

Evelien Tonkens, University of Amsterdam,

Civicness and citizen participation in social services: conditions for promoting respect and public concern

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Abstract:

This chapter analyses the relationship between civicness and citizen participation in social services. There is a lot of debate on the contribution of civic behavior and civic culture to public service performance. This chapter looks at the reverse direction: how does citizen participation contribute to civicness? It is argued that citizen participation has more chances to be successful and augment civicness, when certain conditions are met: when participation is structured rather than laissez-faire, if it is experience rather than expertise-based, if representation is substantial rather than merely descriptive, and if public and personal/group interest are distinguished and treated as something that all involved struggle with rather than as a problem of citizens only. These conditions are argued to be important on the basis of analysis of literature on citizen participation; whether they are indeed effective in practice needs to be subject to empirical research.

Citizen participation and civicness in social service organisations are supposed to be closely connected. Citizen participation is considered to contribute to civicness, both of citizens themselves and of social service organisations. Only when the voices of citizens are included, and citizens are given the power to really exert influence in social service organisations, do these organisations have a chance to become civic.

The possibility for citizens to exert power and influence in social service organisations, is generally considered to be an important reason for promoting it (Hogg 1999). Some even argue it is the only proper legitimisation for participation (Jones 2003). However, few authors state that citizens do really exert much influence (Fung 2003, Lenaghan 1999). Most authors are disillusioned about the lack of real power and influence of citizens. Some argue that those in power do not really mean to give citizens power and influence (Raco 2000). Citizens are merely used for window dressing (Cochrane 2003), citizen participation is merely a theatre (Milewa 2004), a chasing of the 'holy grail of community control' (Baggott 2005), Those in power are only 'playing the user card' if it suits them to make a democratic impression (Harrison and Mort 1998).

Others argue that citizen participation does not empower citizens, it rather disempowers them. It is used as an instrument for responsabilisation of citizens (Kearns 1992, Paddison et al 2008), of policing and disciplining them (Hodge 2005, Cruickshank 2003, Swynedgedouw 2005), e.g. to be prudent with public funds (Milewa 2004). Participation is even labelled a 'tyranny' as it merely facilitates 'an illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power' (Cooke and Kothari 2001: 4).

The lack of power and influence of citizens is sometimes blamed on new public management and its marketization or its centralised exercise of power. The marketization of the public service sector is argued to disturb democratization: it is squeezed out by a 'supermarketized vision (Cowden and Singh 2007), in which citizens are replaced by consumers, who are not meant to and have not learned to use voice but only choice (Jenson and Philips 2002, Keat 1992, Hickman 2006, Raco 2000, Bagott 2005). Also, centralised governance and the stress on 'zero tolerance of failure' and on quick results does not favour participation, as this strengthens the risks of failure and tends to slow processes down (Foley and Martin 2003).

In this chapter, this dissatisfaction over the power and influence that citizens really exert in social service

organisations is analysed more closely, concentrating on the relation between civiness and citizen participation. How can citizen participation indeed increase civiness of both the organisations and the citizens involved?

Civiness and participation

Let me first make clear what I mean by civiness in this context. In this volume, civiness is defined as 'the quality of institutions and organisations to encourage and reproduce civil attitudes and behaviour at the individual and collective level' (Evers et al, introduction). Civiness entails 'conditions and resources that [state policies and economic development] often use but can not simply create or install: trust among citizen, commitment and solidarity, ability for cooperation, ethics of performance or entrepreneurial spirit' (Evers, this volume).

As to civiness in relation to social service organisations, there has been a longstanding debate on the issue of how civic behaviour and civic culture contribute to public service performance. Ever since the famous work of Almond and Verba (1963) much research focussed on how 'the performance of public organisation may (..) be influenced by the extent of a civic culture in local areas.' (Andrews 2007, 846)

In this chapter, the reverse direction is scrutinized: how do social service organisations themselves promote civiness? Citizen participation in social service organisations has been installed in order to promote the civiness in and of their organisations. What civiness is supposed to mean has changed over the last decades, however. Evers (this volume) traces changes in the meaning of civiness over the last decades in social services provision in welfare states in four discourses. Traditional welfarism's stresses civiness as 'giving people a respected status by democratic and social citizenship' . The following period of empowerment and participation stresses civiness as 'giving personal respect and additional meaning and impact'; consumerism made 'choice a part of civic rights and service cultures', while

the social investment state state's stresses civicism as 'making public concerns and the respective obligations of people as citizens part of the picture' (Evers, this volume, table 1.) These four discourses were developed respectively, but they all still linger on today. When put together, three aspects of civicism stand out: respect, choice and public concern, the last referring to orientation towards public interest and the public good.

Since the rise of the second discourse, 'empowerment and participation', citizen participation in social services was high on the agenda, resulting in various practices, often sustained by laws, to install citizen participation in these services on modern welfare states, with the promise of contributing to both respect and public concern.

From Evers' analysis of civicism in social service organisations, I distil two meanings of civicism that are crucial for the relationship between civicism and citizen participation: respect and public concern. I leave out choice, Evers' third aspect, as that was not so much a promise of citizen participation, but rather of marketization as an alternative to participation. How does citizen participation contribute to civicism in terms of respect and public concern? And what hampers citizen participation to do so? I will first look at the issue of respect, and then I will go on to public concern. My review of literature on citizen participation concerning these questions results in formulating some conditions that may improve civicism in citizen participation. Whether they indeed do so, is still to be researched empirically.

Expertise

In order to foster respect, citizen participation should be organised in such a manner that it fosters citizens' respect for service providers as well as the reverse.

In most citizen participation processes, citizens are given respect by putting them on an equal footing with professionals and policy makers. They are granted rights to deliberate on policy strategies and budget choices. Yet, their expertise on this issues is often disappointing. In a

recent research on clients' participation in health care,. Trappenburg shows that lot of attention of clients boards goes to financial, policy and planning issues, of which citizen know very little, with the result that they are very busy but nevertheless fail to have much influence (Trappenburg 2008) Training helps, but it will rarely put them on par with the real experts. To involve them in deliberations about these issues will not generate much new insights or knowledge.

Implicitly citizen participation is often built on a model of *expertise based participation*. The expertise based model is built on the idea that citizens should have a fair amount of expertise: they should be able to discuss policy issues the organisations more or less on equal footing with managers. Only then can they exert real influence, only then can they be taken really seriously, and can their interventions not be dismissed so easily. Citizens are thus staged as if they were accountants, financial or planning experts or other specialised professionals. They then of course fail to fulfil the expectations attached to these roles: they will hardly ever be as knowledgeable, informed and skilled as the professional accountants, financial planners or other paid, full time experts.

Thus this model tries to accomplish an equal balance between citizens and managers by staging them as equal. Because in practice citizens tend not have the skills and knowledge that managers possess, this model stresses the importance of schooling and training for citizens in order to raise to the level of the people they talk with. Proponents of this model invariably stress this: if only citizens would receive better training and would be given enough time to develop their skills, they could participate fully (e.g. Hunt 2007, Lenaghan 1999).

Most practices of participation are based on the expertise based model. The setting is such that citizens are positioned as quasi experts. They are invited to deliberate on issues like planning, budgeting or long term and abstract policy goals: issues in which their experience cannot easily be integrated. Bringing in one's experience

in these situations is almost inevitably a disturbing factor, as it distracts from the agenda.

Professionals tend to stress the importance of expertise rather than experience more to the degree that their own professional status is weaker, found Brooks in a research on patient and public councils in the UK (Brooks 2006). If patients bring in their own experiences, this tends to annoy nurses more than it disturbs medical doctors. Nurses tend to dismiss these experiences as trivial, too personal and as an attack on their own expertise. Patients, in turn, do not feel heard by the nurses and become frustrated. Brooks explains this by the weak status of the nurses, whose own expertise is not highly valued in the hospital. Other research concludes in more general terms that experiences are often dismissed as 'too distressing and disturbing' (Carr 2007, 271). Patients then feel that unrealistic demands are made on them, liking having to express themselves in managerial terms.

So the expectation that citizens deliberate on an equal footing is hardly realistic. But why should they? Either they are no experts, and thus inevitably fail as qualified partners in debate. Or they developed themselves in this direction, either by training or because they are former professionals experts who now function as voluntary citizens in citizen participation projects. Then they may be able to discuss complex policy issues, but what is their added value as citizens? The assumption that citizens are willing and able to deliberate on issues like budgeting is simply wrong, argues Milewa (1997). Citizens are more motivated if problems are not too far from their own experiences (Lenaghan 1999, Milewa 1997).

There is an alternative model of the role of expertise, which claims that what citizens are expected to bring to the debate is their own experience as (potential) users of services. These experiences are needed because this is what professionals and managers cannot really know themselves. They really need citizens to tell them about this. These experiences form the expertise of citizens, an expertise that the other parties involved can never master

to the same degree. The one who wears the shoe knows best where it pinches. (Dzur 2004b) Therefore officials should create room and value experiences of citizens (Maloff et al 2000). So here not equality but difference is the basis on interaction. An equal balance can only be attained if both parties bring in their particular expertise and do not try to be like the other party. They will necessarily fail to really get on an equal footing and so will not have much influence then.

A strong defense of the experience based model can be read in Sennett (2003), particularly for the interaction between professionals and patients. Sennett argues that both professionals and patients have their own expertise that they should mutually acknowledge: professionals are experts in diagnosis and treatment, but citizens are experts in 'the experiences of these, in how it feels to live with a particular disease for a life time, how it is to lie in the operation room and without knowing what is going to happen, and when.

But to really make room for experiences and let these play a meaningful role appears to be complicated. At best experiences tend to get a legitimizing role: they are received as legitimating for the already chosen path. Experiences that do not fit that path, are neglected and placed outside the order of things (Hodge 2005). Power imbalances between citizens and professionals or managers are not easily restored when room is made for experiences. Professionals and managers keep the power to neglect them. This may be different, Carr (2007) argues, if officials would also talk about their experiences, and if more generally, passions and conflict would be more present in participation. Carr, following Chantal Mouffe [], argues that, in order to get a proper power balance, all parties involved should bring in their emotions and experiences.

Some other research also suggests that it may help to explicate these two models. Brooks e.g. describes that at first professionals were irritated by what they conceived as trivial experiences of citizens. However, putting this issue explicitly on the agenda proved to be the turning point. Patients were invited to tell why they were

frustrated and what they thought they could bring to the table: their experiences. One of them said: 'You didn't want personal involvement but that's all we can offer you really: personal involvement and feedback from other patients.' (Brooks 2006, 9) This opened the eyes of the nurses and learned them things that they had no knowledge of before at all.

The experience- based model of course needs other ways of organising than the expertise- based model. With the expertise-based model, all participants need to share a certain level of background knowledge. In health care this may involve some knowledge of the health care system, in welfare it may involve some knowledge of welfare entitlements and procedures. This knowledge can be organised by training, as is quite common in citizen's juries.

Citizens can add something (and therefore also feel they make a difference) when they are invited to talk about their experiences, about which they by definition know a lot, and their narratives and ideas do add something new to the deliberations.

This calls for more attention to the experience-based model. Yet the experience- based model was introduced by social movements in the 1970s and was silently abandoned after it was object to interesting criticism. This criticism still needs to be dealt with. First of all the experience based model has been criticized as essentialist. The experiences of citizens tend to be invoked as something very deep, personal, fixed and therefore inaccessible to others and not at all open to debate. It was in other words criticized for closing down debates rather than opening them up, and therefore as unfit for deliberative democracy.

It is however, possible to conceive of experiential expertise as more postmodern, fluid concept. There is no need to treat experiences as fixed and deep. How a situation is experienced depends on many other factors, for example on changing ideas of what is considered appropriate to experience and feel (Hochschild 2003), and therefore also the knowledge based on these experiences is fluid and open to debate.

Firstly, following Sennett (2003) on the issue of respect in the (inequal) interaction of patients and experts in health care, Sennett proposes to acknowledge experiential expertise in the sense that the patient knows how it feels. How it feels to live with diabetes, to live with cancer, to live with a demented partner or a handicapped child. The doctor should try understand by way of empathy, but – except for the rare case that she has suffered the same illness – should know that the patients knows better. Conversely, the patient should recognise that in terms of diagnosis and treatment, the doctor in the end, generally knows better.

Experiential knowledge can secondly also be based on the notion of *metis* as developed by Scott (1998). Scott developed this notion the field of planning but his concepts can easily be applied to other field. He analysed why big planning projects e.g. in Tanzania in the 1960s or Russia in the 1920s, tend to fail. These projects were developed from drawing tables, in architectural and planning offices, far away from practice, and, even though often with the best of intentions, they take pride in being so remote, and moreover, they take pride in a certain esthetics that comes with planning as if the world can be reinvented. They then failed, Scott analysed, because they did not recognise the value of particular local, non-standardised knowledge of citizens. E.g. the knowledge that one should, in a particular valley seed the one plant after the other is blossoming and a particular migrating bird has been seen, rather than on a fixed date of the calendar, that does not take into account that each year the seasons develop differently. Experiential expertise in deliberative democracy can also be understood as *metis*: as a particular, local knowledge that is very precise and therefore not transferable.

Organising expertise also implies: not just inviting participants in the early stages of a process, but also, or maybe even more, in the process of implementation, because then the issue of *metis* becomes most important. Citizens are most often invoked in the earliest phases of a process, where a go or no go decision is at stake, Archon Fung argues, while their voice is more useful and more

needed in the phases of implementation, when everyday experiences are most informative and bringing them in most corrective (Fung 2003) Experiences do not need to be restricted to those of actual clients of a certain organisation, but can also extend to past and possible service users are valuable to get a full picture of experiences of citizens that are meaningful for social service organisations.

However, experience and expertise do not operate on an equal footing. Expertise is generally considered to be more important, and it is also usually brought forward by voices (from e.g. experts, managers etc.) that are deemed more important. To equalize the weight of these different voices requires a well structured debate, as Archon Fung (2003) shows on the basis of a thorough analysis of participation in community safety and education. More often than not, Fung argues, participation has a 'laissez-faire' character: it is built on the naïve thought that citizens can exert influence and power if only they are given the occasion to raise their voices. Usually not much thought is spent on the structure of the discussion and the process of participation as a whole. Power and influence can only be exerted if participation is well structured (Fung 2003, Cawston and Barbour 2003, Dzur 2004a and 2004b). Also, citizens do not spontaneously possess the capacities to participate (Milewa 1997) and are often easily intimidated (Hunt 2007). Much more effort should be put in training in order to equip citizens with the capacities to exert influence. Fung shows in detail how training and structure had a direct influence on the power and influence citizens could exert. Training and structure are particularly empowering for lower educated citizens.

To organise structured participation instead of laissez-faire participation may help to balance the inequality of experience over expertise and thus to augment mutual respect.

Representation

Another issue that tends to weaken mutual respect between citizens on the one hand and professionals and managers on the other, is the fact that the citizens active in boards and councils generally are far from representative of the whole group of users. This is true for most forms of citizen participation, both in social service organisations and in other fora. On average citizens participating in deliberative democratic procedures and boards, are older, higher educated, more often white and male (Cooke and Kothari 2001, Raco 2000, Taylor 2003, Fung 2003, Gastil 1993, Sanders 1997) and they have more radical ideas than the groups they are supposed to represent (Fiorina 1999). Higher educated men are not only more often present, but moreover, they exert more influence than other citizens present. They talk more easily, louder, and are more skilled in rhetorics; all this together results in their being better listened to and so exert more influence (Bovens 2006, Sanders 1997, Fung 2003). Harrison and Mort (1998) found that the argument of weak representation is often played out selectively and strategically: if citizens express opinions that do not support the listeners, they tend to dismiss them as non-representative.

The problem of weak representation is so omnipresent and so difficult to combat, that quick wins cannot be expected. Incomplete representation is an inherent problem of democracy as democracy always involves delegation of some kind (Ankersmit 2002); so there is always some distance between the representative and the represented. This distance needs to be recognized and valued rather than judged. It is part and parcel of democracy, otherwise we would have the dictatorship of single citizens who all expect their representatives to directly express their own views. This also urges for attention towards the institutional settings in which participation occurs, as it underlines that each form of participation is institutionally mediated. Again, some institutional settings favour representation, while others don't. Cowden and Singh (2007) e.g. point out that in new managerialism, institutions tend to control who is participating and therefore whom they do or do not need

to listen to; they tend to dismiss representation as irrelevant or at least do not put much effort in it.

However, in this rightful reproach of weak representation, the argument is based on only one aspect of representation, that Hannah Pitkin (1972) calls *descriptive* representation, to be distinguished from *formal* and *symbolic* representation. *Descriptive* representation concerns the characteristics of the representatives: the degree to which they differ from those they are supposed to represent. *Formal* representation concerns formal the process of selecting representatives such as elections and random selection. And *symbolic* representation concerns the contents: the degree to which they express opinions that represent those of the group they are supposed to represent. These three together comprise *substantial* representation: the overall quality of representation.

Most of the debate on representation of citizens in social service organisations is actually restricted to descriptive representation. It is of course not to be denied that this is an important aspect of representation, but, following Pitkin, it is not the only aspect of importance. Yet as all the weight of representation is put on this one aspect, and as citizens are virtually always failing here, representation is failing even the mildest expectations.

However, more effort could be put into the other two aspects, compensating for the lack of descriptive representation. When these three forms are all considered and related, a richer practice representation be built, in which respect has better chances to be generated. As to formal representation, there are generally too few citizens who are willing to participate to organise elections: organisations are already glad if there are people willing to participate. They could however organise different forms of formal representation such as random selection. In the case of citizen juries and citizen forums', random selection often works quite well (Lenaghan 1999) Along the lines of a jury model, an organisation may select a random sample of the stakeholders, either fully random or selected from a particular subgroup, for a particular topic, e.g. the elderly and their informal care givers for

issues on improving elderly services. All receive a personal invitation in which it is made clear that they are selected and their opinion is needed. Research indicates that if people feel selected this way, their willingness to participate much higher than when they are simply given the opportunity to participate. (Leyenaar 2007). This is also in line with research on volunteering, which indicates that two thirds of the volunteers started participating because they were personally invited (Wilson 2000).

Also, even with few candidates elections can be actively organised, thereby engaging citizens in the issue of formal representation. Not just by tolerating them (setting a period in which the elections take place and provide the occasion to elect and be elected), but more actively by organising campaigns and making clear what may be at stake.

Moreover, as Contandriopoulos points out, representatives can compensate their lack of descriptive representation by putting a lot of effort in symbolical representation. (Contandriopoulos 2004). Either the organisation or the representatives of citizens that were formed on the basis of both formal and descriptive representation, can then go on to organise symbolic representation on top of these two other kinds. The organisation and/or citizens representatives can go and find citizens in their 'natural habitat' and discuss whatever needs to be discussed with them.

So, rather than complaining that there are very few immigrants, parents or young people or vulnerable old present (thus lacking descriptive representation), these immigrants can be actively addressed in mosques or language courses. Citizens can enrich their symbolic representation by looking for adolescents in the streets or youth clubs, and visit the elderly in nursing homes, and find out what their views and needs are there, rather than expecting them to come to their representatives.

In the Netherlands, a welfare organisation does something like this, with a (typically Dutch) delivery bicycle with a coffee and a few places to sit along like in a bar, professionals go out and find citizens with whom they deliberate. We can call this 'democracy at location' where

democracy is organized at places where people gather rather than forcing them to leave these in favour of formal meeting rooms. Of course, these meetings should be structured somehow or other, particularly as 'laissez-faire' deliberative processes give most room to those who are already well represented in other ways (Fung 2003).

So the problem of representation cannot be solved completely, as there is always some kind of distance between those who represent and the represented. But in order to build mutual respect, it may help to exchange the often implicit expertise based model for an experience based model, provided these are taken as material for reflection rather than these as deep truths that speak for themselves.

Public concern

After having looked at the issue of respect, I now turn to the other aspect of civiness scrutinized here: public concern. It is often argued that citizen participation has very little to contribute to an orientation towards the public good, that is to public concern: it is merely a matter of expressing self interest or even NIMBY (Not in my backyard) –behaviour (Wolsink 2006). Citizens tend to stress their own interests rather than the common good, or they tend to conflate these two, officials complain. Deliberation should be about the general interest, but in practice this is very difficult since citizens stick to their own interests too much, is the complaint. Citizens conversely may complain that what is presented as the general interest, tends to be the interest of those who present it. Who is in the position to present their own interest as the general interest? In order to be heard, it is at any rate more effective to present one's position as articulation of the general interest (Conrandripolous 2004).

Implicitly, these complaints fit the consensus model (Cohen 1991, 1997) of deliberation, as opposed to the and the agonistic model (Young 2002, Elstub 2006, Urbinati 2000, Hogg 1999). The consensusmodel, with

Habermas as its source of inspiration, claims that the strength of deliberative democracy lies in the need for all participants to formulate their arguments in terms that are also convincing for others. Personal interest cannot be convincing to others and so are not accepted as a valid argument. The consensus model therefore forces people to abandon their personal interest and take an impartial stance. In this manner, deliberative democracy is a good guarantee that participants will focus on the public interest. In the consensus model, citizens are approached as citizens rather than consumers, who can and should take both their own interests and those of others and/or the 'general' interest into account. Research shows that citizens are on average very well able to make these distinctions (Wolsink 2006). Consumers do not have much of a role in civic democracy, as they are not meant to deliberate on the public good (Walsh 1994). The consensus model gives room for citizens and other stakeholders such as professionals to sit together in a stakeholders board and focus on shared interests and on the public good rather than group interests.

The agonistic model argues that what is put forward as public interest, is simply partial, personal interest in disguise. The agonistic model does not demand of participants to put personal and partial interests aside, but invites them to articulate them. There is no point in only bringing in arguments that are acceptable to all, as the consensus model demands. The agonistic model does not deny the importance of public reason, but it claims that public reason does not arise out of consensus but out of confrontation of differences. From that confrontation and the related power struggle, wise decisions are born, is the idea of the agonistic model. 'It is only through allowing citizens to express their private interests in a deliberatively democratic arena where they will hear of the experiences and information of others that they might come to appreciate their private interests conflict with what they perceive the common good'. Deliberative democracy should not strive for impartiality but for 'enlarged thinking'. (Elstub 2006, 27)

Most older forms of deliberative democracy such as clients boards and platforms, are based on the agonistic model. Many newer forms of deliberative democracy, such as interactive policy making and joined up governance, are built on the consensus model. Fung and Wright argue in the concluding chapter of *Deepening democracy*, that most citizens' groups start out with the agonistic (or, in their words, in an adversarial) model. After some time they often gain some success and then need to change their attitude towards a consensus (or, in their words, collaborative) model. To make this step, they argue, is quite complicated. It demands different skills, and often there are new people needed for this new role, who do not have a history of conflict with the former adversary, that now partly turned into an ally.

The distinction between the consensus model and the agonistic model seems to demand a choice between them, and thus between two ways of civicness: either to evoke attitudes of self or group interest, struggle and self-centredness, or to evoke orientation towards the public good onto the edge of self-denial. But this does not need to be the case. Deliberative democracy does not need to be set up either as a power struggle, in which interests are staged as in opposition so that they can clash in a fervent power struggle, or as a peaceful harmonious power-free Habermassian conversation on the other hand. Citizens can be recognized as simultaneously having personal or group interest on the one hand, and be oriented to the public good on the other. Moreover, not only citizens have interests, this is also true for other stakeholders.

Rather than suggesting a choice needs to be made, effort could be put into recognizing the interests of all involved as well as public interests, though not simultaneously. A discussion can be separated in a part in which all involved can address the issue from the perspective of their own interest – how do they personally feel about such a home in their street - and from the perspective of the general interest – how do they, as citizens of this town, think would be a proper way to house these patients in the city?

Conclusion

Citizen participation and civicism in and of social service organisations do not automatically reinforce each other. In this article I identified some major recurrent obstacles to citizen's participation contributing to civicism in terms of respect and public concern. Firstly, following Fung, it was argued that the degree of structure of a participative process makes a lot of difference. Organising fair and structured debate on a micro-level strengthens the inclination of citizens to identify and sympathize with each other and particularly with those who are less outspoken and more silent.

Mutual respect is also hampered by citizen's lack of expertise on many aspects of (managing) service delivery. The issue of expertise and experience, acknowledging experience as the main asset of citizens is helpful to strengthen citizen's influence. Rather than demanding of citizens to be governors-by-proxy, it should be acknowledged that what they basically bring with them, is their experiences as (potential, former or actual) users of services. This reminds us of the experience based models propagated in the 1970s and 1980s which were criticised for their debate-blocking essentialism; it is however possible to overcome this essentialism by treating experience as raw material rather than as deep truth.

Lacking representation was identified as another recurring obstacle to mutual respect. This problem can be reduced by, following Pitkin, recognizing that the focus is generally too narrowly directed to descriptive representation. The richer concept of *substantial* representation, including descriptive, formal and symbolic representation, is better equipped to contribute to respect in citizen participation.

Public concern is another hotly debated issue in citizen participation. To create more room and attention for public concern, it was argued that particularized and generalized interest of all participants should be acknowledged, disentangled and separately debated.

Citizen participation does not automatically contribute to civicness. It was argued that it has more chance to do so if the conditions sketched in this article are met: if participation is structured rather than laissez-faire, if it is experience rather than expertise-based, if experience is not treated as ultimate truth but as something to be analysed, if representation is conceived as more than just descriptive representation, and if public and personal/group interest are distinguished and treated as something that all involved struggle with rather than as a problem of citizens only. These conditions have a good chance of improving civicness in citizen participation. Whether they indeed do so, is still to be researched empirically.

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