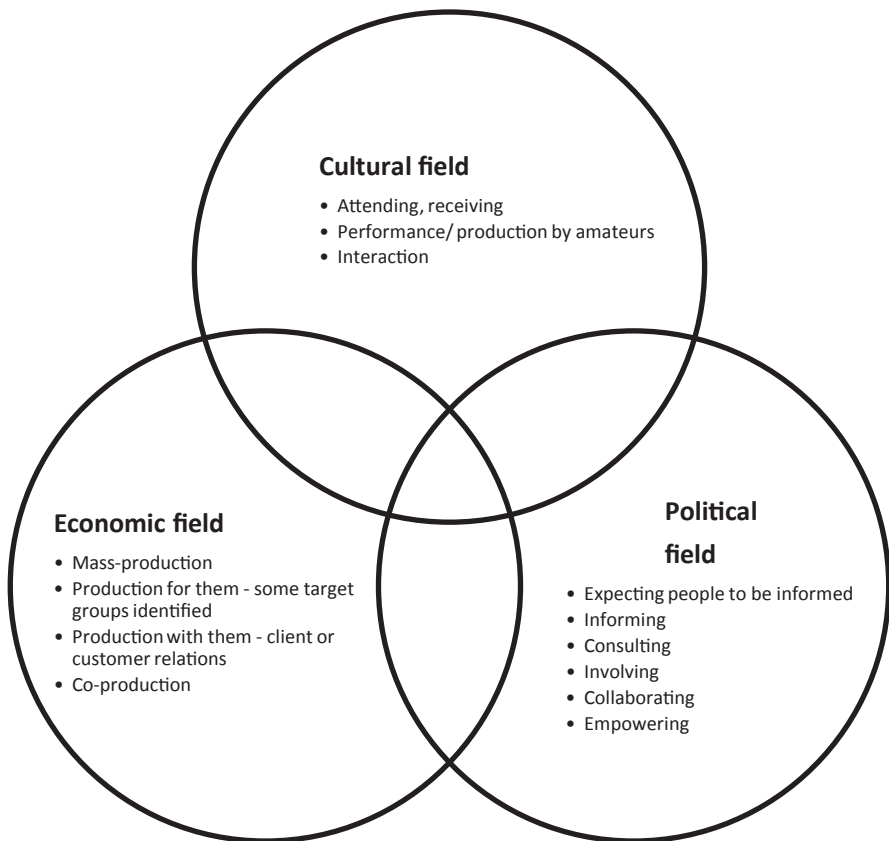
4.2 Participating in what?

In the introductory part of this article, we referred to the overarching aim of the museum to invite its visitors and users to participate within a changing societal context. The different roles of the museum also mean that different aspects of participation are relevant to each of these roles.

The definition of participation as it is manifested in different fields is outlined in the next schema (Figure 2). Each domain in which the museum operates is described by its distinctive understanding of participation and user en-

agement. For each field, the meaning and aim of participation differs. In each particular field the notion and understanding of participation is brought into the museum using the concepts and reasoning of those particular fields. Thus in order to understand museum participation, we need to analyse the field-based logic and motivations behind the participation. Borrowing from the ladders of participation approach (whilst maintaining a critical distance), we can distinguish more active and more passive relations to audiences.

Figure 2: Participation and audience relationships in the different fields of museum operations



We should be careful not to blindly copy the active/passive approach, as it is not without its problems. In the context of the *cultural institution*, Morrone in UNESCO's "Guidelines for cultural participation" (2006: 6–7) claims that it is difficult and unwise to attempt to reduce cultural participation to an active/passive scale. He proposes a distinction of attending/receiving; performing/

producing by amateurs; and interaction. For Morrone (2006: 7) interaction is a process “defined by continuous feedback of flow communication between external source and a receiving subject.” With this kind of definition of interaction he attempts to quantify and explain the experiences enabled by new digital media, distinguishing interaction from attending, and defining receiving as a third and distinctly different way of cultural participation. Similarly to Simon (2010), Morrone does not see these activities as in any way hierarchical, but rather as a way to distinguish three different media through which participation can happen. Here the element of control and power is not at all prominent in distinguishing the three levels of participation. However, Morrone (2006) clearly distinguishes the professional and amateur aspects of culture and limits the understanding of cultural participation to the amateur only. This implies that in the cultural field, Morrone takes the (debatable) stance that everyone is an active participant.

When moving to the next field, we can see that in *the economic discourse*, the term involvement is used, rather than participation. Participation here is more about attracting the public to be involved in the activities offered by the institution. This kind of relationship between the institution and its publics corresponds to the museum’s increasing demand to be interactive. In many cases, interactivity is seen as adding technological solutions or elements such as buttons, screens and multi-media to the exhibitions. The problem is that this can lead to deceptive interactivity, where a person is given the sense that he or she has control over the process, whereas the control in fact is pre-determined by others (by technological tools and the intentions behind them).

The understanding of participation in the *economic role* of the museum remains rather vague. While we can definitely see discussions of audience participation in the debates on marketing and organisational communication, there is little evidence of the systematic classification of participation in the whole economic field. The discussion in marketing has for the past 20 years moved from product placement towards customer relations and dialogue (e.g. Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 1991), and the new web 2.0 technologies have only reinforced that trend (see for instance Godin, 2008). In Figure 2, we list a number of potential economic relations, which could be seen as co-existing and emerging depending on various external or internal factors. In the first instance, the institution does not care for the market other than for its purchasing power. In the second, some target groups are specified and production is organised for them. The focus on the relationship with people is illustrated by

the idea of paying careful attention to customer or client needs, understanding the selected target groups carefully and almost co-producing with them as a result. Lastly, economic relationships can evolve into the co-production through mutual cooperation and partnership in the production process. These stages are also distinguished by different levels of control. In a way, this hierarchy mimics the IAP2 (2007) participation model in the economic field. However, while in the public field relinquishing control can be seen as part of the motivation (empowering individuals, the citizens, to take control), the economic field has different operational logics; here giving up control is not often an option at all. In the economic field, the ultimate key seems to be in understanding the customer and proposing mutually beneficial partnerships in order to maintain economic dominance and gain profits.

At the same time, creative economy discussions envision the people in the active role of being engaged and interested, while museums become passive sites for their creative forces. Here, dialogue and participation takes place within the community and the museum's role in these processes is yet to be understood.

When looking at *political-democratically motivated participation* in the museum, or the museum as a public institution, it makes sense to talk about stakeholder engagement or mobilisation where the aim is often to rally the visitor or users to some course of action. Here museums can become sites of public campaigns. The more subtle role of democratising democracy means that museums as public institutions also have a responsibility to educate people not only about museum contents, but also about participation as such. Hence, it might be relevant to discuss the distinctions of different ladder of participation approaches (e.g. OECD, 2001) and stress that although informing is not necessarily participatory, museums can and often do see civic education as part of their public role; informing can become a prerequisite to mutually beneficial participation.

Political participation has probably been analysed and described the most thoroughly. In Figure 2, we have summarised the propositions of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2, 2007) in order to approach political participation as providing information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment. These levels have a clear hierarchical structure. While each level is perceived as valuable, fulfilling specific goals, with its own specific instruments, the level of public impact is seen to be increasing with each subsequent stage. In the context of knowledge institutions, an additional level is described in this scheme: the expectation that the public will

be informed. This layer contains an expectation of a public institution that although the role and responsibility of an institution is to serve the public, the responsibility of looking for this public service is solely that of the recipient. This corresponds well to the traditional role of museum as collecting and preserving, where the value and quality of the collections are seen as important for future (potential) researchers and viewers as today's active citizens. This idea of maintaining collections for the future, as the paramount role of the museum, is in a way part of the museum that is seen as a public institution that excludes everyone – except professionals (and possibly the donators) – from its activities.

4.3 Naming thy partner – to whom does the message go?

In the museum context, audiences have a variety of names. While 'audience' comes from the field of communication studies, museums have also conceptualised the people on their premises. For instance, Peacock and Brownbill (2007) bring together concepts of 'audiences', 'users', 'visitors' and 'customers' (originating from four different paradigms) in an attempt to understand the users of online and offline museum environments. The museums have been looking at their 'people' from the perspective of friends, visitors, clients, users, participants, while new technologies and new economic relations also expand on the notion of prosumers (Toffler, 1980) and produsers (Burns, 2006).

As naming has its power, the naming of the people who come to the institutions can also empower or marginalise people. When museums looked at their visitors as 'the respectable' or as 'friends', and showing off items of curiosity was central to their communication, a fairly limited imbalance of power was inscribed in the interaction. The holder of the collections was superior to the viewers in many ways, although s/he was still dependant on the visitor's approval. In the original museums, superiority might have stemmed from interest, monetary value or societal position. When museums became institutions, superiority was tied to expertise on preservation or knowledge about the items (and their contexts). In the shift towards a more participatory museum, it should be acknowledged that participation will never be all-inclusive and equally empowering. As discussed above, the variety of approaches enables different levels of audience participation. Nielsen (2006) has proposed a 1:9:90 rule, claiming that on average, in large scale multi-user communities, most participants do not participate at all. Participants can be divided into regular and active participants on the one hand, and into those who engage themselves from time to time on the other. In the museum context, this means that only some visitors can

be potential participants in museum activities. When the modern laboratory-museum is looking for partners, they need to take into account the fact that, according to Simon (2010), participation has to be valuable for the institution, the participants, and also the 'lurkers'. Thus when we discuss participants, the museum, the actively engaged group of people and others all need to be satisfied and supported.

Here, again, the different fields raise different expectations regarding participants. As discussed above, *cultural participation*, as defined by Morrone (2006), expects reception, participation through amateur production and interaction through new technologies. Moreover, the roles of the participants can also include those of informant, expert, contributor or creator of other kinds of content.

Operating in *the economic field* means that museum institutions have had to start understanding their audiences better. Through learning more about its target groups and customers for marketing purposes, museums also foster their participation in the other (cultural and political) fields. The economic field in most of the cases defines customers or consumers in a fairly passive way. Here the customers are seen as a source of knowledge in terms of 'what they want'. When we look at the concept of creative industries, the understanding of museums in the economic field changes again. Here museums are seen as the site for active, engaged and critical individuals who are inspired by the museum for their cultural work. However, there is less focus on the museum taking an active role in these dialogues.

The role of the museum as *public institution* offers more possibilities and also raises more expectations. This role implies that active engagement can be situated on many different levels. For museums, people who see the museum as a resource, people who act as quality contributors, or people who are partners in collaborative projects are all important. Of course, we should keep in mind that it is impossible to have all functions of the museum realised through co-creative or hosted activities, as this would be too resource-consuming for any institution.

Although contributing, and possibly also collaborating, can be individual, participation can also have a more social dimension when a group of individuals works together with an institution. Arguably, only a group of people or a community with mutual awareness and an existing network can be a partner to the institution with the potential capacity to share power. Museums can look at the participation as a possibility to foster the birth of such community

or network. Simon (2010) proposes five stages of participation,³ which range from 'me' (where an individual consumes content) to 'we' (where individuals engage with each other and the institution becomes a social place full of enriching and challenging encounters). The stages in between help to link the visitor to the content, and through the content also to other visitors. Simon (2010) sees these stages as progressive and proposes that for the stage 5 experience, the groundwork of the other four stages is needed. While today's museums focus mainly on stages 1 and 2, the incorporation of other stages makes the participation more valuable for both the individuals and institution. When critically examining the IAP2 participation model (2007), one can see that more public involvement becomes possible only when audiences start working together rather than remaining in a one-on-one interaction with the institution. In those instances, the institution also has more control over the agenda and outcome of the participation. Organised or networked communities have more chances to co-create or to work with the museum in a partnership, as the interaction is less dependent on individual capabilities. Many of the more complex participatory initiatives demand more resources from the participants, and networks or community groups are better able to fulfil these demands.

5. By way of conclusion

In this article, the classic model of communication of Who says What to Whom has been used in combination with three societal fields to map audience participation in the world of museums. It is important to see that the different fields of operation generate different demands for museums and the praxis of participation depends very much on the situatedness in these particular fields. The museum has always been a medium for many different messages and through the logics of participation the wider circles of people are included as communicators. Traditionally, museums narrate the stories of their owners – either private or public – although through the organisation of these participatory practices, museums can take a step towards diversifying these voices. The collections and exhibitions need to be sites of discussions in order to foster the civic skills of the audience, but also to fulfil the expectations of the cultural economy.

It is important to understand that participation in museums needs to be understood through the diversity of approaches – often there are manifold choices

³ Simon terms this social participation, a term which does not receive too much prominence here in order to avoid confusion.

to be made, and the increased number of active participants or contributors can mean that the contributions become more superficial, whereas collaboration or partnership can only occur with limited numbers of individuals. Again, this is a reason to place more emphasis on the organised or networked audience. Whatever participatory structure is preferred, as long as the repertoires of the participation are diverse, the participatory aims of the museum can be seen to be fulfilled.

This article focused on museums as institutions in public ownership. We have not paid much explicit attention to privately owned museums and their particularities. However, it is clear that privately owned institutions face the same struggles and often their need for participation is even greater because of their necessity to raise funds and community support for their survival. The museums have been and will continue to be media for many messages and this article has hopefully contributed to understanding the many perspectives museums can take towards participation.

It is vital that museums understand that unless they open many of their functions to the public, they are not able to fulfil the obligations/expectations placed on them. We have spent little time on discussing the socialising functions of museums, although these can only be fulfilled if society sees the museum as a valuable resource and as part of its everyday activities. The experiences of participation improve when we look at the participants not as isolated individuals but as a collective, interrelated entity, and when we foster their interactions. Museums need to be sites for community building and networking.

In many ways, museums – as reflexive knowledge institutions – can play a leading role by introducing and socialising audiences to the ideas of participation. This also means that the traditional understanding of museums as sanctums of truthful memories needs to be abandoned, as the more post-modern society needs reflexive citizens. Reflexivity comes only with practice, when existing knowledges are questioned and analysed. Instead of providing visitors with ready-made and perfect answers, museums can use participation as a way to entice and support critical thinking. In this fashion museums have increasingly played a role in introducing literacy skills to the citizens of today.

It would be wrong to state that we have to invent new kinds of audience relations for the museum. In a way it would suffice simply to return to the initial understanding of museum audiences as friends, strengthened by the current understanding of audiences as partners in the experimental knowledge laboratories in order to construct the approach that we need to bring to museums.

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A critical analysis of two audience prototypes and their participatory dimensions¹

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Summary: This article discusses how the concept of audience theory has been developed within two basic intellectual traditions, resulting in two basic prototypes. On one side, there is the trajectory of the “mass audience” that was created and developed parallel with the emergence of the media of mass communication. The mass audience is regarded as a multi-layer collectivity, residing at the end of a successive linear communication process – sender, channel, message, receiver and effects. In this one-way communication model, the audience is primarily the receiving structure, with little or no opportunity for feedback and participation in the communication process.

The other prototype is linked to the development of new digital media and the internet; here the public is theoretically considered as “cross media” and active. The audience of new media is seen as a heterogeneous and structural collective in the communication model that characterizes the flow of information “many to many”. This prototype attributes to the new, active audiences or users unlimited power to participate and shape the communication processes.

We discuss features of the two prototypes, including media usage, media access, information resources, time engagement and functions derived from media use. The most important feature we take up, however, is participation. We point out the problems and limitations of both prototypes in this regard. On the one hand the study of audiences has long been rooted in the concept of mass audience and limited with its primal orientation towards the effects of mass communication, while on the other hand, the emerging prototype 2 is all too easily granted participatory capacities, especially concerning the public sphere. Therefore, the theorists of new and old media must step outside the prevailing postulates and consider the audience beyond the two prevailing prototypes in order to further deepen our knowledge and understanding of contemporary audiences and their participation.

Key words: mass audience, active audience, participation, media convergence, new media, virtual communication

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1. Introduction

In our thinking about the information society, whose beginning can easily be traced back to the early 19th century, we as scholars tend to ignore the mass media landscape, as it has been perceived in the past decades. In slipstream of this “novel” way of thinking, the concept of audience becomes affected as well. The convergence of mass media with information and telecommunication technologies, which has been labelled the third significant media-morphosis in human history³, goes hand in hand with a structural transformation of the audience, which in turn is captured in a new way of conceptualizing the audience. In this era of overall commercialization of the mass media systems, it was the audience that finally stepped out of the shadow of money. In Fidler’s (2004: 176) words: “Almost through the entire twentieth century, media and advertisers had a mutually useful and interdependent relation. However, because the audience of mass media has become more fragmented and puzzling, capability of newspapers, magazines, television and radio to bring advertisers in touch with potential consumers went down.” New communication forms are enabled by the ever-rising number of digital gadgets that serve as means of information, entertainment and education. Through their usage citizens spontaneously form new collectivities, for which the old label of “mass” is becoming inapplicable.

Yet, the inability of the concept of the mass media audience to capture all audience practices should not be seen as a point of rupture in media history, leading to the erasure of this concept, but rather as a process of deconstruction with an indefinite end (see Webster and Phalen, 1997). As long as mass media survive, some oases of mass audience will survive along with new media participatory and interactive audiences (or “users”). Moreover, the new ways of thinking about the audience should not necessarily be seen as unique and all-encompassing. Both the concept of the mass media audience and the concept of the digital media audience have their flaws and limitations, in that each excludes a variety of practices. This article aims to look at these two audience models, in order to show the exclusions that characterize both of them, with a special focus on how they deal with the concept of participation. This dichotomous, archetypical approach, with a focus on conceptual reductions will allow us to emphasize a co-presence of both models, in which each can strengthen the other to better understand the wide variety of audience practices.

³ Two preceding media-morphoses were mainly associated with the language procession in written and broadcasting media technologies (Fidler, 2004).

2. Two audience prototypes

In this article we will thus start from two main prototypes of the audience, which have played, and still play, a dominant role in thinking the audience. The concept of the “prototype” will be used as a means of categorization, where some elements of a category (of audience) are more central than others. Prototypes or proto-instances combine the most representative attributes of a category that serve as benchmarks, knowing that they simplify and reduce. What will be labelled as audience prototype 1 refers to the mass audience. New collectives associated with the use of digital media will be referred to as the Type 2 audience. Both theoretical concepts will be discussed separately, and then summarized in Table 1, at the end of this discussion.

2.1 Audience prototype 1

In the frame of his sociological discussion about mass, the public and the public opinion, Blumer (1946) introduced the concept of mass audience. The mass audience was portrayed as a multi-layer collective that existed at the end of the linear, sequential process of mass communication (sender, channel, message, receiver, effects). These layers were structured according to their relatively stable socio-demographic attributes, such as age, sex, education, level of income, profession, etc. On the one hand, it has been noted that some of these common qualities could predict the audience’s choice of media and its products. For example, men read more newspapers than women, youth visits cinema more frequently than older generations, and the typical audience of TV serials is female. On the other hand, the mass audience was steadily divided into subgroups (readers, listeners, viewers), preferring different mass media, separately or combined. In this sense, both social and technological factors were ferment in the field of information. As McQuail (1997: 2) wrote: “Audiences are both a product of social context (which leads to shared cultural interests, understandings, and information needs) and a response to a particular pattern of media provision.”

Apart from being linear, the described mass communication process is characterized as a one-to-many model of communication. This model left little space for the audience to participate in mass communication, with the exception of minimal feedback loops. Occasional, measurable re-actions from the audience were taken in consideration as a form of participation. Indirectly, ratings of listeners and viewers, and circulation figures of newspapers were also

regarded as important feedback for media businesses. In addition, there were some very limited channels in mass communication for the audience to give a direct response: letters to the editors, telephone calls to broadcasters, complaints to ombudsmen, fans' organizations, etc.

A more significant participative capacity was assigned to the public, a different citizens' collective. To quote McQuail (1997: 6 – emphasis in original) again: “The ‘*public*’ is a product of modern conditions, especially when seen as an element in the institution of democratic politics. It consists of a set of people who engage freely in the discussion of some public issue, with a view to advancing some opinion, interest, policy, or proposal for change.” Although the public is structurally different from the audience (Dewey, 1927), the public was (in the early fifties) accepted as the subject of public opinion. The apparent lack of will, tools and capability to participate *continuously* in public discussions, e.g. the public sphere, made citizens a sort of problematic subject from the theoretical horizons of public opinion, which in turn justified the re-use of the attribute of mass (audience), whose political will was only expressed through the logics of voting combined with private debating. In addition (and much later), participation that was organized “for” the mass audience often remained minimal (Carpentier 2011), and can even often be described as pseudo-participation (as for instance in many Reality TV programmes).

Within this model the audience becomes articulated as passive, and often seen as focussed on leisure, gratification and escape. Functionalist analysts (see Wright, 1974) focused on the following (pre-defined) social needs: orientation, cohesion, cultural continuity, social control and public information. Regarding individuals, functionalists have added personal guidance, relaxation, information, adjustment and identity-building to their inventory. Age was frequently treated as an attribute of audience prototype 1, since the results of many empirical researches showed that heavy use of media, especially TV, was associated with late age and social marginalization. While searching for media effects many related phenomena were elucidated. Spending its leisure time by, basically, consuming mass media content, the audience prototype 1 is perceived as open to the risk of becoming “psychologically illiterate”. As behaviourists suggested, this was one of the pivotal mass media “effects”. Even functionalists treated such a risk as unacceptable, calling it a “narcotizing dysfunction” of the mass media (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1975). Moreover, this was combined with the threat of psychological indifference and alienation. What audience members perceived as gratifying experiences was redefined as “escapism”. As Katz and Foulkes (1962:

380) wrote: “Alienation may mean the feeling of powerlessness or meaninglessness, or the feeling of ideological or social isolation. Alienation produces the desire to escape, a desire which the mass media are presumed to be instrumental in satisfying.” After its development in the late 1930s, versions of this type of critical attitude enshrined in the first audience prototype – deriving from a range of theoretical standpoints – are still current, as Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2009: 207) argue: “Along these lines, critical scholars such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1947), Postman (1985), have voiced severe concerns about mass audiences alienation to be the drive for escapist media use indulging in light-hearted content while not facing and avoiding the issues of actual importance.”

2.2 Problems with the audience prototype 1

Lack of participation

One of the main problems of the audience prototype 1 is that the audience members were seen as the “victims of control” exercised by mass media. Various schools of thought in communication theory attribute different origins of control over the media content and related audience cognitions (see for example Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998). In USA, this approach has had the status of “dominant paradigm” for a long time (Hardt, 1992). Although people are seen as free to avoid the views and values expressed through the media, there is an emphasis on the difficulties they have to resist temptation, because communicators are generally perceived as subjects with more information, better knowledge and more expertise. This control over resources is manifested through the structure of mass media ownership and production, by performing persuasive forms of political and economic marketing, as well as by communication strategies of the political actors insisting on their responsibility and right to make political decisions. Again, this kind of social power is distributed unequally. And therefore, in mass audience theories, the power of the communicators over the audience, seen as an individual member or as a collective, has always been taken for granted.

Despite this reductionist and problematic framework that ignored audience activity and pleasure, we should recognize that audience participation was indeed structurally hampered in (and by) audience prototype 1. This is because the social distance between the audience and mass media production was more considerable than the possible needs and channels for feedback. Content participation was limited by the predominance of gatekeepers, and the engagement of audience prototype 1 in media systems and political life turned

out to have more disappointing than encouraging outcomes: “Public audience experience normally involves some degree of identification with a wider social grouping – whether defined as fans, or citizens, or a local population or a taste culture.” (McQuail, 1997: 91) There are exceptions, though, from the previously mentioned public roles. As Hasebrink et al. (2007: 13) suggest, these other forms of potential participation of mass audience include, for example, viewers’ organizations related to political lobby/protection of minors/media, pluralism/cultural diversity; consumer’s organizations; and initiatives related to media education. However, these forms of participation for the most part have not been extensive, and possible identifications with such public roles have not significantly strengthened the position of the mass audience *vis à vis* the mass media.

Ignorance of local/community media

Often excluded from the prototype 1 audience were the groups that have some kind of local or community awareness and a sense of belonging. These collectivities usually gather around local or community media, either broadcast or printed (and recently complemented by online versions). These segments of the (mass) audience were partly able to escape low interactivity with the public communicators and high social control by “hidden communicators” involved within mainstream media, since the social distance between the audience and the local/community media turned out to be rather small and the local audience’s assessment of what is of “news value” was close to the value perceived by the local/community media ‘gate keepers’. In addition, local/community media are spaces where, as Kean (1995: 378) suggests, “micro public spheres” can emerge. His hope was that the local media could serve small, relaxed public spheres, and that these media in turn could be supported by citizens, both financially and by volunteering in program-making and management. A similar argument was made by Dahlgren and Sparks (1991: 15): “Perhaps this is the first sign of a new, two-tiered public sphere, where the alternative movement media, with their stronger link to the experiences and interpretations of the everyday lives of their members, have a growing political capacity to transmit their versions of political reality to the dominant media. This serves both to diffuse and legitimate a wider array of viewpoints and information.” Local/community media grew thanks to the low price of communication technologies, especially in Europe (but also in Latin America and Africa). Thus, the participation of local/community mass media audience members could be developed quickly

and even have some influence upon the local political field. However, analytic enthusiasm should be tempered, as local/community audiences, media and publics exert low influence on making the most important top political decisions. They are additionally weakened by the fact that general mass audience neglects these media, based on (mainstream media) arguments related to their tiny circulation and rating figures.

Lack of attention for fans

Inventories of mass audience “participation”, as discussed above, have missed another important subgroup. Fans, as a subgroup of the mass audience, were often perceived and theorized with a negative connotation. They were seen as being enthralled by the modern celebrity system via the mass media, with one-sidedness and a non-political passion ascribed to them as main attributes. Their consumption behaviour was described as “deviant”, because of the creation of a strong para-social interaction with the celebrity figures as the object of fandom. Treated as cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers, they were presumed to act as the hysterical members of a crowd, associated with violence and irrational mob behaviour (Jensen, 1992: 10). A number of authors contested this negative concept of fan culture, suggesting that fans were consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who also participate (see Fiske, 1989; Jenkins, 1992; Kloet and van Zoonen, 2007).

One nuance here is that the fan subgroups of the mass audience are nowadays perceived less negatively. It is unclear whether this is the consequence of a better insight, or the consequence of freer and easier access to the objects of fandom. We can only agree with Hills’ (2002: 44) assessment about the fans’ identity as comprising “[...] in one sense ‘ideal consumers’ since their consumption habits can be very highly predicted by the culture industry, and are likely to remain stable. But fans also express anti-commercial beliefs (or ideologies, we might say, since these beliefs are not entirely in alignment with the cultural situation in which fans find themselves).”

Fans were important, as they also used to be the only self-organized collective within the mass audience. Of course, they maintained their internal organization by means and channels of interpersonal communication. Fans’ production is *enunciative* (Fiske, 1989: 34) in a sense that the meanings produced inside a specific fan group are shared within a face-to-face or oral culture and articulated in a semi-public form. The generation and circulation of such meanings and commodities did not necessarily remain detached from the local

community, since the fan production circulates inside the community, and can be categorized as “narrowcasting”, as opposed to “broadcasting”. Fandom constitutes an alternative social community, based on communication with others, often scattered across a broad geographic area, and who may never – or only occasionally – meet face to face, but are sharing a common sense of identity and interests.

2.3 Audience prototype 2

Computer networks, mobile phones, e-book readers, etc., have mutated into a new kind of media, which will be referred to as digital media in this article. These changes also impact on the definition of the audience: “These media differ radically from traditional ones in several respects: entry is cheap, the number of practitioners is limitless, geography is not a barrier, communication is a two way process and the audience have the power in terms of how and when content is consumed.” (Breen, 2007: 55) Therefore, social communication processes are not seen as linear and sequential any more, and the focus is placed on the many-to-many model of communication.

In audience prototype 2, there is a structural shift (see Carpentier, 2009) towards an active audience that is active in a material way, deploying a variety of activities (and not exclusively actively interpreting mainstream media texts). Quite often the concept of the user is used to signify this change. As Cover (2006: 149) says, digital media allow: “[...] not only the recording and re-recording of the text and some ability to distribute it independently, but to re-sequence the text, re-order it, change its quality, and so on, all in accord with the imaginative requirements of the audience-user.” The roles of the communicator and the recipient in the information flow and their interaction are seen as much more intertwined within virtual communication of digital media. Everyone is seen to be enabled to simultaneously exercise the freedom of speech and the freedom to be a reader, listener, viewer or even all of these at once. Audiences have gained sophisticated tools to intervene in all kinds of communicated “texts”, for instance acting as citizen journalists or producing user-generated content.

With audience prototype 2, the existing social networks, blogs, forums, interactive portals, etc., testify that a new social context – we are accustomed to calling it the “information society” – has emerged. It is claimed that communication technology is setting people back to the “life world”, making it more a reality than a utopian oasis. The opportunity to communicate freely

opens up the potential public spheres and public discourse, providing an easy access as well as the impetus for the shaping of new social movements, for commenting and opposing governmental decisions, and for practicing the original forms of political activities, although they are often also seen as moving away from institutionalized politics. Since the audience prototype 2 belongs to different interpretative virtual communities, it has a better chance to escape the manipulation and to delegitimize discourses controlled by the carriers of social power. They can contribute to the formation of the public opinion, as an actor in social issues identification and solution, as a critic of a political order or as a resource for protest. The active audience also intervenes directly in public discourse. The audience is in command of the channels that are capable of sending back, instantly and easily, opinions and attitudes to the mass and digital media. The audience's ability to comment on official information is one of tools for an alternative re-framing of the news expressed in the "ruling language", or to open up the hidden aspects of messages in the news. If citizens communicate through the digital networks, they engender new phenomena such as the "partial public" or the "counter-public". In the first case, social movements with little resources use the new technologies to make their issues visible and to gain the attention of the policy makers, mass media and other citizens. In the latter case, citizens who participate in the network communication give expression through discourse, symbols and actions that challenge, and sometimes deconstruct, the established public beliefs supported by the political actors and the mainstream media.

Digital media audiences are not only seen to be active in a wide variety of virtual communities using a similarly wide variety of opportunities for self-presentation, but their capacity to perform "cultural jamming" is also emphasized. Thus, audience prototype 2 is not only seen as capable of freely decoding of cultural products on offered, but also of making, re-shaping or destroying the official cultural matrix (Dahlgren, 2008: 197). The simultaneous existence, appearance and disappearance of sub-cultural movements and contents are not comparable with the phenomena from the period of mass communication and mass audience. What used to be ignored and considered as the "alternative" for the mainstream media is now articulated as the predominant form of the postmodern digital culture. This phenomenon is referred to as *the mash-up cultures* by Sonvilla-Weis (2010), *the remix culture* by Castells (2009), and *the convergence culture* by Jenkins (2006). As Carpentier (2011: 112) stresses: "This line of arguments emphasizes the processes of collective action and community

building that support the digital participatory culture bypassing the traditional organizational structures.”

Age still plays a crucial role in the construction of audience prototype 2, as is exemplified by the generational discourse of the digital or internet natives. Compared to these internet natives, i.e. the youth, the so-called internet migrants, who usually overlap with a great deal of core mass media audience, and the elderly become marginalized. An illustration can be found in van Dijk (2007: 186) “They comprise a quarter to a third of the population of (even) the most advanced high-tech societies. Increasingly, they become equal to the lowest social classes [...] At this stage of new media diffusion, the unconnected still contain a large proportion of elderly people, some of higher social class, but isolated socially and without access to computers and Internet.”

2.4 Problems with the audience prototype 2

Gaps in the theoretical framework

The internet revolution opened a new angle on the audience, which now is often treated as an “active audience”. This concept is not entirely new and was not coined solely in relation to Web 2.0. The active/passive audience dispute has its roots in the tradition of mass media audience research too. The emergence of the active audience concept can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, with Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1980) and Fiske’s (1987) emphasis on subversive audience power. This period was marked as the shift from passive audience theory towards the active one with the power to interpret media messages in line with specific individual, social and cultural conditions (see Carpentier, 2011; Press and Livingstone, 2006; Williams, 2003; Biocca, 1998). The active audience is engaged in the signification and interpretation of the media messages, doing it independently from the intentions of the message-senders. The core of the active audience engagement is almost completely different from the mass audience activities discussed above. As a general phenomenon, it is well summarized by Press and Livingstone (2006: 178): “The active audience research is significant because it challenged the grand claims about dominant ideology, media imperialism and media power [...] posing ideas of heterogeneity against homogenization, of active against passive, of resistant against exploited audiences.” Many of these propositions, used in the academic and common discourse, celebrate deliberation of the audience with the upheaval of the new digital media.

However, if we compare the pace of innovations in the field of digital media with the theoretical conceptualization of new audiences, theory is apparently lagging behind. Certain kinds of theoretical bias in favour of the digital media can mask shortcomings of the audience prototype 2: “The discourse of novelty also feeds into the technological-determinist model, assuming that specific media technologies are by definition more participatory than others.” (Carpentier, 2009: 410) One solution is to look at audience activities from the traditionally established perspectives: the individual, the medium and the culture.

At the *individual* level, audience prototype 2 is seen to get a bigger chance for access and choice. The precondition is, of course, the possession of the technological means and computer literacy. The initial enthusiastic discourse about the audience prototype 2’s access and choice was significantly revised by the digital divide debate. The initial arguments about opening up the public arena for every individual (to actively and freely participate in, raise issues and personal standpoints, ...) were contrasted with the serious constraints to participation posed by: age, race, class, social status and gender. If we take the *media* perspective, then we should mention the emphasis on the access of audiences to the process of message production. Here audience prototype 2 is seen to overlap with what was presumed to be exclusively the job of professionals, because as “citizen journalists”, they are alternative sources of information, entertainment and education. This way, the participative audience challenges the power of classic media organizations, but often the exact nature of the new relationship between audiences and professionals remains unclear, and the differences between audience prototype 2 and media professionals are not elaborated upon. From the perspective of *culture*, the rise of the interactive production of symbols is seen as enabling altered patterns of expression and thought. However, the endurance of such new cultures is questionable. For example, some pieces of digital cultural products exist only as long as the screens and lasers are switched on. Their audiences also exist only until the new cultural deed disappears, after the switch is turned off, unless it is being recorded in some way.

Problems with participation

In the context of participation, we have to shed some light on the forms and levels of its aggregation, or rather on its potential to form socially relevant groups. Conversation became the keyword of communication in the new social context, bringing along the continual discussions about the de-massification of the audience. The audience is not seen as “mass” any more, but rather as a set

of diversified, self-structured collectivities that are in a flux. Nowadays, the high participation of the audience prototype 2 is being taken for granted. Ironically, in the light of audience theory and research development, the question for contemporary scholars should be: is an inactive or passive audience even possible in the expansive universe of Web 2.0?

Higher levels of participation (not interaction) is still more a theoretical expectation than an embodied practice, and the virtual communities are not primarily used for deliberation, or for pursuing political or other interests and goals, but rather for the self-representation. Until now, civil society actors have been able to use the interactive possibilities of the communication network, “[...] only on a relatively small scale. Because of the lack of a narrow filter of mass media, the network seems to be more interesting as a medium of self-presentation and taking public positions, rather than as a medium for the exchange of views and discourse.” (Grunwald et al., 2006: 229) Thus, as long as audience prototype 2 mistakes clicking the “like” button with participation/action, the changes in the given social order will remain rather small.

Admittedly, individual activism⁴ within audience prototype 2 is seen to undermine (to a certain extent) the power of political and economic institutions dependent on citizen support (in terms of votes, attention and consumption). But again, this model is not without problems: hack-tivism is a private and anonymous endeavour, and therefore carries low potential for mass participation. The broader version, electronic civic disobedience, does not seem to impress contemporary power centres that there is a genuine risk of their functions to be taken over by citizens through new forms of participation, or, that their work could be blocked by new forms of social resistance of people sitting in private hubs of social networks and the blogosphere. Still, political institutions did not change significantly, because deep restructuring in political field did not happen (yet) (with the exception of the crash of the global neoliberal ideology). Information highways, in the metaphorical sense, are not one-way streets, but to a great extent, it remains the same in real life. In critical situations, politicians, administrations, and companies could simply unplug from the virtual communication and ignore the voices coming from the invisible social space.

⁴ Since the Sixties, petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, blockades and other forms of “digital civic disobedience” become unconventional, permanent factors of the political repertoire of Western representative democracies. A more creative, more expensive, and thus less widespread way of protesting is cloning or “defacement” of enemies’ web pages. There is also the possibility to create the so-called “fake Web sites”, where some famous powerful institutions (such <http://www.gatt.org>) are hiding under another domain name or stolen domain names, such as <http://www.worldbunk.org> or <http://www.whirledbank.org> that spread the bad word about an organization, jeopardizing their reputation.

Problems with power distribution

As Jenkins (2006: 3) argues, some consumers have greater abilities than others to participate in the emerging information society: "Not all participants are created equal. Corporations – and even individuals within corporate media – exert greater power than any individual consumer or even the aggregate of consumers." Table 1 offers a summary comparison of the two audience prototypes, and one can readily see how prototype 2 correlates with the digitalization of industry and the reduced need for manpower. In many post-industrial countries young generations (e.g. internet natives and typical cross-audience members) are desperately searching for employment. Power relations in the new communication models must not be overseen, although only few researchers trace the "effects" within the active audience. Large corporations, media giants and advertising moguls did not die out. In line with the political economists' thesis, they are still manufacturing consumers for their products, using new digital media to their advantage. The "netizens" still have to buy computers, gadgets and software, and have to pay for maintenance and internet connections, if they are eager to participate.

The majority of global social networks (like Facebook) are oriented towards making profit, and are extracting value from the free accumulation of participants' personal data and social relations. From this perspective it is true that: "profit participatory platforms are not simply about facilitating regimes of meaning production and circulation, but about inviting users to express themselves in order to produce a large amount of free labour or marketable data." (Langlois, 2011: 4) As long as the new digital media are satisfying the same core human needs, or as long as audiences gain the same gratifications from the digital media, their gratifications will become "resources" for profit making power agents. Of course, cross-media audiences still use new media for old purposes: voters to make free and rational choices; consumers to acquire goods and services quickly and comfortably; citizens to get benefits from state and social services, etc. Also politicians, PR campaigners and advertisers count on the new media, predominantly as a new instrument to improve their traditional jobs.

Moreover, the content of new media in virtual communication is perceived as largely free of the gatekeepers. The reality, however, is decidedly otherwise: There are indeed gatekeepers, and these recent ones are far more dangerous, for they have an impersonal shape and name – the search engine. Despite of the apparent formal conformity at work when searching for new knowledge,

these engines can mislead users in a projected direction. As Gerhards and Schafer (2010: 156) explains: “This means that although a large variety of the actors and different standpoints can be found somewhere on the internet, and although the NGO websites, blogs, discussion boards, etc. will provide practically every conceivable viewpoint on their respective website, it is unlikely that the average user will find this content. This is due to the fact that only the respective URL, not a search engine, would bring the user to an alternative page.” Thanks to the high number of links and the frequent visits, the websites of political and economic power-holders appear at the top of the search engines’ lists. Therefore, the average user of the internet faces difficulties in searching for alternative sources of information and argumentation in the electronic jungle. Apart from one-to-many communication models, which remain on the internet websites, the developing many-to-one models (Wikipedia for example) and many-to-many (conversation) models are gradually saturating the virtual communication, provoking an information overload. Paradoxically, the information “overload” will diminish the diversity of public discourses, if the member of audience prototype 2 does not have enough time and dedication to invest in searching the Web 2.0 themselves.

The forgotten risk of escapism

Although the passivity of the audience prototype 1 was associated with a long-time exposure to mass media (especially TV), leading to alienation and escapism, the same risk must not be ignored as far as the audience prototype 2 is concerned. In this sense, audience prototype 2 hides the possibility that a new kind of escapism (equal to the previously described narcotizing dysfunction of mass media) could reappear among dwellers of the network society, composed of numerous virtual communities and spaces. Therefore, the early warning about non-participation posed by Fidler (2004: 255) should be supported: “Ever rising capability to filter and direct information, in order to satisfy ever smaller interests alongside with possibility to ‘live’ in self created virtual communities – and to avoid real involvement in community and its responsibilities – are serious causes for worry.”

Data about popular social networks (Facebook, Linked-in, MySpace, etc.) point out that audience prototype 2 uses them not only to get involved in the community, but rather as a means of self-representation and self-socialization. It is, therefore, still plausible to talk about escapism. Statistically, every Face-

book user has an average of 130 “friends”⁵. It is hard for a person to interact with so many people in real life, let alone to befriend them. This indicates the risk of “empty interaction”, taking in account how much time and content must be invested in a social network. This kind of the social network search and exchange is equally time-consuming as the “narcotizing” television watching. Furthermore, if many of the “friends” inside the networks have never met in real life (and probably never will), this practice fits partly to the old thesis about mass audience escapism (as well as representing an instance of pseudo-accumulation of social capital). And we must not forget that Second Life, and similar platforms, that are highly interactive, free and participatory, but yet created on the premise of the made up identity (creatively re-invented self) and on the creation of virtual life and life-like relations.

2.5 A summary of the two audience prototypes

The authors hope that the article was clear enough to indicate the comparative differences between old and contemporary, mass and active, type 1 and type 2 audiences. This juxtaposition was aimed to serve as a platform, on which our approach to participation of both kinds of audiences is based, and that will, hopefully, provide some relevant insights. Instead of a discussion of theoretical research results, we suggest a systemized overview in the form of a table. It starts with a set of social attributes, by which audience models clearly split into two prototypes that encompass different ways (and problems) of audience participation.

Table 1: Two audience prototypes

Attributes	AUDIENCE PROTOTYPE 1	AUDIENCE PROTOTYPE 2
Age	Older	Younger
Socio-economic status	Low	Better off, perspective poor
Cross-media use tradition	Poor	Short, but intensive
Access to new media	Low, computer illiteracy	High, computer literate, use of different digital platforms
Information sources	Traditional mass media, basically TV	New digital platforms
Time engagement	High, “heavy” use of mass media	High use of social networks and internet facilities

⁵ Facebook Statistics <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>.

Attributes	AUDIENCE PROTOTYPE 1	AUDIENCE PROTOTYPE 2
Functions derived from media use	Leisure, gratifications; escape from reality	Socializing in virtual communities; self-presentation; individual activism
Treated by the media as	Consumers, spectators and fans	Users, content makers and discussants
Modalities of participation	AUDIENCE PROTOTYPE 1	AUDIENCE PROTOTYPE 2
Expressing political will	Voting	Not very keen to vote, a cynical attitude to politics in general
Political participation	Public protesting through petitions and rallies	Protesting in social networks, disseminating and sending of e-petitions, spamming; defacing
Civil engagement	Private debating about meanings in public discourse	Public negotiating about meanings in public discourse on blogs and forums
Audience interactivity	Sending feedback to mass media	Creating user generated contents that partly enter into media and partly circulates through the net as citizen journalism
Audience participation	Pseudo participation in “reality shows” and other interactive media formats	Participation in socio-political activities of virtual communities, challenging, denying and confirming public discourse by citizen journalism
Public sphere engagement	Forming of “micro public spheres” around local mass media	Forming plenty but temporary interpretative and meaning sharing public spheres around new media

3. Conclusion

This article provides an overview of the audience theory development, anchored in the two dominant models of the media audiences: the mass audience (referred to as audience prototype 1 associated with mass media in this article) and the new, active audience (audience prototype 2 associated with digital media). Scholars articulate them largely as the audience ideal types, entering

therefore in disputes about two different general concepts: the world of “bad” against the world of “good” audiences. On the one hand, there is the theoretical vision of the passive audience: atomized members of a mass, conformists, vulnerable victims of control. On the other hand, there is a vision of an active audience as it should be: individualistic, community building, impervious to influence, creative and productive, shuttling from digital to traditional media.

Outside these ideal types the situation is not so black and white. Each audience variant is in fact more complex, more nuanced than the simplified models suggest. The mass media and mass audience still exist. The audience of digital media is expanding, bringing new qualities but shortcomings as well. Hence, out there, in real-reality, both types of audience exist simultaneously, having in most cases the same individuals as twofold members.

Both audience prototype 1 and 2 have proven to be fluctuating collectivities. Apparently, today it is necessary to understand the word audience as “*pluralia tantum*” and research it as a twofold, cross-media audience. Schröder (2011: 6) introduces this term in order to encompass “[...] all kinds of contemporary user engagement with media, be they sense-making as in reception research, or participatory in the sense of Web 2.0.” For members of the cross-media audience are dispersed, not only in space and time, but across numerous virtual communities as well. It is worth mentioning that they often temporarily belong to more than one virtual (and real) community and have a low level of loyalty to any communication channel at their disposal. Compared to the members of mass media audience, the prototype 2 audience’s new experience in media use is shorter but more intensive. At the same time, the younger cross-media audience members are said to be – as internet natives – computer literate and capable to benefit from all services enabled by the internet, mobile phones, e-book readers and other digital platforms. In theory, this knowledge and skills could enrich their cultural capital, but, as shown above, there is a gloomy road ahead as far as employment and social mobility of internet natives are concerned.

The political systems of the representative democracies allow civil society interventions into the media field and public sphere. This is an exercise of human rights and freedoms “[...] civil society in the media sphere can be characterized as an audience constellation, which is discursive, independent, pluralistic, bound to life worlds and oriented towards the common welfare. With these characteristics, civil society has got a special sensitivity for problems and concerns of viewers and can articulate them into the political process.” (Dahlgren quoted in Hasebrink et al., 2007: 79). This prediction is theoretically correct

but still not fully realized. The constellation of power and the level of engagement of civil society institutions and movements have not yet prevailed in the political process. Correspondingly, one should not be overly optimistic in one's expectations of new kinds of audience participation that could influence the established orders. As a researcher of audience prototype 2 reports: "[...] the predominance of groups with a social, rather than political or economic mode of engagement suggests that, while these groups are helpful in fostering internal trust and social solidarity, they may not be so strong in cultivating skills in deliberation and debate [...] they are largely apolitical in focus and most capable of producing goods that are oriented toward the individual member's 'personal sense of efficacy.'" (Song, 2009: 72) Activism and participation in virtual communities do not transfer smoothly into real life. Even more, it is not sure whether or not the type 2 audience is suffering from alienation and a sense of social and political powerlessness. These may be less visible or less studied (compared with the mass audience research tradition), because new theoretical frameworks are far behind new communication practices.

It is still uncertain if the old, mass audience concept is really outdated as an object on the horizon of the communication theory and research. Mapping of new key dimensions that can circumscribe the multitude of cross-audiences is needed both in theory and in research. For the time being, a great deal of research still keeps continuity with old audience theories and concepts. In this article, we did not have any pretension to offer a new theory. What we aimed for was a systematic comparison between the two audience prototypes, their attributes, communication practices and participation forms. We could have included additional variables and attributes that were not mentioned in the article or listed in Table 1, in order to further warn the reader about to the complexity of sailing towards a theoretical horizon of full audience participation. These variables could be: new social contexts with placeless power and powerless places; new techniques of lobbying, spinning, and bewildering of people; absence of media and computer literacy on a complete global scale; lack of presence of real "others"; fight for freedom of knowledge distribution between states and corporations, insisting on copy rights, and the active audience and civil society, asking for gift economy and creative commons... However, we hope that even without these added elements – space does not allow us to develop them – our perspective remains clear and compelling.

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The participatory turn in the publishing industry: Rhetorics and practices

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Summary: One of the cultural and media areas in which the issue of participation – with all its ambiguity – has recently emerged to full significance is the area of literature and publishing. Following the music, film and television industries, the publishing industry is in fact facing a vast renewal due to digitalization processes (assuming digitalization as a complex negotiation between social and technological forces). New textual formats and devices (such as e-books), new forms of distribution (e.g. online retailing), new marketing strategies (e.g. in the social media), new models of business (e.g. the print on demand) are becoming increasingly popular. At the same time digitalization has enabled the creation of a whole new participatory, grassroots publishing market, while grassroots storytelling and social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook), used as a collaborative writing environment, bring out participatory forms of online writing that continue the tradition started almost fifteen years ago by the so-called “hypertextual fiction” and the avant-gardes before that. In this context, by addressing the theoretical debate and recent social discourses on the e-book, this article suggests a recognition of the diversity of the forms of participation that are ascribed to the new publishing scenario. Secondly – moving from the Foucauldian notion of author-function – the article solicits the relationship between author and reader in the contemporary digital publishing scenario and addresses the question whether and under what conditions the supposed participatory turn in writing and publishing we are facing promotes the construction of a polyphonic, co-authored, recognizable, collaborative dialogue, or rather points to a cultural landscape where “all discourses [...] would develop in the anonymity of a murmur” (Foucault, 1969).

Keywords: participation, publishing, author theory, e-books, social reading

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1. Introduction

Just like in the press, television, and music industry before, digitalization is now affecting what, echoing Bourdieu (1984), we may call the publishing field: i.e., the social arena defined by the interactions between the *nomos* of the field, the *habitus* of agents (be they authors, agents, publishers, printers, distributors, retailers and readers), and social, economic and cultural capital. As a socio-technical process involving technologies, designers, developers, users, institutions (Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996), digitalization seems to radically enact the tensions that, according to Bourdieu, articulate a field. On the one side, the tension between autonomy and heteronomy (a field need to be autonomous from other fields); on the other side, the tension between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, defining the tensions between those who stick to the specific rules of the field and those who try to subvert the field by disrespecting those very rules.

Of course, the publishing field has undergone major changes in the past as well; a “field” is not, after all, a fixed *datum*. Following Thompson’s (2010) impressive study of the American and British publishing markets, it is worth recalling: 1) the pluralization (in the 1980s) of sales channels with new book-shop chains followed by supermarkets’ sales and the arrival of online players like Amazon; 2) the rise (in the 1990s) of “super-agents” who ceased serving the interests of both authors and publishers – as it was the case until then – and started to represent only authors’ interests; 3) the ongoing consolidation of publishing companies that requires constant growth in a flat market, forcing publishers to editorial strategies focused on those books that seem to have an immediate commercial appeal. The changes identified by Thompson are of the utmost importance: they modified the power relations in the publishing field. According to many observers, what the digitalization of the field will bring would be even more radical: to some extent, it is the very autonomy of the field that is now potentially under pressure. Popular labels such as “the end of the book” or “the death of publishing” may well be tempting slogans to use in describing the current state of the art, but they are not really useful, for in their glibness they do not provide as much heuristic value. However, if we compare what is now taking place with what happened in the early 1990s – when for the first time the press began claiming the “death of books” following the diffusion of word processors and multimedia hypertext (Nunberg, 1993, 1996) – we must acknowledge that some fundamental changes are indeed taking place.

One of the keywords used to describe and conceptualize the heretical impulse that runs through the publishing field is “participation”. On the one side, participation describes the new practices of reading and writing (i.e. social reading, self-publishing etc.) made possible by digitalization. On the other side, the term participation is becoming a discursive *totem* used to evoke a “revolution” in knowledge creation and circulation. In this perspective participation describes a scenario where knowledge will be democratic thanks to the fading, under the pressure of collaborative writing and reading, of two major features of the publishing field as we have known it since the Eighteenth century: the fixed and closed cultural form of the book and the separation between authors and readers.

Starting from this duality, the article explores the publishing field under the perspective of both the social practices and the discourses that are shaping it as a participatory arena. Adopting a phenomenological point of view, the concept of participation will thus be used as a useful tool to describe the actual changes in the field. Also, recognizing the power of discourse, the publishing field will be used as a testing ground to verify the construction, circulation and operativity of the concept of participation itself and its complexity and theoretical soundness.

2. The participatory turn in publishing: old and new issues

Participation, when referring to books, is both an old and a new issue. It is an old issue because the cooperative nature of writing has long been questioned within three critical areas². Firstly, by the sociology of culture, committed to understanding the social relations that shape the world of art and literature, hidden within the romantic ideology of the “creative solitary genius”. Secondly, by literary theory and semiotics, investigating the collaboration/conflict between authors and readers, so as to challenge traditional assumptions up to the point of claiming the “supremacy” of the reader in the process of writing. Thirdly, by art and literature historians and critics who have been underlining the collaborative nature of writing.

And yet, participation is a brand new issue, arising along with the success of e-books and the digitalization of publishing field. Digitalization is affecting the

² It is clearly not possible to give full references here. Just to mention a few titles (and despite their differences): Becker (1982) and Bourdieu (1992) for the first perspective; Barthes (1968, 1973), the reader response criticism (Tompkins, 1980), Yale critics and deconstructivism (Culler, 1982) for the second perspective and Stillinger (1991) on multiple authorship, Aarseth (1997) and Murray (1997) on interactive novel and the seminal works of Popper (1975) and Lippard (1973) and more recently Bishop (2006), Frieling (2008), Dezeuze (2010) on participation in arts.

press infrastructure, the social practices of reading and the *status* of the book, and the very same author' and reader' roles and relations. We are facing significant changes in what Peterson (1976) has defined the constituent elements of any field of symbolic production: technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational career, and market. At the same time we are facing a lot of changes in the world of auto-production: i.e. the "informal cultural production" generated by cultural consumption in everyday life contexts (Peterson, 2000; Peterson & Anand, 2004).

Corporate publishers – what Thompson (2010) calls the "merchants of culture" – are trying to find their way in the digital market under the pressure of the new powerful intermediaries like Google books or Amazon and the flourishing of a whole new *indie* small-scale publishing scene that enforces the growing phenomenon of self-publishing. The traditional model of economic exploitation of books and copyright are under question, challenged by both new mediators and the readers who are potentially becoming powerful digital books distributors through the informal sharing circuits of networked and "piracy audiences" (Cardoso, 2008; Cardoso et al., 2010). The lifecycles of books are changing due to online retailers strategies and readers' online conversations and social reading practices and their connection to Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs etc.

Also the status of the book is changing: what we were used to think of as the essential features of books (symbolically representing in their paper and ink materiality the whole publishing field) are now under question. E-books, at least some of them, reveal that a book should not necessarily be a piece of linear printed writing (monomedial, and with a full stop at the end). Productive and collaborative readers are gaining a new centrality in respect to both published texts and the publishing industry: we are in fact witnessing an unprecedented access of the reader in the publishing machine. At the same time, social media make it possible to develop an ongoing dialogue between authors and readers while grassroots storytelling and social media increasingly work as collaborative writing environment, bringing out participatory forms of online writing.

Last but not least, it is increasingly difficult to hypostatize "the reader", separating him/her from its simultaneous status as a technology "user", a "consumer", and part of "media audiences" (Livingstone, 2007; Griswold, Lenaghan & Naffziger, 2011): the act of reading is now more and more integrated – even "physically" so, if we consider the affordances (Normann, 1988) of some e-book devices – in a broader network of cultural consumption spread over different media platforms.

3. Participation as a social discourse

Just like in the press, television, and music industry before, these complex and heterogeneous processes are very often described in terms of participation. If we analyze the social representations of e-books, social reading practices and the contemporary publishing industry, we can see how frequently the word “participation” occurs³. Of course we can easily dismiss the point by saying that it is only the last epiphany of a well settled utopic tradition that magnifies the social and personal empowering strength of the digital technologies and communication (whatever “communication” may mean)⁴.

On the other hand, even if it were merely a rhetorical effect, it would not be possible to easily disregard such a strong presence. As the social shaping of technology perspective suggests (see for example Flichy, 1995; Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999), the rhetorical and metaphorical dimensions of language need to be taken into serious account in the analysis of innovation processes and of the domestication of information and communication technologies (Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley, 1992)⁵. Language is in fact full of empirical consequences. Language works on the mutual shaping between the technical and the social, and it works on the concrete practices of dissemination, adoption and use of new digital technologies in the publishing field. This does not mean that we can accept the participatory turn as a given fact, nor can we accept the commonsensical circulation of the word participation. If we give a deeper look we clearly see that idea of participation is used to refer to very different actions, expectations and potential consequences. We see that it could thus be framed within very different theoretical traditions (poststructuralism, sociosemiotics, public sphere theory, democratic theory) and social definitions of books, publishers, authors and readers. Following Carpentier (2007a, 2011), we can see how this progressive indeterminacy occurs in the first place in the conflation between the concepts of access, interaction and participation.

Let me give some examples taken from public statements of publishers, scholars and authors⁶:

³ I am referring here to a research I am conducting on social representations of e-books and the broader discursivity (Foucault, 1980) related to the digitalization of the Italian publishing scenario.

⁴ For a critique see among others Flichy, 2001; Formenti, 2000; Stefik, 1996; Breton, 1992; Breton & Proulx, 1991; Sfez, 1988; Mattelart, 1993.

⁵ For a discussion of the domestication perspective see Berker et al. (eds.), 2006; Haddon, 2007.

⁶ These quotations come from the research mentioned above.

“Our perspective is to build a partnership-in-profit with the authors. In the actual landscape, both the author’s platform and the publisher’s work are important. Our goal is to build a collaborative work, a system that can share opportunities. Then, if the contract period works for the author and for the publisher, we can contract again” (Giuseppe Granieri interviewed by Jane Friedman, 2010).

“Doppiozero [...] is a community of readers and writers. A whole new area of confrontation: a source of intelligence that produces content not only on the basis of marketability, but on the basis of its critical potential [...] A true laboratory of ideas, to be disseminated through the most democratic and participative medium, the Web” (Marco Belpoliti’s conference speech presenting a new online editorial initiative named Doppiozero – <http://www.doppiozero.com> – in 2011).

“Power goes from the publisher to the reader: he decides what he wants when he wants it, and at what price” (Riccardo Cavallero, General manager of Trade Books Mondadori, interviewed by El Pais, March, 2011).

“Why publish with publishers? In part in order to survive. And what if my publisher was 2,000 readers/friends? 2,000 people, no more, and I could write just for them: two books a year, we can get together in meetings and stay together as friends. It’s patronage 2.0. The copyright will be held by those 2000 readers/friends. Cost: € 1 per month, for two years” (Giuseppe Genna, writer, on his Facebook profile, May 2011).

Under some circumstances, the word participation is used in a “strong” way (Carpentier, 2007a, 2011). On the one side, what is happening now is described as a process of democratization based on the increased possibilities to access and interact with knowledge thanks to a deep re-articulation of power relations in content-production and decision-making processes *in* the publishing industry. On the other side, what is happening is seen as affecting power relations in everyday life *through* the changes affecting books industries⁷. Given that, following Thompson (1995), we may see books as one of the battlegrounds where symbolic power is enforced; symbolic power being the “capacity to intervene in the course of events and influence the actions of others by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms” (Thompson, 1995).

⁷ For the conceptualization of participation *in* and *through* the media, see Carpentier (2007b).

In this perspective, two analytic areas have been especially explored so far. Firstly, the conceptualization of knowledge as a commons (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Paccagnella, 2010), where “to participate” means “taking a part of it” and at the same time “being part of it”. Secondly the idea of the construction of a new public sphere (Habermas, 1962) where open online publication experiences (like Wikipedia) are supposed to provide participants with equal opportunity to participate without the constraints set by roles or status differences in a good approximation of the Habermasian ideal speech situation (Hansen, Berente & Lyytinen, 2009).

However, more than talking about “strong” participation, most of authors that animate the debate on digital publishing are talking about *access* – i.e. achieving presence to technology or media content and generating the opportunity for people to have their voices heard – and *interaction* referring to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships within the socio-technical networks constructing the contemporary media and symbolic landscape (Carpentier, 2007a, 2011). From these perspective, participation basically means a different style of interaction among social actors and the widening of opportunities to get access to the editorial system both for authors, readers and small-scale publishers: think about the lowering of entry barriers in the market, and the decrease in costs with digital books publishing and distribution; the developing of a new *indie* market that promotes a redefinition of the traditional roles of cultural intermediation; the rising of new business models based on a deeper interaction among authors and publishers or among authors and agents (who now can easily operate as small-scale publishers) or among authors and readers in self-publishing, and so forth.

Participation in publishing here stands for a democratization of knowledge occurring in the first place through the undermining of what has been called the democracy of consumption (or, alternatively the tyranny of the market). Digitalization of the publishing industry is claimed to open new spaces of public visibility for authors and issues. The newly created spaces renegotiate a publishing system until now largely based on the idea that big sales are a “quality” marker and the one rule to follow (not a goal to achieve) in the selection and promotion of books and increasingly in the construction of the cultural canon itself.

Like in other media before (Carpentier, 2007a, 2011), the concept of participation is then used as *passepartout* to indicate several different (and sometimes contradictory) processes, largely referable to the expansion of access

possibilities into the publishing field and to a proliferation of different opportunities for interaction with text and with the social actors (including readers) that shape the field. If we specifically refer to e-books, social reading practices, and the changes brought about by online retailing and publishing, we can even substitute “participation” with “interactivity”. (Provided, of course, that we define interactivity not as a hidden characteristic of a given technological system but rather as a label that sums up different and multidimensional forms of technologically mediated interaction). Following McMillan (2002), we can indeed see how interactivity may refer to at least three different types of interaction of the users with documents, other users, and the system. Translating this model to what is happening in the publishing field makes it clear that part of what is named “participation” can be reconceptualized as “technologically mediated interaction” or as “multidimensional interactivity” between: 1) reader *and* digital books that – at least potentially – are more changeable in their content and sharable among readers; 2) between reader *and* reader through online social reading platforms; 3) between reader *and* the technological system: think of publishers and retailers adapting and targeting their offer according to user profiles and online interactions.

4. Authorship and participation

This very same complexity is visible, even more clearly, if we focus our analysis on one of the key features of the traditional publishing scenario (Pasquali, 2008): the author. A commonsensical stance regarding digital text and authorship is that the author is going to fade under the pressure of reader’s writing and the anonymity of the web, and that such very process will lead to a more collaborative and democratic circulation of knowledge. However, if we give it a closer look, it is quite clear that here too we are facing plenty of ambiguities. For example we are seeing the revamping, in the current debate, of interpretations that have widely circulated in the scientific community in the early 1990s about hypertext (Landow, 1992, 1994).

Following a (rather simplified) poststructuralist vogue, hypertext and digital online collaborative storytelling were (and are) theorized as *the* participative textuality. They are described as open, dialogic texts, emancipated from the “tyranny” of the author and performed by the reader so as to master and subvert language as power site. There is a whole body of sophisticated critical literature claiming this. However, the emphasis on participative nature of the hypertext simply neglects the fact that in hypertext, like in any other digital text, database

options and generative rules are always under a form of control rooted in the interaction between the author/programmer and the system. No matter how many choices and possibilities are given to the reader, the hypertext reader is inscribed within a web of power bonds.

We can see even more complexities and ambiguities if we conceptualize the author as a function that defines 1) how discourses exist, circulate and work in society 2) and thus working as a disciplinary device both on texts and on authors as subjects, in categorizing texts and giving the ethical and juridical responsibility of writing to the author as subject (Foucault, 1969). First of all, think about how the much more flexible and manipulative digital text makes more and more difficult to demarcate and fix textual *corpora* “under” the author name. All this seems to testify the end of the author function, but on the other hand the author, increasingly building him/herself as a brand, gains a new centrality in functioning as an aggregator of different discourses both in and outside the web thus strengthening the author function (as exemplified by the relation between author and productive fans).

Secondly, let us consider how much of online textuality is anonymous, authorless, or the product of multiple authorship, while the responsibility of what is written is no longer clearly traceable to a specific author. Again, all this may seem to testify the end of the author function but on the other hand in recent times the author has been a constant presence both on the cultural scenes and the media, increasing his/her online presence, and direct responsibility, and connecting with readers through the web and social network (on blogs, social reading sites, Twitter etc.). As never before, the author is nowadays asked to participate in society. As never before the author has been placed at the centre of the public scene. Readers, we may say, are desperately seeking authors: think about the huge popularity gained by literary festivals, readings, and book presentations.

In such desire there is another ambiguity inherent to the participatory turn in publishing, an ambiguity that is deeply rooted in the very etymology and philosophical history of the word participation. On one side, indeed, we are seeing readers participate, share part of the privileges *of* the author function and we are increasingly seeing them co-operate to the knowledge construction/distribution, etc. On the other side we are increasingly seeing readers who try to participate *through* the author: exactly in the same way as in Middle Age authors were participating through divine authority (Minnis, 1984). Yet we should not be surprised, and maybe we can see this participative tension not as

a mere result of the inherent ambiguity of the concept of participation. Participative tension can also be detected in a horizon of increasing fragmentation as a symptom of the readers' nostalgia, and of our desire to be part of one of the most extraordinary figures of consistency and coherence that modernity has given us: the author figure.

5. Participation as a social practice

The ambiguity between access, interaction and participation, then, is not only inscribed in the social description of what is happening, or in its theoretical conceptualization, but also in the very social practices of authors, readers and publishers in the new digital landscape. The publishing industry is certainly more open and pluralized today. Authors are now confronting lower barriers to overstep, and can rely on a variety of promotional and distribution channels while readers (sharing notes, comments and reviews in social reading networks, blogs, commercial websites etc.) have certainly reached the centre of the publishing scene and are increasingly determining editorial choices and book consumption. This is certainly true, and it *might* lead to people's empowerment and to the democratization of knowledge, so as to enforce social participation in a deep democratic meaning. And yet participatory culture might lead to the exploitation of users' creativity, interactions and peer production (Bollier, 2002; Kranich, 2007; Deuze, 2008) by the new interactive cultural industries conglomerating publishers, hardware and software industries, and new online and web 2.0 players from Amazon to Google to Facebook. It might also lead to the new form of labour in digital capitalism (Mosco & McKercher, 2008; Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn, 2010; Formenti, 2011).

More deeply, and this is the crucial point, it is also true that in digital media – and the book industry is no exception – any action (even emancipative and participative ones) becomes the basis for that specific form of user-system interaction that has been called “registrational” interactivity. That is to say, the media's potential ability to automatically register information from the users and thereby adapt and/or respond to their actions (Jensen, 1999). Moreover, this ambiguity is a key feature of the contemporary cultural scenario that has been described by Manovich (2008) as software culture. In software culture, the specific operating strategies and syntax of software (for example the control statements “if/then” and “while/do”) are a common layer that permeates all areas of contemporary societies. Power, control, creativity, participation, technology, aesthetics etc.: everything is woven with and through software

(both the “visible” software used by consumers and the “grey” software, which runs all systems and processes in contemporary society). In software culture, a book is at the same time a product of human culture in dialogue with other books in the intertextuality of culture *and* a computer file in dialogue with the computer’s own cosmogony. Cultural software (a subset of application software which enables creation, publishing, accessing, sharing, and remixing images, moving image sequences, 3D designs etc.) has become the precondition to and the interface of our interactions with the media and cultural texts, while it shapes “contemporary techniques of control, communication, representation, simulation, analysis, decision-making, memory, vision, writing, and interaction” (Manovich, 2008: 11).

If we keep that in mind, we see that the ambiguity among participation and interaction in the digital environment is a structural feature, indeed. Interactive systems enable participation (and interaction), and participation feeds interactivity. The actual increase in access, interaction and participation of authors and readers means an increase of the control that the system, through profiling software and data mining, may have on the users. It is exactly in this bond where what we can call, echoing Foucault (1975, 1980), the knowledge/power nexus of the software society, resides. We should not forget this point. It would be particularly paradoxical to forget it, especially now when digitalization and the participatory turn in publishing is revealing the nexus between knowledge and power at work in print culture.

6. Conclusion

By simply offering an alternative model, the participatory turn in publishing industry undermines what has long been taken for granted. It challenges the way symbolic power has been operating until now – a power that does not reside primarily in the production/diffusion of specific ideologies encoded in texts. In fact such power is inscribed in the very act of symbolic mediation and in the mode (based on routines, roles, formal and informal rules, etc.) of production through which the cultural industry apparatuses (Agamben, 2009) operate. A power that is even more effective because it is hidden, as Couldry (2000) writes using Bourdieu’s terminology, in the central habitus of contemporary society, where the history of media and cultural industries has “turned into nature”.

What is truly under discussion here is not what is the best e-book device, nor the inner sociability of social reading platforms or how to make money out

of self-publishing. What is at stake is the understanding that books are cultural objects (Griswold, 1994): concrete, socially and historically rooted products of specific configurations of technologies and specific modes of cultural production and consumption. What is at stake is the possibility to discuss (and even overcome) that particular mode of cultural production that Chartier (1992) has called the *circuit du livre*, that is the “stabilization of written culture into a canon of authored text, the notion of author as creator, the book as a property, the reader as an elective public” (Hesse, 1996: 21). What is at stake is a better understanding of the contingencies of that mode of cultural production that “*was not* the inevitable consequence of the invention of printing during the Renaissance, but, rather, the cumulative result of particular social and political choices made by given society at given moments” (Hesse, 1996: 21 – emphasis in original). What is at stake is the possibility to “give a look” at the power embedded in that mode of cultural production (in the mode, not only in the means). A mode that is based on the knowledge reification in the fixed form of the book and on the author function (Foucault, 1969) resuming the modern subject’s principles of individual accountability and of autonomous and property-owner creative individuality (Burke, 1992).

In this particular perspective, it does not really matter whether the participatory turn is a consistent and real option or it is a mere rhetorical exercise. What matters is that its very existence – as a recognizable and controversial social discursivity – has generated a breakthrough. At the same time, and for the very same reason, it is important to understand that participatory culture is neither the inevitable consequence of the digitalization nor something that we can take for granted. Even if we think that participation is a key issue in software culture, we need to keep in mind all the ambiguities at work in the concept of participation. We need to keep in mind that participatory culture is not a destiny, and that it can turn into something very different, depending on the choices we all make. We may wish that participation becomes the central feature of the free, collaborative circulation of open knowledge and leads to a new public sphere built through ongoing, meaningful social interactions. We must be well aware that participation may also just be the *buzzword* of the new global digital capitalism.

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