Local Democracy and Participation

A qualitative study about citizen participation in Kochi, India

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"India is a pluralist society that creates magic with democracy, rule of law and individual freedom, community relations and [cultural] diversity. What a place to be en intellectual! … I wouldn't mind being born ten times to rediscover India".

Robert Blackwill, departing US ambassador, in Guha (2007: II)

ABSTRACT

The citizens in the Indian state of Kerala are considered as the most politically aware and active population in the country. Kerala has a nature of intensely participatory, activism and empowerment, and it is known for its sudden strikes and demonstrations, making it ideal for studying local democracy and participation. The city of Kochi was chosen as the place to do research because it is one of the most industrial advanced cities in Kerala, and is also considered as the industrial and financial hub of the state.

Compared to the rural citizen, there is a bigger gap between the urban citizen and the local government. For while every registered voter is registered as a member of the Grama Sabha in the rural areas, the urban areas have the Ward Committee as the lowest level for institutional participation. This makes the representation ratio between citizens and their elected representatives almost ten times larger in the urban areas. Studies also indicate a lack of knowledge and interest for social and political issues among the urban citizen in India, with one of the explanatory factors being an increasing modernization of the civil society, giving rise to the questions asked in this thesis.

The analysis in this thesis is based on in-depth qualitative interviews, ethnographic observation and existing literature on the subject. In addition, the data material also consists of shorter and more informal interviews and conversations, making the total count of informants 48. The informants represent a variety in the society regarding age, gender and socio-economic status and membership in a resident association, the Kudumbashree and trade unions.

The thesis aims to shed light on the barriers linked to citizen participation on an individual level, and in turn what means the citizens use to participate. The first part of the analysis identifies the barriers that the individual citizen experience in relation to democratic participation. The second part explores how these barriers can be reflected among members in the organizations mentioned above. Thus what their motivation for organizing themselves are, and if they feel that they are able to voice their worries and interests through their membership.

The thesis demonstrates that low attendance in formal democratic institutions, often interpreted as a lack of commitment and engagement, is not necessarily connected to a lack of interest in social and political issues among the citizen. On the contrary, in some cases it is the opposite. A common denominator among the informants was lack of confidence in the political institutions, and its actors addressing their concerns and protects their interests, making them look for other solutions. For these reasons trust is a useful analytic concept in the attempt to elaborate the current patterns of citizen participation.

One of the challenges for the democratic institutions are to find ways to re-establish a connection with the ordinary citizen. However, while making sure that the citizens' voices are heard, and taken into consideration, there are also a chance that too much focus on the special interests of each group in society will produce entrenched interests and institutional ossification. In conclusion the thesis finds that even though there are advantages to organizing interests, the upper class and middle class have the resources to be more efficiently organized, causing the possibility to crowd out a more encompassing policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVATONS

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI-M	Communist Party of India-Marxist
CSES	Social-Economic and Environmental Studies
KILA	Kerala Institution for Local Administration
LDF	Left Democratic Front
LSGI	Local Self Government Institutions
PPC	People's Planning Campaign,
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
RA	Resident Associations
SC	Scheduled Caste,
ST	Scheduled Tribes
UDF	United Democratic Front

GLOSSARY

Churidar	A traditional clothing for women, consisting of a long tunic and long pants
Corporatino of Cochin	The municipal corporation that manages the city of Kochi (formerly known as Cochin)
Grama	The lowest level in India's political state hierarchy, are below District and Block
Grama Panchayat	Local Self-government
Grama Sabha	Institutionalized village council, India's constitution from 1993.
Hartal	Term for strike action and mass protest often involving total shutdown
Kudumbashree	Female-only neighbourhood groups that aims to contribute to economic uplift and integrate women with the activities and institutions of local governance
Lakh	One lakh equals 100 000
Lok Sabha	Means peoples assembly, it is the lower house of the Parliament in India.
Malayalam	The language spoken in Kerala
Ourokottam	A preparatory meeting previous of the Grama Sabha meeting for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes
Panchayat	Literally means assembly. Democratically elected bodies at sub regional levels
Panchayati Raj	Literally means assembly rule. India's system of government existing of three levels: Gram/Block/District
Saree	Traditional dress for Indian woman
Ward Committee	Institutional councils, the same function as the Grama Sabha, only for cities in urban areas
Wards Committee	Institutional council, in addition to the Ward Committees, in municipalities with a population of over 3 lakh.

1. INTRODUCTION

It was my first day in Kochi and I had been standing in line at the boat jetty for a ticket over to Fort Kochi for quite some time. Around me were Indian women dressed in colourful churidars and sarees. The station was getting crowded as there clearly was some delay, and since nobody seemed to know why, I decided to go ask the man working in the kiosk at the station if he knew why it was taking so long – "strike" was the answer. Of course, what else could it be? Kerala has a nature of intensely participation, activism and empowerment, and it is known for its sudden strikes and hartals. In addition to this ferry personnel strike, there was one hartal, and a two-day national strike that affected me directly during my field study by interfering with my schedule. It may not be the best situation for a tourist or the local citizen, but for the purpose to study local democracy and participation I could not have wished to be any other place.

1.1.   The road towards this thesis

In 2011 I conducted a field study in the rural area of Wayanad, Kerala exploring the reasons behind the declining participation in the Grama Sabha meetings (Olsen et al. 2011). One of the main explanatory factors was to be found in an increasing modernization of the civil society and politicization of local democracy. These findings made me curious about the situation for citizen participation in a more urban area. If it was possible to see a decline in the interest and knowledge for political and social issues in Wayanad, then what about a society that has come further in the transition, or already is considered as modern? This awakened an interest to study citizen participation in Kochi, and thus gave rise to the questions of

this thesis. The city of Kochi was chosen as it is considered the industrial and financial hub in Kerala, and is one of the most advanced cities in Kerala when it comes to industrial development.

I began my field study by talking to scholars and researchers about local democracy and participation in Kochi. We discussed the findings from my earlier field study in Wayanad, and what Ramanathan (2007: 674) describes as a total absence of participatory involvement of citizens in, and accountability of, local self-governance structures in urban areas. They could confirm that the findings and arguments of Ramanathan (2007) to a great extent also apply to Kochi. According to them it is a challenge to get ordinary citizens to engage in social and political issues beyond those that have a direct impact on their lives. After talking to several citizens of Kochi, I soon learned that the lack of participation in elections and political meetings were not necessarily connected to a lack of interest in social and political issues, on the contrary, in some cases it proved to be the opposite.

Getting in contact with people was not a big challenge as they often came up to me on the bus or at a restaurant just to talk. When we began talking about the reason for my stay in Kochi, the response I got was often in line with "Ugh, why do you want to study politics?" and "It is nothing good with politics". The citizens talked about a corrupt system with corrupt politicians. When asked about pressing issues in Kochi, the majority mentioned pressing and visible challenges such as waste management, sewage and mosquitoes. Although they talked about the same problems, and partly described the same feeling of hopelessness and a lack of trust in the government, how the feeling of powerlessness affected them and how they reacted as a result of it was different. This made my curious about the challenges an urban citizen encounter in contact with local democracy, and what barriers that can be identified when they themselves describe their situation.

1.2.   Research Question

The research questions posed in this thesis is partly a result of a field study conducted in 2011 as part of development studies at Oslo University College.

Studying local democracy and participation in rural areas made me curious on how the patterns for citizens' participation differ from rural to urban areas, as findings implicated that it would. The general aim of this thesis is to explore the current context of citizen participation in Kochi, and the development forward. Kerala is often described as a vibrant civil society (Corbridge et al 2013; Isaac and Franke 2002; Törnquist et al. 2009). A strong and vibrant civil society strengthens democracy, but it requires participation from all the different groups of society in social and political issues. The research questions are posed to shed light on the barriers linked to citizen participation on an individual level, and in turn how the citizens choose to engage themselves in social and political issues in their community. Two research questions are posed:

1) *What are the barriers to citizens' participation in Kochi?*
2) *What alternatives do citizens have to engage and participate in local democracy?*

1.3.   Structure of the Thesis

The thesis will begin with two chapters with a brief outline of the historical and political background of India, Kerala and then Kochi. Chapter three presents and discusses the literature on democracy, and how modernization of society can have an effect on citizens' participation, and the concepts of trust will be discussed.

The first part of the analysis identifies the barriers that the individual citizen experience in relation to democratic participation. Thus what their motivation for organizing, or not organizing themselves are. These questions lead up to the second research question, elaborate the alternatives that the citizens choose, and if they feel that they are able to voice their worries and interests through their membership. In the last chapter I will come with concluding remarks and elaborate what I believe will be the challenges for the local government, and the Indian government related to citizen participation.

1.4.   Kerala - God's Own Country

Kerala is situated in southwest India, and is one of totally 28 state governments in India. It has a population of 33.4 million, and is the most densely populated state in India. 74 percent of the population live in rural areas (GoK 2011). Kerala is divided into 14 districts, Thiruvananthapuram being the largest city and administrative capital. The state is covered by coconut trees and has a much more luxuriant landscape compared to many other states in India, this is also why Keralites call their state "God's own country".

The state of Kerala is well known for its history of social mobilization for better education, healthcare, public distribution of food, and fundamental structural changes such as land reforms (Isaac and Franke 2002: xiii). When the Left Democratic Front (LDF) party was elected in 1996 they decided that 35-40 percent of its Ninth Plan outlay for projects and programs to be formulated and implemented by local governments, this was the first step to realize their ideals of democratic decentralization. In the case of Kerala, democratic decentralization is part of a larger struggle for self-reliance and an attempt to meet some of the most keenly felt needs of the people through mass participation. The decentralization experience in Kerala has an intensely participatory, activist, and empowering nature, which makes it very interesting from a scientist's point of view.

Economic growth has been the Achilles heel of the state (George and Kumar 1997). Economically, Kerala is behind many other states in India. Some of the reasons for this could be that the majority of its population lives in rural areas, where agriculture is the largest industry, and due to several reasons it has not been beneficial to pursue industrialization to the same extent as in other states. The slow growth in economy has already put a limit to the development in the social sectors.

The two biggest political parties in Kerala are the Congress Party and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). They are the leading party in each of their coalition – United Democratic Front (UDF) and Left Democratic Front (LDF). These coalitions fight for victory in each election, and they have a habit of winning just about every other time. The biggest parties in the UDF after the Congress Party are Kerala Congress and Muslim League, while the two biggest parties in LDF are

CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist) and Communist Party of India (CPI). The last Kerala State legislative assembly election was held on April 13 2011, with the UDF beating the LDF by a margin of 4 seats. There has been a strong organizational life in Kerala, with political parties, trade unions and cooperatives. On the one hand, the civic organizations were rooted in the socio-religious and often caste-related associations of civil society. On the other hand, the political and economic groups were affected by increasingly important class interest as well. Alongside these strong popular organizations, Kerala has state agencies and bodies of considerable prominence (Törnquist 2010: 118). These different groupings in civil society have left their stamp on the parties and on political life in general, as have a range of trade unions and cooperatives (Törnquist 2010: 119).

Kerala has experienced great improvements in the social plan in the last 50 years. Looking at the social indicators, Kerala is well above the average in India, and in some areas at the same level of European countries. This development has taken place without any significant economic growth, making Kerala a good example of the importance of the government's role in creating social development (Smukkestad 2008). The investments that the Communist Party started when they won the election in Kerala in 1957, had a focus on health and education as well as an extensive land reform, has by many experts been called the "Kerala model".

Kerala's strong civil society may be traced back to popular based demands that began in the nineteenth century in the two British-dominated principalities of Travancore and Kochi. Where the citizens demanded greater equality in religious and social life, for the right of all to seek public employment, for fairer economic legislation, and for state support for the improvement of health care and education (Törnquist 2010: 117-118).

1.5. Kochi - The Queen of the Arabian Sea

Kochi is a major port city on the west coast of India by the Arabian Sea, and over the years the city has witnessed rapid commercialization, and has today grown into a commercial hub of Kerala. During the British colonial rule, Kochi was one of Kerala's

three separate entities, and was ruled by maharajas who were under the suzerainty of the British colonial government (Kannan 2000). Due to its geographic location the state has been readily available to the influence of other countries and cultures, which has resulted in significant migration. Migration has made Kochi the most densely populated city in Kerala.

The city of Kochi is considered the most advanced in industrial development amongst the districts in Kerala, and is therefore also a representative example for the new liberal version of local development. It is a development that has given priority to economic growth, privatization and industrialization. It is interesting to see how this has affected the citizens' participation in local democracy. Kochi in this thesis refers to the whole district of Ernakulam. Fort Kochi and Ernakulam are the "twin cities" that is under the Corporation of Cochin. Corporation of Cochin is the municipal corporation that manages the city of Kochi. The Corporation consists of what used to be the three municipalities of Fort Kochi, Mattancherry and Ernakulam.

The city of Kochi is divided into 74 administrative *wards*, from which the members of the corporation council are elected for a period of five years. Each ward has its own Ward Committee. Since Kochi has a population of more than three lakhs (300 000), it also has *Wards Committees* in addition to the *Ward Committee* (Sivaramakrishnan 2006: 6-7).

The Council headed by the Mayor manages the affairs of the city, aided by the Secretary who is appointed by the state government. The *wards* are administrative units of the city region. The central office is situated in Ernakulam. Kochi is a part of the Ernakulam Lok Sabha Constituency. *Lok Sabha* can be translated to the *House of the People,* and is the lower house of the Parliament in India. Members of the Lok Sabha are elected on the basis of adult suffrage. Each Lok Sabha is formed for a five-year term, after which it is automatically dissolved. The 16th Lok Sabha was formed in May 2014 and is the latest.

1.6. Historical and Political Background

India is currently the largest constitutional democracy in the world; today they have a decentralized form of government that is built up on Mahatma Gandhi's social model (Ruud et al. 2004). After the independence from British rule in 1947, India has had success with its democratic institution building. One of the biggest challenges was to find a way to reconcile the country's great religious, regional and ethnic differences (Guha 2008). An important feature of the period after independence is the significant expansion of the government's ambit, which came partly as a result of the ideological conviction of leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. To some extent this was a continuation of what already took place under British rule, but the pace, dedication and energy was completely different. Elections, representative governments at the national and state level, and in principle and sometimes in practice at district and village level, were introduced. Government and state administrations grew steadily to complete the tasks that were set forth in the ambitious national development plans, and the state sought a degree of influence over society that by far exceeded what colonialism had dared. Political parties quickly became the connection between state and society, and people increasingly had a political party affiliation (Ruud et al. 2004: 313 – 314; Williams 2008). However, one important note to make is that the democracy in India continues to co-exist with high socio-economic inequality and widespread poverty (Pedersen 2011).

1.6.1. The Panchayati Raj Institutions

As Norway has got the government, the county and municipality, India has the government, state government and the Local Self Government (LSG) institutions. The big difference is that the LSG institutions are also divided into three levels. This system is known as the Panchayati Raj, which directly translated means "governing assembly". It is a three tier-system consisting of the District Panchayat, Block Panchayat and Grama Panchayat (APPENDIX 2). The purpose is to distribute power from the government and out to local self-governments to obtain a greater degree of autonomy at the village level. Gandhi believed that such decentralization was

important for India to be able to develop further after independence.

When India became independent in 1947, there was already a provision that local government should be taken by the states, and that they should be adapted to local conditions and traditions in the various states. This did not turn out to work as intended (Ruud et al. 2004). However, the situation turned in the 1990's when people showed new interest in village councils, and in 1993, changes were made in the Constitution; the 73rd and 74th amendments. The amendments referred to the same topic, but the 74th amendment deals with urban areas while the 73rd amendment deals with rural areas. The latter contained several points that would improve conditions for the Panchayats and give them more power and responsibility to decide over their own development, both economically and socially (GoI 2007).

1.7.   Decentralized Planning in Kerala

Despite the acknowledged advantages of decentralization of planning and repeated commitments made in its favour, the planning process in India remained a highly centralized affair (Isaac and Harilal 1997: 53). There was no genuine planning from below, which made it difficult to meet complex local-specific problems and the felt needs of the people. There was a big national debate on decentralization during the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments passed by the parliament. The Indian government enacted 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts in 1993 as a bid to achieve democratic decentralization and provide constitutional endorsement of local self-governance authorities. This was to provide panchayats and municipalities with such powers and functions that is necessary to enable them to act as institutions of self-government.

The 74th Amendment has provided an institutional framework for people to participate actively through a two-tier system of local self-government in urban areas. The first tier is the municipality, which consists of elected councillors, while the second tier is the ward committee at the level of wards. The ward committees are meant to be constituted for the city corporations. The provision for ward committees in the 74th Amendment is intended to enhance proximity between

citizens and their elected representatives by enabling a platform for participation of people in local self-government and for securing accountability of elected representatives (Thomas et al. 2006: 138). However, since the citizens in the larger municipal bodies do not have easy access to the elected representatives due to the wads-sizes, it is recommended that in wards committees should be constituted in municipalities having a population of over three lakhs (300 000).

The government of Kerala, led by the Congress coalition, passed the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act in 1994 (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2006), an act that required the transfer of powers down to the Municipality/Panchayat/Corporation level and increasing the participation of the electorate through the formation of wards in municipalities. Kerala accepted the three-tier panchayat system proposed by the central government and elections were held in 1995 to establish elected bodies at the village level, block level and district level. The 74th Amendment, also known as the Nagarapalika Act, focused on the urban areas. In distinction to rural areas, which had been the subject of central government interventions since the 1950s through Panchayat legislation, urbanization had remained constitutionally undefined and therefore a state subject. As a result, each state government in India had implemented its own bodies of legislation for defining urban areas, and established various procedures for electing city councils or regulating taxation and the implementation of infrastructure services. The result was a nationwide pattern that limited the effective powers of city councils and the independence of urban executives, and established state-level authorities to regulate urban planning and utilities.

By the mid-1990s there were major political changes in Kerala. The Left Democratic Front (LDF), led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), had been successful in the 1996 local elections (Isaac and Franke 2002: 17-18), thus regaining government powers from the United Democratic Front (UDF), the rival political formation. LDF had decentralization as its first priority. The decentralization process took another leap when LDF launched the People's Planning Campaign in 1996. The People's Planning Campaign (PPC) for democratic decentralization was the beginning of a process of devolving the functions and

resources of the state from the centre to the elected governments at the lower levels. The aim was to facilitate greater direct participation by the citizens in government. However, it is important to remember that the Campaign was launched in a society that already could be considered as a vibrant and activist civil society. Kerala had already gone through a process of social democratization under Communist Party-led governments after 1957 (Franke and Chasin 1994; Isaac and Franke 2002; Williams 2008**)**, all of them state-led. This made it possible for the PPC to draw from the experiments conducted by the Kerala People's Science Movement, other nongovernmental organizations, cooperatives, local councils, and government agencies.

The Campaign introduced a decentralized planning with the aim to provide a meaningful participatory space for all sections of society. The institutions were designed to enable the participation of all sections of the population, particularly the marginalized communities. At the end of the millennium the public awareness focused increasingly on the financial incapacity of India's cities and the inadequate condition of their infrastructure after decades of state-government regulation. In some ways, the 73rd and 74th Amendments created a lopsided treatment of the rural and urban voters.

1.7.1. The Lopsided Treatment Between Rural and Urban

While Panchayti Raj institutions for the rural areas have resulted in self-governance structures and a fair degree of empowerment, nothing similar has been done for urban residents (Ramanthan 2007: 674). Ramanthan argues that participatory involvement of citizens in, and accountability of self-governance structures are almost totally absent in urban areas. There has been a lot of focus on building and strengthening the democratic institutions in rural areas, while there has been no such focus on the urban decentralization. According to Ramenthan (2007) this is the result of a policy that saw urbanization as a trend that needed to be slowed if not stopped altogether. While rural citizens have the Grama Sabha where every registered voter is a member of a Grama Sabha and should participate in decision making through this vehicle, urban citizens has no such institutionalized platform.

The urban citizens have the *Ward Committee*, which is conducted for the elected representatives from the particular ward, and may have representatives of the civil society as its members; thus they only have an advisory role. There is also the *Wards Committee* [sic], in article 243S in the Amendment Bill, it is provided for "wards committees" to be set up in all municipalities having a population of three laks or more (Sivaramakrishnan 2006: 7). However, the details relating to the composition, territorial area and the manner of filling seats in the wards committees are left to each state's legislatures. Due to different interpretations, Kerala and West Bengal are the only two states where one ward committee for each ward has been prescribed (Sivaramakrishnan 2006). In most other states, the wards have been grouped into Wards Committees, with the number varying from three to 19 wards (Sivaramakrishnan 2006: 7). In Kochi, each ward committee is for an average population of 9 000 (Sivaramakrishnan 2006: 11), due to lack of updated, I can only imagine that this number has increased since. The Wards Committees may exercise executive powers for the local level functions (Model Municipal Law chapter 4: 26-27).

Even though one can say that the main objective for the provision for ward committees is to ensure good governance (Thomas et al. 2006: 138), the representation ratio between citizens and their elected representatives is almost 10 times higher for urban areas than in rural areas (Ramanthan 2007: 674) making the whole process of participating more alienated and difficult for the urban citizen to grasp. While rural participation is embedded in the Constitution, citizen involvement in urban areas is still very indirect.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter begins with a presentation and elaboration of two central concepts of this thesis: democracy and participation. The terms are often ambiguous in the way they are used, and therefore useful to discuss. Democracy is a topic that has been extensively researched, and there are many contributors in the field of participation. Furthermore, citizen participation will be discussed in the light of modernization. In the last part of the chapter, the concept of trust will be presented and discussed as the analytic framework of this thesis. The concept can be ambiguous, and due to many interpretations it can be difficult to grasp (Hardin 2006; Warren 1999). Why some choose to participate, and how, is a question about human actions, where trust has proved to be a good framework for explaining the reasons behind the informants choices – what is it that drives them to make the choices they make.

2.1. Democracy – a Highly Debated Concept

Democracy is a highly debated concept, not just over what definition to use, but also as a result of normative judgments - about how much democracy is appropriate in any given society. Some theories emphasize the choice between people or parties that are competing for the formal power, and the requirements for an election to be considered as democratic. To be democratic, polls must be free and fair, and sitting rulers must leave their positions if they lose (Przeworski 1991; Schumpeter 1976). Other theories focus on issues related to citizens' equal opportunities for democratic participation (Fraser 2003). A third group of theories elaborate the variety in citizens' involvement in local communities. All three groups of theories are interesting, and they all contribute with important elements to the concept of democracy, however, they cannot stand alone. Democracy is not just about political institutions, decision-making and voting. For a democracy to thrive one needs active

citizens that take part in the local democracy.

Joseph Schumpeter (1976) challenged the idea that democracy is a process by which the electorate identified the common good, and politicians carried this out for them. For him this was unrealistic - people's view reflect ignorance and superficiality because they are manipulated by politicians who set the agenda. This basically made a "rule by the people" concept both unlikely and undesirable. Instead he advocated a minimalist model, much influenced by Max Weber, whereby democracy is the mechanism for competition between leaders, much like a market structure. Although votes from the general public legitimize governments and keep them accountable, he argues that the policy program is very much seen as the politicians' and not the people's, and that the participatory role for individuals are usually very limited. This limits participation to voting for competing elites, and is a stark contrast with a view of the individual evolving through participation in decision-making processes. Schumpeter's theory of democracy is in other words based on certain elitism, a form of democracy that does not require any broad political participation outside elections other than being able to put their mistrust on the politicians. This is an insufficient view on democracy. A counterpart to the form of democracy described here can be found in the different varieties of participatory democracy.

The normative core in Fraser's theory is the principle of "parety of participation" (Fraser 2003: 36). The principle requires that every citizen have the right to participate as equals. Participation for Fraser is both social and political, and the right to hold membership in different organizations. Fraser's principle of participation includes all citizens as participants and it presupposes that all human beings are equal (Fraser 2003: 45). For equality to be possible, the redistribution of resources and wealth must be done in a way that ensures every citizens' independence and voices. In addition, equal values of all citizens and equal opportunity to social esteem must be institutionalized by both the government and among the citizens (Fraser 2004: 127 – 128).

Democracy becomes more meaningful if there are formal democratic institutions where citizens can participate. For these democratic institutions to have an effect there

needs to be active citizens who make use of them, furthermore the democratic institutions must have the ability to accommodate and implement the wishes of the citizens. The goal is active citizens that are able to participate in strong and transparent institutions. Törnquist (2009:1) argues that the main cause for the current stagnation of democracy in the global south today is "flawed representation emanating from both elitist institutions building *and* fragmented citizen participation".

There is a great amount of literature on civil society participation having a positive view on individual democratic participation, and therefore also on the functioning of democracy (Fung 2003; Pateman 1999; Portes 1998). For John Stuart Mill, it is at the local level that the real educative effect of participation occurs – it is by participating at the local level that the individual "learns democracy" (Mill in Pateman 1999: 31). Mill argues that "we do not learn to read or to write, to ride or to swim, by being merely told how to do it, but by doing it, so it is only by practicing popular government on a limited scale, that the people will ever learn how to exercise it on a larger" (Mill quoted in Pateman 1999: 31).

2.1.1. *Representative or Participatory Democracy?*

A liberal democracy is a form of representative democracy where the elected representatives are limited by a constitution that emphasize the protection of individual liberties, equality and the rights of minority groups. Binding decisions are to be taken by democratically chosen representatives. The challenge is to balance the power between the people and the representatives they have chosen. The people can in practice only govern themselves through elected representatives. In order for the elected representatives to be able to attend to their tasks on behalf of the people, they must be given power and authority.

However, the representatives may come to exploit their power position and go against their voters' wishes and interests (Rasch 2000: 67-68). To prevent a collapse, it is important to design good institutions. David Hume (in Hardin 1999: 23) proposes that we should design government institutions so they should serve our interests even if they were occupied by incapable people. The aim is that

through the introduction of liberal institutions and procedures in time will form the citizens into good democrats. To ensure an orderly democratization that does not stop and is driven back by elites afraid of losing their privileges, it is recommend keeping the radical masses outside democratization. In the liberal argument, the radical forces oppose the democratization process with its radical demands and wishes of drastic power changes, and in addition the radicals are poorly organized and unlikely to play a central role in both the process and in the democracy itself. It is the moderate elites of the regime and the opposition who are the key players in a democracy, and it is they who are best placed to manage the process with international support (Grugel 2002 62-64; Törnquist 2004: 4-5). It is assumed that economic liberalization contributes to strengthen a growing middle class and prevent that all economic and political power is concentrated in the authoritarian regime. And that political liberalization should allow for a greater political participation and inclusion that in the long term will strengthen the moderate opposition, which is considered to be an important force behind democratization (Törnquist 2002: 21-22; Fukuyama 2004: 20-21).

Democracy is, additionally to the protection from tyranny, also a possibility for citizens to have impact on their own lives through participation. Stiefel and Wolfe (1994: 5), define participation as "the organized efforts in increasing control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control". Participation is here located outside of the state, taking a variety of forms from social movements to self-help groups. From the World Bank's perspective, participation is a "process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them" (World Bank 1995). The focus is more on direct participation of primary stakeholders, rather than indirect participation trough elected representatives.

A participatory democracy draws inspiration from the practices of Athenian democracy, and it is a process emphasizing the broad participation of constituents in direction and operation of political systems. It also tends to advocate more involved forms of citizen participation than traditional representative democracy.

The goal is to create opportunities for all citizens to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seek to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities. Active participation will reduce the risk of tyranny, because an engaged and knowledgeable citizenry is generally though to be a better protection against power-hungry rulers than subservient subjects who never employ their own judgment or never think about politics at all (Phillips 2004: 57-58).

John Rawls (1993), believes that the participant perspective would not work for pluralistic societies because it assumes that the members of the society have relatively similar values and that they understand political cooperation as a joint realization of collective goods. He argues that it is neither possible nor desirable to assign members of a pluralistic democracy had values and collectively identity in the deep sense. He believes that it is sufficient that the citizens mutually recognize each other in order to be entitled to the same basic rights and a minimum of basic goods, or assets that need to fulfill their potential as full members of society (Rawls 1993).

2.2.   Participation in a Modern Society

Modernization of society involves that a society through economic growth experiences industrialization, which in turn can lead to urbanization - more people are taking higher education, specialization, bureaucratization, new methods of communication and political changes (Inglehart 1997). Inglehart (1999) emphasizes how postmodernism has influenced people's views on politics and their participation in elections, this has also been found by other scholars (Törnquist et al 2009; Ramanathan 2007). He highlights the loss of respect for authority in society, while there is an increased support for democracy. He claims that better living conditions, due to positive economic growth and the absence of war and conflict can be reflected in subsequent generation's value priorities, and thus their political participation, both when it comes to forms of participation and what they vote in elections.

Typical post-materialistic values that Inglehart (1999) describes are related to the need for belonging, intellectual self-realization and aesthetic satisfaction (Todal

Jensen 1993: 28). Inglehart's (1999) arguments are based on the notion that those who grow up in a welfare state do not have to worry about basic physiological needs and does not need the same degree of belonging to a larger community as there are several groups or societies to choose from. This can also be seen in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as Barro argues that "with rising incomes, (they) become more willing – and more able – to supplement the necessities of life with luxury goods (such as) democratic governance" (Barro 1996 in Landa and Kapstein 2001: 269).

In other words, democracy will come second for poor people, as immediately necessary consumption items will come first. Following this argument, as incomes grow people are expected to have more interest in and greater support for democracy. This argument has been supported by many studies over the years (Almond and Verba 1965; Powell 1982; Verba et al. 1995). However, studies like these have mainly been done in a Western context. Studies for India show that this is not the case (Yadav 1999, 2000). Yadav (1999) writes: "The textbook rule about political participation is that the higher you are in social hierarchy, the greater the chance of your participating in politically activity including voting. Contemporary India is perhaps the only exception to this rule among functioning democracies in the world today" (Yadav 1999: 2397).

There are different factors proved to impact on citizen participation. Education has been proved to matter for participation, independently of socio-economic status (Finkel et al. 2000; Finkel 2002; Jackson 1995). And information and insight has been showed to matter apart from education (Dahl 1989; Norris 2000). In addition to this, social capital and social networks have also been found to be significant for efficacy and participation levels (Krishna 2002; Putnam 1993).

That citizens are engaged and involved in social and political should be considered as a strengthening of the political institutions. The more people that participate in elections, the better (Engelstad 2005: 110). However, as Engelstad also points out, there are arguments for the opposite. A low turnout at elections has been described as healthy for democracy since it is the least insightful voters who stay away (Lipset 1981). High participation has been seen as a "fever reaction" of

society, a sign that extremists are trying to dominate (Petersson and Westerståhl 2004). Conversely, a low turnout can be interpreted as a sign that the citizens are so satisfied that they do not believe it is important to vote (Offerdal 2003). The basis of this thesis is that participation and active citizens initially is positive.

Bauman (1999) argues that almost nothing is solid anymore; people change jobs, homes and partner, and identity, goods and services can be purchased. He also elaborates how fear of commitments has affected individuals' identity, people fears of being tied up. Today's society is constantly changing, what may seem wise and safe today is not necessarily wise and safe tomorrow. This view can be seen in connection with the blooming of unconventional forms of participation. Conventional participation such as voting at elections can be understood as an attachment to a specific party and its values and politics.

From Bauman's (1999) perspective, the conventional participation will loose ground for more unconventional participation because it is perceived as too committing. If you vote at a general election, you have voted for a government that essentially will sit for five years. The same can be applied to being a member of any particular political party, whether you are an active member or not. If you are a member of a political party, in a way you have taken a stand in several social and political issues, at the same time it is also a membership that is not always as easy to end. With the focus on one thing at a time, the unconventional forms of participation makes it possible for people to voice their opinions without feeling any sort of connection to a particular political party. Unconventional actions are often very task-oriented and specific, features that are appealing to the more "modern" identity and its civil society.

2.3.   Trust

During my field study and as I started to get an overview of the collected data, I found that people's dissatisfaction towards government and the choices that they made, basically was about trust, or the lack of it. Both lack of trust in institutions and in individuals. The purpose of this thesis is to try to identify the barriers to citizen

participation based on individual experiences, exploring the factors behind, how they choose to react and why. Trust cannot be ignored in studies of human action as it gives us the possibility to include the informal modes of social interaction in our studies (Offe 1999: 42). Trust is therefore chosen as the analytical core of this thesis. Literature on trust often distinguishes between the trust in people and trust in institutions.

2.3.1. Reasons for Trust in Others

Due to its many interpretations, trust can be a difficult concept to grasp (see Hardin 2006; Warren 1999; Grimen 2009). Several theories assume that trust is based on the trust givers' varying degree of knowledge about the trustee's reliability. The more knowledge, the more efficient is the trust. It is rational to trust someone you know shares your interests (Hardin 2006).

Knowledge the one acquire through experiences and available information, form the foundation for whether or not we feel that a person is trustworthy or not (Offe 1999: 53). In other words, trust means that we need to know a fair amount about the other person (Hardin 2006: 68).

Trust based actions are controlled by fallible expectations about how others will or should act. Expectations are assumption about what will happen, or should happen, in the future, now or in the past. The expectations may be wrong, regardless of what one might think, feel or want. The person who chooses to trust will therefore be objective vulnerable (Grimen 2009: 21).

Following these arguments, trust is based on what we find familiar. People are more likely to trust others who are similar to themselves in terms of clothing, gender, age, culture and religion (Grimen 2009: 15; Sztompka 1999: 41-43). The more knowledge we have, the good experiences that we have, and to have our expectations met, can all contribute to if one finds others trustworthy, thus choosing to trust them.

Putnam argues that individuals are able to be trusting because of the social norms and networks within which their actions are embedded (Putnam 1993: 177).

Norms of generalized reciprocity encourage social trust and cooperation because they reduce incentives to defect, reduce uncertainty, and provide models for future cooperation. Trust this therefore considered to emerge from the social system, as much as it is a personal attribute (Putnam 1993: 177). These arguments make it irrational to trust someone one knows little about. However, when it comes to trusting government and its institutions, one often may not have a choice as it would be difficult to have a relation to every individual that are a part of the institutions.

2.3.2. Trust in Institutions

In a democracy, citizens can only vote based on their limited knowledge of government, and thus have an impact on the governments actions. One of the most important functions of the state is to be the main provider of necessary goods like physical infrastructure, schools, and health services etc. As citizens we expect them to provide these services in an adequate and satisfactory manner. Many of the general functions and customization tasks are mainly the same in all communities, regardless of social type, size and level of development (Schiefloe 2003; Offe 1999). The recruitment and training of new members, producing and distributing food and other necessary resource, are some of the needs and functions a society must cover. In sociology social institutions are referred to as a form of durable solutions that provide important social tasks (Schiefloe 2003). The institutions are there to represent us, such as our state government or various organizations that we hold membership in. In these organizations there are people who are granted authority, and who make decisions and carry out actions on our behalf. In other words, all interactions with an institution are also interactions with its representatives.

There are some theoretical disagreements on whether or not it makes sense to talk about trust in the government as an institution. Grimen (2009) believes that we, with some reservations, can trust in institutions. Moreover, there are those who believe that trust in democratic institutions are a prerequisite for democracy to work, while others argue that we should not trust the ones in power (Grimen 2009: 110; Hardin 2006: 69).

Hardin (2006) and Offe (1999) believe that liberal democracies emerged through criticism towards traditional authorities, thus more democracy over the years has meant less trust in government. Hardin argues that we must not interpret citizens' cynicism towards government as distrust; the relation of citizens to government in general is not a relation of trust or distrust. At best, much of the time it is a relationship of inductive expectations and acquiescence (Hardin 2006: 167). Obviously, what citizens must want from government is that it is trustworthy. And to distinguish between the trust one give to individuals and institutions, Hardin speaks of citizens' *confidence* in government (Hardin 2006: 65).

Trust in institutions can be based on trust in particular individuals connected to a specific institution, or extended to the organization itself. To its resources, management philosophy, systems for quality control or the competence of its employees (Gulbrandsen 2005:118). Trusting institutions also requires having trust in institutionalized practices and procedures (Grimen 2009). When it comes to trust in institutions, Luhmann (in Grimen 2006) argues that we need to distinguish between personal and impersonal distrust. He characterizes distrust towards institutions as an impersonal distrust, and that in some occasions impersonal distrust may be a prerequisite for trust in institutions. We entrust children to schools, not to specific teachers, and our money to the bank, not to specific employees. The institution's quality is therefore essential. Based on this argument, one can say that strong institutions are a prerequisite for trust in strangers.

When it comes to the concerns about declining citizen participation in democratic institutions, voting does not necessary need to be a sign of trust in government (Hardin 2006: 167). Hardin claims out that the concern of declining participation, and electoral participation, should be addressed to the politicians and officials' competence rather than their motivations (Hardin 2006). He follows up with the argument that we may have come to an era where it is possible for governments to not be able to handle many of their problems, and that this does not matter much. He believe this is possible as long as government does not go back to the desire for mercantilist management of industry or socialist desires for central planning (Hardin 2006: 177). Offe shares Hardin's thoughts on trust in institutions,

as "trust can only be extended to actors and in the ways in which they perform and enact their roles within institutions" (Offe 1999: 45). He believes that trust is only something we can have in individuals. We cannot know enough about institutions' inner life, and they cannot reciprocate trust, only people can reciprocate trust. Trusting institutions would according to Offe therefore be naive. While Offe (1999) argues that institutions cannot reciprocate trust, Grimen (2008) argues that it makes sense to trust institutions - they may not be able to reciprocate with warmth and feelings, but they can reciprocate.

2.3.3. Representative Democracy and Trust

There are many scholars who have tried to answer the question of why citizens in some advanced democracies feel that government competence is declining. Some claim that people have changed and are therefore more sceptical of government because the social organization of our lives has changed (Etzioni and Diprete 1979). Others argue that styles of politicians have changed, as the shift from traditional campaigning to the marketing of candidates (Manin 1997). Hardin (2006), on the other hand argues that the underlying political issues have changed in ways that reduce confidence in government, and perhaps what is needed is a redefinition of democratic politics and participation. He notes that democracy has been recreated many times, and that it was reasons for that time to think each of these changes somehow was bad and tended towards less democracy (Hardin 2006: 162). Yet, it would be hard to say that any of the changes was a mistake, as circumstances a nation of 50 or 300 million cannot be run the same way as a small city-state. With this in mind, he argues that we may have entered another transitional era with democracy shifting from coherent, party-dominated contests to free-for-all elections of a new kind. In which the competence of citizens to judge candidates and issues may be in decline because the complexity and diversity of issues make them extremely difficult to understand (Hardin 2006: 162).

In general, it appears to be difficult for citizens to judge their governments as trustworthy, at best they can judge that a government seems to be competent and

that it produces apparently good outcomes (Hardin 2002). Hence, citizens can be more or less confident in government. If the government handles crises and disasters well, it can be given credit for its seeming competence even while it is held accountable for failing to prevent the crises or disaster. Urban citizens can do little more than react to government's failures that might set up disaster, and then react to its immediate handling of the crises. Evidence that it has failed can often be glaring and inescapable and can lead to distrust (Hardin 2006: 175-176).

3. DATA AND METHOD

Since I was mainly interested in how citizen of Kochi's own ideas and attitudes towards democracy and participation, and the importance of it, I chose to build this thesis on qualitative data. In-depth interviews were used as a mean to provide rich data about the individuals I talked to, and the group of informants that they represent. To gain insight into the informants' thoughts and attitudes related to subjects concerning topics related to democracy and participation, it was important to give them room to reflect on their own attitudes and experiences related to the topics.

No matter how well prepared a researcher is prior to an interview or field study, he or she cannot avoid entering into a relationship with the informants (Neumann and Neumann 2012: 11). With this in mind, Neumann and Neumann believe that the idea that the researcher should be neutral, and therefore has to avoid entering any relations with the informants, is based on faulty assumptions (Neumann and Neumann 2012 11-12). Because a qualitative approach is characterized by a direct contact between the researcher and those being studied, this raises a number of methodological and ethical challenges (Thagaard 2002; Neumann and Neumann 2012). It is these challenges that will be elaborated and discussed in this chapter. The approach puts the researcher's own interpretations in focus, and to ensure the projects' reliability and validity it is therefore very important for the researcher to document and discuss the choices that were made and interpretations continuously in the research process.

I will first give an insight in the challenges I encountered in relations to choice of method, being in the field, conduction interviews and ethical questions that arose during the research. Thereafter I will evaluate the data and the processing of data. My effect on the field as a researcher, and the field's effect on me

will be discussed in section 3.4. followed by a section on the ethical considerations. Finally, the thesis's credibility, conformability and transferability will be elaborated.

3.1.   In the Field

I stayed in Kochi for the purpose of this thesis from January to March 2013. Meetings with different key persons and researchers were made during the first weeks in Kochi. My goal for the first week were to get an overview of the Corporation of Cochin, hereafter called Corporation, and talking to as many people as possible to see if my research question was relevant or not. I had done extensive reading and research on the topic prior to the field study, but since there is a lot of documents that could not be found online and many texts are written in Malayalam, the local language, it was important for me to meet with key persons and to discuss my topic and thoughts with them for input in the first weeks. I also tried to come in contact with organizations such as the Kudumbashree, Resident Associations and Trade Unions, and map their functions and role in the community. The observation and experience from my former field study gave me a better understanding of the context and institutions that I were studying.   Therefore, even though my observation has not been given that much space in the analysis, it was important in the overall guiding of the research.

All the interviews were finished one week before my internship at the Centre for Social-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES) ended. Initially I had hoped to finish earlier, but due to the many delays along the way I came to realize quite early that this was not going to happen. From past experience I knew that this could happen, so I had included extra weeks for any possible delays.

The fieldwork was carried out during the last months of the deadlines for implementing the Corporation's projects of the year, and also the conducting of the Ward Committee meetings in the area of Kochi. This situation had both its advantages and disadvantages since it was a very busy time for the local government and it's officials. However, this was also one of the reasons why I wished to be in Kochi during this period, as I wanted the possibility to attend the

Ward Committee meetings and talk to people attending. Furthermore, to be able to talk to the politicians and elected representatives during the implementation of on of the most important responsibilities of the local government– working with, and implementing issues that the Ward Committees have promoted, and which should concern everybody. Unfortunately, due to poor communication and busy schedules, I was not able to attend any Ward Committee meetings, which originally was planned to play a bigger part in this thesis.

Only a few of my interviews were conducted with an interpreter, as many Indians speak sufficient English. Three interviews were conducted with an interpreter, translating from English to Malayalam and back. The rest of the interviews were carried out in English. There were some unplanned conversations with groups of women who did not speak sufficient English, but in these instances there was always someone in the group, or nearby, who could translate.

3.1.1. Sample

Compared to quantitative research, where the informants are selected randomly, the sample for this thesis is selected strategically (Thagaard 2009: 53). They were chosen to reflect a representative sample of the different groups in the civil society of Kochi, these being ordinary citizens in Kochi from different socio-economic classes, politicians, academics and young people. Several represented two groups. Their age ranged from 19 to 64 years. The "youth" in this thesis are between 18 and 27 years ord. The first-time voters to the general election would be between 18 and 23 years in May, and I also wanted to include the age group that were able to vote at the previous elections, both national and local body (panchayat), in 2009. The politicians and bureaucrats were interviewed due to their important role in the local government and how they perceive the challenges in relation to citizen participation, and the researchers, academics and NGOs were interviewed for their insight and reflections on the subject.

The recruitment of informants was done by the help from the staff at the Centre for Social-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES), and by contacts that

I had established during my last stay in India in 2011, and that I got during the current stay. I began my field study with conversations and interviews with the researchers at CSES, other academics, representatives from the public sector and local politicians. I found the "snowball method" (Thagaard 2006: 54) very helpful in finding informants. One thing often led to another, and by the end of an interview I often ended up with new names to contact. By using the snowball method with several independent people, I believe I managed to avoid getting informants within the same networks. This was desirable in order to get a more nuanced picture and data. However, getting informants was not the biggest challenges, as most people were interested in the subject and wanted to talk with me. However, the main challenge was conducting these meetings, because due to several reasons several appointments kept getting delayed.

In the thesis, the informants' are given fictitious names. They will be named after they the different groups they represent: Resident Association members' name start with R's, Kudumbashree members' name start with K's, Trade Union members' name start with T's, academics' and scholars' name start with A's, the one NGO representative's name will start with an N, for the rest of my informants who do not belong to any of these groups, the females will be given names that start with a F, and the men with a M.

3.2.   Collecting Data

The list of informants consists of 48 informants. Not all the interviews were scheduled in advance, and some may perhaps be better described as informal conversations. The in-depth interview lasted from 30 minutes to over one and a half hour. I made sure to have at least five interviews with representatives from each of the groups represented in the analyses – Resident Associations, Kudumbashree, Trade Unions and the youth. The data for the religious groups are mainly based on observation, newspapers and brief conversations, including members of the Hindu nationalistic party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Nevertheless, regardless of the circumstances, they all were informed about my purpose in Kochi, and were given

my contact information in case they had any further questions or if they did not want to be quoted.

As mentioned above, there were some obstacles related to getting the interviews conducted and these will be elaborated in this section. When using qualitative methodology the transitions between the different phases can be overlapping – a hermeneutic spiral (Grimen 2007: 256-257). One could say that I had my experiences with this hermeneutic spiral. After reaching Kochi and the collecting of data, meetings, talks and interviews with several people, I acquired new insight to the field that led to changes and clarifications of the questions that I originally had posted. One can say that the tortuous path of formulating the research question is a reflected of the large amount of information, number of informants and the diversity that they represent. One of my main challenges was that at the point of my field study the research questions were not set and the complete framework for the thesis was therefore not developed by the time I started collecting data. This can also be reflected in the amount of data that I have gathered andsome times it feels like I had enough data to write an extra thesis or two.

3.2.1. The Interview Guide

The *interview guide* is the researcher's aid during the interview; it is the specific expression of what the researcher want to analyze (Widerberg 2001: 60). To be able to shed light on the research questions, and having the analysis in mind, I wanted my interview guide to focus on illuminating the social patterns and context. The informants were considered as carriers of these social patterns and context. The intent with the interviews were in other words not focused on them as individuals but representatives of a social group in society. Therefore, my interview guides were semi-structured. I opened the interview by asking general questions about themselves, trying to create a comfortable situation for the informants by asking them questions they easily could answer. The interview guide were used as a guideline under the interviews, even though they might seem detailed, they were

not followed to the letter. This made is easier for my to follow the flow of the conversation, but at the same time made sure that I covered my main topics for the interview. Some of the interviews were also conducted without a guide, these were mainly interviews with the ordinary citizens, and were interviews at a later stage in the field study and in a situation where I felt comfortable. The decision on conducting the interviews without an interview guide was also made with the intent of making the interview situation as comfortable and natural as possible for informants such as students or ordinary citizens. When putting the interview guide aside I felt that they were able to relax more. I also made sure that I formulated the questions in a way that enabled the informants to reflect and give detailed answers.

3.2.2. Conducting Interviews

Prior to the interviews all informants were given a short oral introduction, and given the written information that I had prepared (APPENDIX 1). Even though I had an internship at the CSES, I was not working for, or represented any organization, company or state agency. I was therefore careful to make it clear that I was there as an independent researcher. The informants were also assured anonymity, and that they may withdraw themselves from the study at any time during the process without any further explanations.

I did not want to create a bigger distance than necessary between the informant and me. I tried to adjust to the different groups of informants, especially when the person sitting opposite of me seemed to me uncomfortable and insecure. From my previous field study I experienced that Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Casted and members of the Kudumbashree could be a little more insecure. I avoided this by not using too many academic and sociological terms in the interview with representatives from the Kudumbashree, and in some cases also union members. On the other hand, when I spoke to professionals, officials and politicians I wanted them to know that I had knowledge about India's cultural and political history. At the same time it was important to find a good balance between these two "roles". My intention to speak to them was to get their professional opinion and insights, so I

was therefore very interested in what they had to say. The importance of establishing a good and trusting atmosphere and relationship with the informant cannot be underestimated (Thagaard 2006: 98).

The interview with academics, politicians, elected members and the media were mainly conducted at their offices and work desks. By office I do not necessarily mean a quiet room. Conducting the interviews could sometimes be a little challenging. An office could also mean a large open office environment, all ceiling fans on full blast, and all the windows open letting in all the sounds from outside. This was not the best situation to conduct an interview. In some situations, I would ask if we could close the window or/and turn down the fan just during the interview, as turning off all the fans and closing the window were not an alternative in 35 - 40 degree Celsius. The heat was in some cases an extra challenge. An extreme case is where I had to wait for approximately three hours in a waiting room with limited access to water and fan before an interview, making me slightly dehydrated and exhausted before the meeting. It was not an ideal situation, but good preparation and an interview guide in hand, I was able to ask the questions that I had prepared.

With some of my informants I only had brief conversations with. This was because I took the opportunity to talk to people whenever I had the chance. In all cases I told them my purpose in Kochi, and asked if I could ask them some questions in relation to my master thesis. This was for the shorter conversations in the waiting room or at the bus stop. Another situation I used this method was when I was "abandoned" at the Corporation, and people came to talk with me, or when I was free to walk around the office and talk to the people who had the time and wanted to talk with me. Not all of these conversations are listed in the list of informants as the conversations where too brief for that purpose However, they offered a lot of new perspectives and insight.

3.3.   The Researcher Effect

No matter how well prepared the researcher is before an interview or a field study,

he or she cannot avoid entering into a relationship with the informant. The researcher will always be situated in relation to the field and person that are being studied (Neumann and Neumann 2012: 11-12). It is important that the researcher throughout the study reflects on his or her social position and experience (Neumann and Neumann 2012: 17-18). These are factors that will be triggered in the meeting with informants, and because how the researcher experience and are experienced by the people he or she talks with and observe in the field, are part in deciding what the other part talks about, how they talk about it and how much they talk about it. According to Jon Rogstad (2010), interest and experience both will, and should influence the questions we ask. It is therefore important for the researcher to reflect on the researcher's effect on the field, and how field may have had an affect on him or her. This is elaborated in the following sections.

3.3.1. The Researcher's Effect on the Field

As my skin is lighter than most people in Kochi, I experienced getting some attention in the beginning of my field study. When I took the bus or walked in the streets I noticed that people were looking at me. On the bus people would ask for my "good name" (my first name), where I was from and so on. In the beginning, I thought that they approached me because I looked different, but I did not observe them approach any foreign tourists the same way, asking the same questions. My impression is that they approached me because I was dressed like locals in *churidars*, and of course, it might have been easier to make contact since I was travelling alone. However, after a couple of weeks my skin got more tanned, and one could say that I blended more in. Since my skin was darker I could pass for a North-Indian, this was confirmed as I experienced several times that people started to talk Hindi to me.

My goal was to interview people who represented different groups in society, a diversity that also may have been reflected in the different ways they interpreted my appearance. Many of the politicians and people working at the public offices had a lot to do and many people to attend to, being a young foreign student did not necessary made me a priority. On one occasion I waited for almost a week before I

could conduct an interview that was scheduled in advanced.

3.3.2. The Field's Effect on the Researcher

Having stayed in Kerala and India over a longer period before, I was partly prepared for how this experience would be like, and what I could expect. Hence, I could expect a lot of waiting and that things do not always go as planned. Since I had not been to Kochi before, I arrived in Kochi three days before my internship started to get to know the city, where everything was located, and as an attempt to try to get used to the climate and culture again. However, even though I had conducted a field study in Wayanad earlier, this was much more complex and comprehensive, and I had by no means a relaxed attitude towards it. I prepared myself by among other things, reading literature on India's political system, Kerala's history, democratic decentralization and current issues by reading Indian newspapers online. The purpose was to gain insight, and be up to date on political, cultural and pressing issues in Kochi, and ease the transition to the field study. This may have formed the questionnaire and my approach to the field during my first weeks, but the experiences I had during my stay proved to be much more decisive in my interpretation and understanding of the field, and thus how this thesis has taken form and looks like today.

Since it is not common for Indian women to go out alone after dark, and the fact that it normally gets dark around 7 pm, I usually had the time to go over notes and reflect over the different experiences by the end of the day. I say "usually" because I literally got invited home to people every day, and it was not always easy to say no in fear of hurting someone's feeling or to offend them,

Then there was the language issue. "Indian-English" is often been joked about, but in some cases I experienced that it could be a genuine challenge. Other than having to play some parts of certain interviews over and over again to catch exactly what was said, I did not find it as a big challenge. Neither did I give it much thought until in several occasions I ended up as an "interpreter" between other Europeans and Indians. The explanation for this I believe is partly because I speak

Vietnamese and that I have experience working with people from different cultures and backgrounds. It may have made me, despite some weird sentences and broken accent, able to understand what people were saying. And the fact that I did not try to speak "perfect" English, made it easier for them to understand me. In some cases I even began to pronounce certain words in a way that made it easier for the interviewee to understand what I meant.

During most of my time in Kochi I made sure to make myself available to people be having an open body language and to smile whenever someone smiled or looked at me. Of course with precautions – I did not smile to everybody. However, after a long day, or having been in Kochi alone for a while, it could sometimes be too much. In order to not get too "smothered" and overworked by constantly being in "researcher mode", I sometimes simply sat facing the wall when I ate, both at the hotel where I was staying and out at the restaurant. And to be honest, Norwegians probably have a slightly larger private sphere than Indians.

3.4.   Ethics

Firstly, it is important that the informants get sufficient information about the project and the purposes before the interview begins, this due to the requirements of informed approval (NESH 2009). I had prepared some words about the project and my purposes with doing the interview, and used a couple of minutes before the interview to go through this with the informants (APPENDIX 1).

To secure the informants' anonymity I made sure that my notes and recordings from the interviews were kept safe. I either carried them with me, or kept them at a safe place. After each interview I transcribed the interview over to my computer as soon as possible, and deleted the files from the recorder. The information about personal identification marks was coded when transferred on documents on the computer or my notebook. I also had control over where my computer or notebook was at all times, I made sure that they either were kept with me or in a safe place. As I gathered data that could identify my informants, the project was reported to the NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services).

How to leave the scene of a research study in a way that the participants do not feel abandoned is also important (Creswell 2007: 44). I had some experience with this from my previous field study in Wayanad, where my two fellow students and I became close friends with some of our informants. For me it was important to not leave my Indian friends with the same feeling, for even though they were not subjects for my study, they were almost as much a part of my field study as my informants. In both cases I tried to withdraw slowly and conveying information about my departure.

3.5.   Validity and Reliability

Regardless of method, data will never be the "truth" and their will never be "right" stories (Thagaard 2002: 44-45). Interview as an approach has been criticized. Objections may be that interviews are not scientific, but are dependent on individuals and simply are a reflection of common sense. That it is not objectively but subjectively. Based on this, it may therefore not be valid (Kvale and Brinkmann 2012: 178-182). These are objections that concern the method's validity and reliability. Because even though it might be difficult to claim a study's validity or reliability, it does not mean that we do not seek to have our account resonate with the participants, to be an accurate reflection of what they said (Creswell 2007: 45). To obtain this we engage in different validation strategies, the ones used in this study will be presented and discussed here.

Validity determines whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure, and how truthful the research results are. In this process it is important to account for the research question and the researcher's preconception and perception. This has already been accounted for above. However, the research's validity and reliability in terms of analytic generalization of the findings will be elaborated in this section. How the research is carried out and if it is done in a trustworthy manner will have an effect on its validity and reliability.

I believe that my past experience with the topic of local democracy in Kerala, and being familiar with the Indian culture, have contributed to this thesis validity. In

addition, the meetings and interviews with professionals and academics early in my field study, gave me a broader understanding of the context and frame of what I was studying this time, although there is a noticeable difference between the rural and urban setting when it comes to civil participation. I also transcribed the audiotapes and went through my notes shortly after the interviews and no later than in the same evening. This limits the possibility to forget important points and quotes that were made during the interview.

Recognition is also a procedure to evaluate a study's validity and reliability. This involves that people with experience from the phenomenon being studied can recognize interpretations conveyed in the text. Since none of my informants have asked to see the thesis before it is finished, I have not had any confirmation on whether or not they can recognize themselves and their situation as it is conveyed in the final thesis. However, several of my informants and experts that I spoke with expressed that they considered the questions I asked was highly relevant, and that especially the questions concerning citizen's participation was both interesting and important.

Nevertheless, the knowledge and information acquired in this study can contribute to a better understanding and insight into the situation and challenges that a modernization of civil society brings in terms of citizens' participation in local democracy. I have also by using different sources of material, and in-depth interviews, tried to provide a valid image of the groups or organizations represented in this study.

4. IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS FOR PARTICIPATION

The current situation in Kochi can be described as what Alam (2004: 122) refers to as "the politics of din", which is what he describes as the core of civil society turning its back against democracy. "Turning its back against democracy" does not necessarily mean that they do not believe in democracy, my impression, as Alam (2004) also points out, is that the majority of the citizens are deeply committed to democratic values. However, due to the impression that the political institutions in their country are corrupt, many citizens have instead turned to activism in civil society and organized themselves through civil organizations such as resident associations and religious associations. New or improved civil society organizations can contribute to strengthening and deepening democracy and offer the promise of solving administrative challenges and other problems both at the state level and the local level. The aim of this chapter is to identify what the informants themselves regard as barriers, and how they have affected their attitudes towards politics and government in general and how this again have affected their choice of participation. The analysis will draw on narratives and examples from ordinary citizens, including the youth's expectations and attitudes towards the government. Some of the people interviewed are also members of civil society organizations such as resident associations, trade unions, Kudumbashree and religious groups.

4.1.   The Active Citizen

Democracy requires active citizens that are engaged and enthused by political issues, and take on a personal responsibility for public affairs (Philips 2004: 58; Bratton 2008). Bratton (2008: 48- 49) argues that individual citizens are not only obliged to exercise their right to vote, but they are also expected to engage with

others in collective actions and to take initiative to address their issues by contacting their leaders. Participatory models of democracy have been hit hard in recent decades by what seems to be a declining interest in political life (Ramanathan 2007). Surveys conducted in Europe and the United States (see Hardin 2006; DeBardeleben and Pammett 2009) suggest a process of disengagement from politics as people become more cynical about both politicians and political institutions. My findings and observation after two field studies in Kerala support these arguments. I find that because the ordinary citizen lack confidence in the governmental institutions and its officials, they are still to some extent reluctant when it comes to politics. Because all the basic elements for a successful democracy are there, Kerala has mainly been considered as a success when it comes to its democratic institutions (Isaac and Franke 2002; Heller 1999). However, it cannot be considered as a success if the citizens do not engage themselves and take part in the social and political development of their community.

Before we elaborate the alternatives of citizen participation, and the reasons behind their membership in different civil organizations, we first need to understand the context that these forms of citizen participation are a part of. This will be done by identifying the barriers that can shed light on what is described by scholars and officials as a decrease in participation and a lack of interest in social and political life. What are the possible hinders that make it difficult, or prevent, citizens from engaging or participating in the democratic institutions made available for them, and what alternatives can be found in different civil society organizations. In this chapter the data is used to illuminate the informants' situation, and describe their thoughts and attitudes towards local democracy, politics and politicians. Through this we will identify the barriers for citizen participation.

4.2.   The "Grabbing Hand" of Corruption

It is not uncommon that corruption is mentioned whenever the Indian democracy is the topic, as it is a well-known challenge for the Indian democratic system (Gupta 2005; Harris-White 2003; Mathur 2012; Webb 2012). In most of the conversations I

had during my stay in India, I did not need to ask directly about corruption, as it often naturally became a subject when talking about democracy and politics. Some even claimed that corruption is the price they pay for democracy, while others blame the citizens, including themselves, for their egocentric mindset.

4.2.1. What is corruption, and what are its consequences?

Corruption is considered as one of the greatest hinders to achieve economic growth, accountability and democracy in developing countries. In the Council of Europe's convention on corruption, it is stated that corruption "threatens the rule of law, democracy and human rights, undermines good governance, fairness and social justice, distorts competition, hinders economic development and endangers the stability of democratic institutions and the moral foundations of society" (NOU 2002: 22). Forms of corruption may vary, but it often includes bribery, cronyism, nepotism, extortion and embezzlement. Sandholt and Koetzle (2000) argue that corruption undermines the main aspect of democracy, and that bribery undermines the rule of law and the principle of fair competition and entrenches bad governance, hindering efforts to alleviate poverty and contributes to instability and human rights abuses.

Political corruption is the abuse of public power for private or political gain (Hjellum 2007), and where decisions that are to be made for the common good, are sold and bought for the benefit of individuals (Søreide 2013: 5). Political corruption is more than election rigging; it can lead politicians in office to steer away from good government (Transparency International), as it can occur at all levels of government. An example could be where government officials make decisions that benefit those who fund them, the consequence being that the public's interests comes second. Furthermore, political corruption can divert scarce resources from poor and disadvantaged citizens. Corruption increases income inequality as the benefits from corruption are often at the expense of the poor (Gupta et al. 1998). This could be a result of a policy where private rather than public interests are prioritized. Since it is more likely for corruption to occur in countries where democratic institutions are weak and absent, it is crucial with strong and

transparent institutions. If this is not in place, Shleifer and Vishny (2002) argue that the "grabbing hand" of corruption will always be present.

The sources in this thesis, including the collected data, commonly refer to corruption as corruption by public officials. In comparison to wholesale corruption, retail corruption is on a smaller scale with transactions for services such as house building, education and work. According to a global Transparency International survey, one in two Indians had to pay bribes when dealing with public authorities (Transparency International 2013). The informants in this thesis are mainly referring to retail corruption, thus it is this form of corruption that will be elaborated. In many ways one could say that political corruption is a precondition for retail corruption, as it contributes to maintain the daily corruption. As long as the politicians and government officials have a vested interest, there will be a small chance that they will give priority to get things straight.

The aim of this thesis is not to expose corruption, or to analyze to what degree one can find corruption in Kochi. The intention is only to describe how citizens' experiences with and views on corruption can contribute to explain and illuminate the development of citizen participation in Kochi. So, without going into a deeper discussion on whether or not corruption can contribute to economic growth, we will move on to elaborate how corruption is considered as a barrier for participation amongst my informants, and what effect attitudes like these can have on fellow citizens. When writing about corruption one must also be aware that due to differences in costumes and norms, it may be difficult to define what corruption is and what is considered as legit may differ from region to region and country to country.

4.2.2. Just a little dishonesty

"Money under the table" stories are not uncommon, as I have heard several similar stories during my two stays in Kerala. People had either had personal experience from it, or they could tell me about someone that they knew. It did not take long before I encountered people who had personal experience with corruption and

bribery. It is perhaps not so surprising as studies show that one in two Indians have had to pay bribes when dealing with public authorities (International Transparency 2013).

"When I applied for (...) I did not reach the requirements, the second time I got accepted. What happened? My uncle know someone that knew someone, and with a little money it was no problem"

Faiza

"My family needed to get rid of some trees close to our property so that we could develop our family business, but they were protected or something...There were some people who came and looked at it, and said we could not cut it down...But later my father paid them money, I do not know how much but we got the permission. Now we can earn more money so it was worth it"

Madan

For these two informants, the experiences above had only confirmed their existing suspicion towards government officials and the political system in general - as long as you have the right connections and money you can get what you want. This belief can also be found in You and Khagam's (2005) argument that corrupt systems creates a feeling of powerlessness, based on the assumption that rich people have paid their way to the top. For others, hearing stories like these can create what Luhmann (in Grimen 2009) describes as impersonal distrust. It is a distrust directed towards the whole political system and its institutions, and not at a specific individual.

Both informants agreed that paying bribes as illustrated above are immoral practices, and also claimed that experiences like these are the reason for why they did not care to engage themselves in politics. Even though they both talked about the immorality of corrupt politicians and government officials, at the same time they did not seem to be ashamed to have paid bribe money. Paying was a way for them to get a good education, and for their family to earn money. Although they to some point realized that by paying they contributed to maintain a system they do not accept, they neither saw the problem with paying when they had the chance, nor if they later on would get in the same situation again, as "the system is so f*cked up anyway". The way they talked about the situations described above did not give the impression that they considered them as corruption, maybe only just as a little

dishonesty that benefits everyone included in the transaction. One of them claimed that it is normal to use your connection in business, why should they not be able to do the same? The way they talked about the matter gave me the impression that they would not have the same carefree attitude towards the situation they told me about, had it been a politicians, and not their family members, who used his or her "connections" that way. This could also apply to many of my other informants. The way many of my informants spoke about corruption indicated that whether or not something is considered as "corruption" or just a "little dishonesty" is connected to the person's status. In other words, it would be legitimate for people of lower status, but illegitimate for people of higher status. My impression is that many of my informants are more likely to look upon situations where the distribution of power is uneven between the parties as corruption. Moreover, even though most literature and theories on corruption share a common understanding of corruption as having a negative effect on democracy, the opposite view does exist. There are scholars who argue that corruption, especially at the local level, only is a way to redistribute money and lead to economic growth by "greasing the wheels". An example can be found from my last field study in Wayanad, where I met a well-known scholar within the field who straightforwardly said that local democracy and the Grama Sabha was not worth studying, and that corruption at the local level was not a problem. He believed that what was looked upon as corruption and as an evil only was a way to redistribute money.

4.2.3. Acceptance

Regardless of how politically engaged my informants claimed they were, they all had an opinion on corruption, mainly being that it is immoral and an evil. Nevertheless, they did not place all the guilt on the politicians and the governmental institutions. Several of my informants talked about how it is human nature to be egocentric, and based on this assumption, that it is impossible for democracy to be free from corruption. As one of the informants stated:

"If it is human nature to be selfish, how can we expect the politicians not to be? Of course we want them to be honest and fair, but I think that this is not possible, in the end people will only care for themselves."

Madan

The quote above pretty much sums up one of the main perceptions among my informants, where some proclaimed that this is the reason why they do not care much for politics, since they do not trust corrupt politicians and believe that they only care for themselves anyway. The main representatives of this opinion were found among the youth.

Although the majority of the people that I spoke with believed that corruption is a problem in today's Kochi and India, some seemed not to be too bothered about it. In fact it seemed as though some of them had come to accept the presence of corruption, where adapting is considered as the best solution. This point of view is reflected in attitudes such as "if we do not pay, someone else will". One of my informants told me about the time when she and her family had to pay bribes to get her brother a job close to home.

I had to give my savings to my brother. We needed to pay a donation for him to get a job close to home. (...) It is not right, but we have no choice. My family needed that job...we are lucky that we could pay, not everybody can.

Fatima

By paying one also accepts the situation. It is also interesting how she chooses to use the word "donation" instead of "bribe" when talking about the incident above. To reckon on having to pay "donation" money and being prepared to do so can be considered as a reluctant acceptance of power (Engelstad 2005: 79-82). Those who are in an inferior position do not always have the possibility to stand up against the superior power. Paying "donations" is in a way an acceptance of the situation, and contributes to legitimize the misuse of power. The reality of retail corruption confronts ordinary citizens in their daily life for services that they in many cases are entitled to.

My informant was clearly not happy with the situation, and knew that paying would only maintain the problem. Nevertheless, she felt that they had no other

choice than to pay. She was one of many people that I talked to who despite believing that paying such donations was wrong, they had done so themselves several times. However, they often described the situation as one of having no other choice than to pay "donations". Many experienced the situation as hopeless, not seeing any other solution. For how can we expect people to stop paying money under the table if it can provide their children a good education, to get a job so that they can feed their family or to be able to buy a house that they need. Also, how can we expect the corrupt authority to stop being corrupt when people willingly pay, and if people are able to pay, how can we expect them to not do so when the next one in line is prepared to pay?

4.2.4. Not enough incentives to do the right thing

Another factor that could be traced in the data was the assumption that most people fundamentally are selfish, which also created a hindrance for those who considered not giving in to situations such as described earlier in this section. Even though they might want to participate in an act that might be regarded as immoral, there are not enough incentives to make them do what they know are right. Take for instance the example below from one who "should know better":

> *"Take this plastic bottle for example, when it is empty I will probably throw it out of the window even though I know that it is bad for the environment. Why do I do this? I do not know, but I still do it. I think that many people do like that, they know it is bad, but if they throw it out of the window or on the streets it will no longer be their problem"*
>
> *Akhil*

Littering is not met with sanctions, and fellow citizens will not care if you throw that bottle out your window. One could say that the attitude of "not in my backyard" applies to matters like this. I use this example of the water bottle because it in many ways also can be applied to the matter of resisting giving in to acts of corruption. In other words, for the effort to be worthwhile, one needs to trust one's fellow citizen to follow the same good example. One needs to trust one's fellow citizen to contribute to maintain the effort that oneself has contributed with. This point of view is also to be found in some informants' belief that human nature is egocentric,

and primarily motivated by their own interest. I believe that what gives breeding ground for attitudes like these essentially is about trust, or in this case, the lack of it. Uslaner (2008) claims that corruption is to be found where there is a general distrust. General trust is when the different groups in the society trusts each other, and shares a common set of values. Putnam (1993) goes as far to argue that trust will never be fully developed in a stratified society. When the trust in your fellow citizen is not present, there must be a bigger effort to convince people to invest their time and resources for the common good, if it at all is a common understanding of what the common good is.

The uncertainty describes here can also be one of the reasons for why more and more people choose establish, or become, members of resident associations. Members of resident associations are people who live in the same areas, and therefore are more likely to have more in common. As one is more likely to trust someone one find familiar (Grimen 2009: 15; Sztompka 1999: 41-43), the effort is perhaps felt more worthwhile. Thus, the chances for reprisals and being "called out" might also be higher when it is someone one know.

4.3.   Politicization

Politicization ascribes political content to issues that are seemingly non-political. It has been a growing consensus that the government should have significant responsibility for the citizens' living conditions through life. Thus, there has been a politicization of society, a development that by many is considered as a natural development of government. What may be discussed, however, is the degree of governmental interference, which also can differ from country to country. Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2006) argue that it was through politicization, including the inevitable party politicization in a multi-party democracy, that Kerala's marginalized and excluded groups gained whatever bargained power they have vis-à-vis the dominant groups.

Experiences and observations from my previous field study in Wayanad, and

this one in Kochi, indicate a strong presence of politicization in local politics in Kerala. This politicization has by many been described as an obstacle for citizen participation in different democratic institutions. An example of the discontent towards a politicization of citizens' participation can be found in the split of the Ernakulam District Residents' Association Apex Council (EDRAAC). Out of the split came a new organization named Residents' Apex Council of Ernakulam (RACE). Those who broke with the EDRAAC said it was due to a "systematic effort during the past two-and-a-half years to politicize the residents' association movement" (the Hindu 2009). Today, politicization has become a term with negative associations.

4.3.1. Wrong focus

The type of politicization that my informants were sceptical about was mainly the focus on party politics at the local levels. Several of my informants claimed that the strong presence of party politics at the local level limited the participation by ordinary citizens. Furthermore, it may also result in a narrow, if any, political discussion and representation in democratic forums. Politicization not only creates competition amongst political parties and politicians, but also between different interests groups and pressure groups in the community, related to religion and socio-economic status. Observation in Wayanad indicated that a strong presence of politicization could turn political engagement that exists, which is basically positive, into something that can be harmful to local democracy and its democratic institutions. My informants that saw politicization as a challenge expressed that it would cause the focus to shift away from the local needs – the real needs.

> "Politicization leads to wrong focus in local politics. It will be focus on idealism and political affiliation, instead of civil society and how to best achieve development"
>
> Nadira

I interpret the statement above to be dissatisfaction with the current political ideology. Political ideology is a holistic mindset of the political theories of how society should be governed. Questions about how society should be governed are

seen in the light of a few basic ideas. Most ideologies try to provide answers to key questions about how society is and should be, and it is a way to sustain the political structure (Dion 1959: 47). Ideology can be used as means to power, or to get votes. Groups, who want to preserve certain privileges, can also develop an ideology to legitimize their interests. Groups who consider to be entitled to more benefits than they have, can also develop an ideology to argue that their demands would benefit society as a whole, financially or morally.

It will always be someone who does not agree with the ideology, and in some cases people are not aware of the ideology and do not understand it. This disagreement can occur when the parties have different ways of assessing society, due to difference in background and experiences. Based on my observation, most people are concerned with specific issues, not ideology. As we have seen, and will see later in this thesis, the informants talked about specific, and demand concrete solutions. Therefore, when politicians refer to ideology, they may seem disconnected from reality.

The main explanation for why most of my informants view politicization as negative, I believe can be found in the section above on corruption. Because people have a negative attitude towards politics and politicians, it is natural for them to feel that *more* of it would be negative. However, is difficult to imagine how it would be possible to have democracy without politicization, as expressed in the citation below:

"People are talking about politicization as a problem, but what is the alternative? Politics is everywhere, politicization happens when you discuss politics with your neighbour, you don't need politicians to be in the room"

Anil

The connection between civil and political association is also discussed and connected by Tocqueville (1990) and Putnam (1993). Tocqueville found that in the countries where political associations are prohibited, civil associations were rare (1990), and argues that civil associations facilitate political associations (Tocqueville 1990: 115).

Despite the dissatisfaction many of my informants express, they are also well aware of the fact that they need the politicians if they want their needs to be addressed. Getting rid of the politicians and politics will obviously not be a good solution.

"People may not be happy with the politicians, and they may not trust them, but we need them. People are also aware of this, so instead they try to control them, and this is also where the problem is. Many politicians just do what the people tell them to do, not asking any questions...for if they do the people will just elect someone else next time, or cause so much problem that it is impossible for them to continue."

Abeer

The awareness of the need of politicians creates power relations between the different fractions in the community, and thus also the politicians themselves.

4.3.2. Power relations

Citizen participation is in many ways also about power relations. The spaces that are created for the interaction between citizens and local authorities consist of social actors who possess different levels of power. There is an intense competition for political power and economic resources, and there will always be someone who knows how to use this to their advantage. Observations from my field study in Wayanad showed how much the power relations meant when it came to the beneficiary meetings. People from Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes often felt afraid or insecure to say anything at the Grama Sabha meetings. To prevent a negative effect of the politicization at forums such as the Grama Sabha, the representatives from the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes had their own meetings prior to the Grama Sabha. It is in situations where participants do not possess enough knowledge that the potential for politicization increases. Furthermore, the lack of insight and understanding of political processes can lead to lack of confidence, thus also having an effect on the individual citizen's ability to present their interests and to get these addressed.

Religious identities can also play a significant role in informal relationships, because in many ways they are political in character. The religious ties are not just

mere cultural identity limited to friendship and rituals. Because the success of politicians depends upon the trust they inspire, and ultimately on their ability to obtain material benefits for their fraction, it is not unusual for a politician to allocate resources to their electorates to maintain their political influence and control of the group concerned. Maximizing support and access to resources this way may in turn breed destructive competition and conflict between different groups of society. When religious or ethnic groups are politicized, the identity and loyalties move from the private sphere to the public sphere.

The resident associations are also considered as strong political pressure groups, especially the ones representing a higher socio-economic status or those based in religious neighbourhoods where they hold the majority of the votes in that specific area.

> *"Strong pressure groups may have the majority of the votes in one area, and they use this to put pressure on political parties to get their own candidate or their issues taken care of, the politicians have no choice than to listen. If they do not listen to the people they can loose their support".*
>
> *Anil*

Citizens' participation is in many ways about power and the practice of it by different social actors within the civil society, where the interaction between citizens and local authorities occur. The electoral competition may create incentives for corruption; the need to raise campaign funds can lead to abuses of power not to benefit the individual but the private interests of a party (Geddes 1997).

To limit the extent of politicization and an uneven distribution of power, Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) organized preparation meetings prior to the Grama Sabha meetings for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes called Ourokottam. I got the chance to participate in such a meeting in Wayanad, where participants expressed a great gratitude for the opportunity to learn how to better express themselves, and a better understanding of the context. From my knowledge there is no similar alternative in the urban city of Kochi. I believe that if something similar would be introduced in the rural areas as well, perhaps a higher number from the marginalized groups would have more interests, and confidence, to

participate in democratic meetings and discussion with other groups, beyond the ballot box, as well.

4.4. Too Complicated

Elected representatives and politicians talk about a decrease in interest and knowledge about politics, and that the citizens show no interests for attending meetings such as the Ward Committee, some of my informants did not even know what it was when I asked about it. I discovered that several of the people I talked with seemed to be unfamiliar with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). Different people used different words for the Ward Committee meetings, and they seemed to mix the administrative levels. I did not expect all my informants to know the political process by heart, but this lack of knowledge also reflects an important underlying problem, that the PRIs are poorly implemented and that for many people it is a difficult system to grasp. My impression is that this is the reality for many citizens. Many people do not have enough knowledge about the formal democratic institutions that are provided for them to participate and engage in local issues. This was not just a problem for the informants representing a lower socio-economic class, but also amongst those with higher education. Moreover, it was not just a challenge for people who are supposed to be a part of it through casting their vote and participating in the local democracy, it could also be difficult for those who are a part of it such as local politicians and people working at the Corporation office. However, this seemed to be a well-known challenge, as the two quotes below also illustrates:

"*Many of the elected officials do not have the knowledge or the capacity to do what their position requires, many of them probably don't know what these requirements are (…) the guidelines are too complicated for the local body.*

Akhil

"I am still learning everyday. It is not easy, but I feel that I am here to represent the citizens just like me"

Emerald

Since the PRIs seemed to be too comprehensive for many of my informants, it created some difficulties for me as well. For instance, the informants could say contradictory things when it came to the functions of the Ward Committee or elected representatives. Afterwards, when I checked the facts, in some cases it turned out that none of them was right.

One example could be when one of my informants with higher education said that ordinary citizens are not able to participate in Ward Committee meetings, and added that either way they would not be interested in participating. And when I asked who the Ward Committee meeting is for, he said that only politicians and elected representatives could attend. This made me insecure of whether or not they could participate, and therefore had to try to find the guidelines for the Ward Committee, look up literature again and go back to my transcription from interviews with other academics and politicians. It turned out that ordinary citizens, through their membership in different civil organizations, are able to attend the Ward Committee meetings in Kochi (Thomas et al 2006: 148-152), this was also confirmed by one of the researcher that I spoke to. The ordinary citizens can also attend the meetings in Kochi, even though it is only to witness and to come with input and comments when there is room for it.

This was in connection to this that I discovered that there is a difference between *Ward Committees* and *Ward Committees*, as I was recommended a book by one of the researcher at CSES. I was then told that in Kochi, the *Wards Committees* are only for the chairman of the wards committees and representatives from different organizations, but not the ordinary citizen. I could not find any literature to either confirm or to debunk this, so I can only take their word for it. Sivaramakrishna (2006: 3-7) does however, write that the guidelines for the ward and wards committees are very vague, and can therefore be interpreted and implemented differently from state to state.

However, it is the *Wards Committee* meeting that is only reserved for elected representatives. He could of course be talking about the *Wards Committee* and not the *Ward Committee*, either way; it would be relevant for him to mention that there are two different committees. Since he did not do so, I can only assume that he did

not know that there were two different committees, and the differences between them. In fact nobody told me that there is a different between the *Ward Committee* and the *Wards Committee,* and it was seldom mentioned in the literature that I read, I only became aware of it when I had to check whether or not citizens are able to attend the Ward Committee meetings.

A ward committee consists of councillors who represent the ward, and there can only be a maximum of 10 people from each ward elected by the community that they serve. A ward member is a directly elected person from a specific ward to represent them. The numbers of voters in a ward can vary from 3000 to 20 000. The role of a member is to make sure that the interest of the people that have chosen them is represented and act as a spokesperson for the people in the ward (Model Municipal Law: 26-27). The Ward members elected by the people are not paid, and they sit for a period of five years. Just as trust is based on exaggeration of information (Luhmann in Grimen 2009: 93), distrust can be based on lack of information, which is the result of a system that is too complicated for people to understand.

4.5.   Discontent among the youth

For many of the young people that I spoke to, the main issues were the lack of relevant and interesting job opportunities in India. The general atmosphere among the youth is that the government has failed to handle the biggest crises in their eyes, creating jobs, and the promises of economic reforms, reforms they so far had not seen anything of. It seems as though the Congress Party has failed to lift people out of poverty and to create jobs for the youth, several scholars that I talked to also support this observation. Such failure can lead to distrust (Hardin 2006: 175-176). Their lack of confidence in public institutions and its officials can in many ways also be traced back to a modernization of society. With modernization come more complex and comprehensive societies, and the possibilities of controlling society on the basis of common objectives are getting smaller. And this will also be one of the biggest challenges for the political institutions, especially in big cities such as Kochi.

Today's young voters, and first time voters, are better informed and have gotten more and more dissatisfied with the old government, and it is predicted that they will have a major impact on the election of 2014 (Sunder 2014).

4.5.1. Lack of jobs

Many of my younger informants spoke of the dreams for their future, but many of those dreams did not include staying in Kochi. They prefer to pursue a better life abroad, many of them talked of friends making a lot of money in the Gulf countries. For even though Kochi is considered as the industrial capital of Kerala, they still cannot see a future in Kochi, they explain this with the high unemployment and difficulty in finding a job to match a high education. The difficult situation have created a negative relationship between them and the government – they feel like nothing has been done, and they do not have any confidence in the local governments and politicians. Some of the informants in this situation, especially young people without higher education, almost showed a state of despair and indifferent towards politics: "The politicians only talk, never action". On the other hand, one of the students also made it clear that he would not "settle for less", indicating that in some cases some people may choose to be unemployed if the alternative is a job they feel are below themselves. One of my informants with a higher education said that she would not settle for less - he had studied too many years to be a cleaning lady, reflecting a stance that low-status and physically irksome jobs are no longer a culturally desirable option.

4.5.2. A New India

My observations and the data collected indicate that the younger part of the population are very tired of what they consider as poor prospects when it comes to their economic future in India. This dissatisfaction has caused many Indians to try their luck abroad. Many of the young people that I talked to had either already studied abroad, or had plans to study or find work abroad. Several of them also had family members in Gulf countries that send money home to their family. The

amount of remittances that Kerala receives from Keralites in Gulf countries is a substantial amount compared to the gross domestic product of the state (Basheer 2013). The main discontent among the youth is directed towards the lack of work and career opportunities, not just in Kochi but Kerala in general. Several of my informants dreamt of going abroad for studies or for work.

> *"We do not care for what happens in Kerala, or in India... our ambitions are in Canada or in the US, after the election we will not live here anymore. (...) If not Canada or US, I will find job in the Middle East, my uncle know somebody"*
>
> *Maadhav*

For this specific informant, the only possibility was for him and his wife to move abroad. Even though they did not have any specific plans on where and what they were going to do, he was determined that India was no place for them to raise a family. The main reason being that he and his wife did not have the possibility to get a job with what they consider as sufficient payment, even though they both held a degree from higher education.

Even though not everyone had the same urge to leave, they all had the same desire for change. The attitudes of the ones who still have a plan to remain can be illustrated in the quotes below:

> *"Right now nothing is working, we need thing to change and the politicians need to take responsibility (...) We need a new India"*
>
> *Renu*

> *"The young people that choose to vote for the next election, I believe will vote for change. They will demand better lives for themselves and their family, they demand responsible politicians...they demand accountability..."*
>
> *Anil*

The majority of the youth that I talked to showed a feeling of powerlessness as they did not feel that that had any influence on their own lives, at least as much as they would like to have. The youth's judgement on the Congress Party is that they have

showed lack of competence in providing enough jobs for the educated youth, which in turn leads to distrust amongst students and unemployed (Hardin 2006: 175-176). Studies also show that individuals who feel excluded due to lack of access are more likely to experience a lower sense of political efficacy (Friedman 2002; Manor 2000). However, whether or not citizens trust the government or not, is also related to their expectations to the governments, and the government's ability to solve these problems (Guldbrandsen 2005:119). In this case, the expectations among the young and educated have been high, and the Congress Party have had many years to find a way to meet these expectations.

4.6.   Summing up

The factors elaborated above have been the reasons for why some citizens do not participate in the local democracy. For some this has been a conscious choice, for others it is more of a feeling of apathy and ignorance.

Corruption seems to be a penetrating problem at both the individual level and the institutional level. Corruption at the local level is especially visible and challenging for citizens, as it is at this level that they regularly interact with the public sector. Be it registering for schools, attending a health clinic or applying for different beneficiaries. Therefore, when corruption occurs locally, the impact on citizens' lives can be the most damaging. The main challenges related to corruption are the focus on party politics at the local level, and the uneven distribution resources it brings between politicians and the ordinary citizen. However, the disagreement on what is considered as important issues can also originate in the disagreement, or misunderstanding of ideology.

I believe that one of the main reasons for why politicization has become a term with negative associations is due to the citizens' perception that all politicians is corrupt, and therefore *more* of politics would be bad. The politicization that my informants are sceptical about was mainly the focus on party politics at the local level, arguing that it takes away the focus from the real needs of the local community. The power relations between the different participants and the

comprehensive Panchayati Raj Institutions makes the possibility for participation of local democracy greater.

The young, and first time voters, are also very upset with the way things have been the last years, where they have not seen anything of the promises of economic growth and more jobs. It is predicted that today's young voters will have a major impact on the 2014 election.

5. FROM FORMAL TO INFORMAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Indian democracy, now more than ever, is aptly characterized as a "politics of din". A democracy fought out by competing, more or less corrupt, populist leaders, a politics that the middle classes increasingly wish to distance themselves from (Alam 2004 124- 125). This is also to be found in the argument that middle class people have increasingly withdrawn from using public services (Corbridge et al 2013). They prefer to send their children to private schools, and as a result of this, they show little interests in exercising their voice in the cause of improved public services. We can also see a distinction between different religious groups and "the rest", in Kochi the Hindu nationalism was were present, whereas when I was in Wayanad I observed that the Muslim organizations were most prominent.

The previous chapter found that when asked about democracy and politics people tend to react by referring to all politicians as corrupt, and that they do not trust the government and the politicians to solve their problems for them. This indicates that the people are dissatisfied with the distribution of power, and that they distrust government and its officials. The common denominator among my informants were that many to some extent felt excluded from the political processes most of the time, and that the power lies in the hands of a few people. This in turn led to lower confidence in the political institutions and their officials. The disconnection and lack of confidence affected my informants in different ways, while some was indifferent, others chose to find other ways to involve themselves in social and political matters. This chapter will also show how different forms of citizen participation appeal to different groups of people, depending on their socio-economic status, religion or even age, find different forms of participation appealing.

Those who are not satisfied with the situation can mainly be categorized in two different groups. In one group you have those who see their current situation

and their perception of it, as an impetus for a greater engagement. In the other group you have those who have come to accept the situation.

The latter group of citizens has in a way come to an acceptance of the whole situation and do not do much to change the situation, or they exclude themselves by not getting engaged or participating in social and political issues. My impression is that the majority wants to be more involved in politics, and therefore search for new ways to get involved and engage themselves in social and political issues. It seems as the development is going in the direction of more informal forms of participation outside the ballot box.

This chapter will begin by elaborating the alternatives that I consider as representative for the latter group, the trade unions and the Kudumbashree. Then we will move on to what I believe are the main trends in citizen participation Kochi, that the development is going from formal to a more informal ways of participating.

5.1. Trade Unions

It is often assumed that members of trade unions, and especially those who participate in demonstrations and strikes as politically engaged and interested in politics (Pontusson 2013). This however, was not my main impression. For ordinary workers getting a wage they can live a decent life on and to put food on the table was their main concerns. When asked about topics concerning politics and democracy, they did not seem to have given much thought to issues related to that. However, some of them stated that participation in election was useless. Attending public meetings and other protests was even more pointless.

"The politicians will only listen to the people who have money, why would they care about the
common good?"
Tahir

Even though they expressed seeing no point in politics, and engage in matters beyond wage, the majority of them had participated in several strikes or hartals during the last 3 months.

5.1.1. The national strike: February 20th- 21st

The national strike (industriall-union.org 2013) hit Kerala harder than it did anywhere else in India. The strike was called by 11 central trade unions against the policies of Government on matters concerning Indian workers. The unions had ten demands (industriall-union.org 2013). Some of the demands were better social security to the unorganized workers, ban on contract labour system, more employment and fixing minimum wages at 10 000 rupees a month. Almost all over the country official buildings and offices closed during the first day of the strike, and in some states public transport and shops were closed as well. In Kerala, including Kochi, it was a total shutdown. People were also afraid to go outside because of the possibility of riots. Even though it is prohibited to resort to violence, there were reported riots towards cars and shops (the Hindu 2013).

Even though it was an announced strike, many of the locals did not know about it. When I asked the union members about the strike, and whether they knew what the conditions were (before I had read them myself), many of them could not give me direct answer to my question. Those giving an answer said it was to better the worker's conditions when it came to wages and "things like that".

5.1.2. Loosing effect and legitimacy

When it comes to the use of strikes and hartals, it is one thing that keeps me wonder – why is it, in many cases, one of the *first* actions they take? And some of the people I talked to agreed, they feel that the strike and hartals have lost their effect. Nowadays there are so many hartals that people do not care anymore, it is just a part of the everyday life.

"The strikes and hartals have no effect any more. People don´t know why they are striking, for them it is just extra vacation days".

Akhil

I can confirm that parts of strikes and hartals are considered as extra vacation. Some

of my informants, and my Indian friends asked me what I was going to do during the strike, and whether I wanted to come with them to visit family and friends. For this however, the trips had to be planned ahead since it was impossible to get anywhere during the strike. These kinds of mass protests and strikes affect the whole society. Due to strikes in public transportation or closing of stores, people are not able get to work or to buy fresh food. Especially when the strike comes suddenly on people, they do not have the time to be prepared. For many of my informants that I spoke to after the strike, especially those who were prepared in advance, spoke very negatively of these forms for protests, claiming that they have a negative impact on most people's life.

> *"Why do they do this (ed: strikes and hartals) all the time? (…) I don't know if they get what they want, they complain all the time. (…) Of course it is important to protest if you feel that something is unfair, but why do they have to do it in a way that affects everybody else?"*
>
> *Faiza*

It is not only non-members who react to the frequent strikes and hartals in a negative way. When I asked two union members if they believed of any of the demands would be met, they did not have any special thoughts. Of course they hoped that some of the demands would be met, and they had heard from their union leaders that the strike was a success, beyond that they did not feel that they had the grounds to say anything more.

5.1.3. Blind trust due to lack of knowledge

As a counterpart to the lack of trust that has been discussed so far, it seems as though the members of trade unions have a lot of trust in their leaders, they trust their unions to make their choices for them, a worker put it liked this:

> *"I trust the union to make the right decisions, it is impossible for me to know everything (…) I have to work…I don't have time for politics".*
>
> *Thevan*

Points of view like the one above can make the individual vulnerable (Grimen 2009). The informant says that it is impossible for him to know "everything", implying that he does not have enough knowledge about the issues that are important to him. This particular informant *wants* to learn more, but because he has to work all day he says he does not have the time to familiarize himself with all the aspects of politics.

On the other hand, there are also those who do not show the same attitude, represented by statements such as *"I don't know what my rights are, they (trade union) do"*. Although my informants show confidence in the trade union, they do not seem to have any insight in the trade union and its means and goals. However, for many of my informants this does not seem to bother them, and they seem to be content with the situation – they do not seek to learn more either. Offerdal (2003) claims that this lack of participation can be a good sign for democracy, after all, the citizen are satisfied with the situation. However, I believe that the content that these informants show is more a passive chose due to lack of knowledge, and therefore not the same satisfaction the Offerdal (2003) speaks of. The lack of knowledge could either be a result of a lack of confident in the democratic institutions and the political system, or it can also be found in lack of resources in forms of education and access to information. To be able to participate in a valuable and productive way, people need education, information and insight. These three variables have been proved to be significant for efficacy and participation (Dahl 1989; Finkel 2002; Finkel et al. 2000; Jackson 1995; Norris 2000), in addition to social capital and social networks (Krishna 2002; Putnam 1993).

5.1.4. Unionism as an obstacle to economic growth?

One of the main hopes and goals for the People's Planning Campaign (PPC) and democratic decentralization were to fuel economic growth. The Left saw decentralization as an important strategic initiative to overcome the economic stagnation and deterioration in the quality of social services (Isaac 2001: 17). There have also been cases where some labor unions have tried, and in some cases succeeded, to prevent modernization and technological innovation in some

industries (Tharamangalam 1998). This may seem harmless, and as a logical means to save jobs and fight unemployment, but it has set its toll on Kochi's economic development by making it a less competitive one. The fact that PPC failed to generate economic growth through participation, and the way that this have affected the economy negatively, have created a fertile ground for dissatisfaction among the citizens, especially people working in the service sector and the younger part of the population.

The institutionalization and empowerment of workers' right and their trade union activism have now become to be regarded as disincentives for attracting international and domestic private investments into Kerala. These same basic rights that were won through historical struggle, and still are being protected, are now being portrayed as obstacles to growth and development in the new policy contest (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2006). Due to this, both international and domestic investors are apprehensive about investing and opening offices in Kochi. In contrasts to this, studies have showed that the development of trade unions in developing countries does not necessary threatens to overload fledgling democratic institutions and derail economic growth, they can also set stage for a democratically negotiated capitalist transformation (Heller 1999).

5.2.   Kudumbashree - Prosperity of the Family

Kudumbashree means "prosperity of the family", empowerment of women is a way to bring empowerment to the whole family. The members of the Kudumbashree are proud to be a member, and they acknowledge that is an important step in empowering themselves and their family, both socially and politically. The Kudumbashree is absolutely one of the success stories on how empowerment can contribute to increase participation. However, the role of the Kudumbashree in civil society in the rural areas slightly differs from the urban areas. In rural areas they are a bigger part of the political sphere, citizens (especially Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Casted) expressed a relatively higher trust in the Kudumbashree than the politicians, the politicians also seemed to make use of the Kudumbashree to reach

out to these marginalized groups (Olsen et.al. 2011). In urban areas they do not seem to play the same political role. In urban areas the Kudumbashree focuses on a greater extent on the purpose it was meant to have for the members, to bring women together to help enhance their economic security.

5.2.1. More passive in urban areas than in rural areas

Already at an early stage of the field study, it became evident that the Kudumbashree in Kochi does not have the same influence when it comes to citizens' participation compared to the Kudumbashree in Wayanad. In Wayanad, the politicians, and the Kudumbashree members themselves, saw it as their responsibility to get the ordinary citizen to participate in the local meetings and elections by informing them about the meetings, and the importance of participating. The Kudumbashree members that I talked to in Kochi did not necessarily have any strong affinity to any political party, for them it was important that the job was done. They saw their role as to identify the needs of their family, and being a member of the Kudumbashree enabled them to get jobs and attend different programs reserved for them as women.

They all stressed the importance of the presence of women in politics, praising the 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats and other local bodies. However, when asked about their thoughts on the importance of democracy, and citizen's participation to any of them, they became uncertain and just shook their heads. In some cases I believe that the lack of language skills could have played a part. Nevertheless, they did not shake their heads until after the interpreter had finished translating.

I had hoped that the Kudumbashree would play a bigger role in empowering women and local communities when it came to citizen participation in Kochi. However, the challenges that these women meet in the urban context of Kochi are greater than in rural Wayanad. It seems that in urban areas the Kudumbashree focuses on a greater extent on the purpose it was meant to have for its members, to bring women together to help enhance their economic security. And where the

Kudumbashree in Wayanad may have been an initiative taker for citizen participation and enlightenment about social and political issues, the Kudumbashree in Kochi seemed not to have the resources necessary to engage in these matters. However, the challenge is to make sure that the lack of further engagement and involvement is not a result of lack of knowledge and insight into how the democratic institutions work.

5.2.2. Meaning of the vote

The women may not have any strong opinions when it comes to democracy and political issues beyond the matters that have a direct impact on their own lives, however, several of them expressed strong opinions when asked about their electoral participation.

I find it interesting how these women felt so strongly regarding their right to vote. Compared to my other informants, the Kudumbashree members talked about voting in a different manner. For them voting was more of a right and a privilege rather than a duty. This is also compatible with studies of voting behaviour in India have pointed out that socio-economic status is not related to voting, and it turns out that citizens with a lower socio-economic status have a higher participation rate compared to those of high socio-economic status (Yadav 1996; Yadav and Palshikar 2003). The studies show that people from different social class vote for different reasons. All my informants were asked weather or not they voted at the last elections, many answered no. In comparison, all my informants that were members of the Kudumbashree told me that they had voted, some even seemed slightly offended by the question.

"Of course I did, to vote is an important part of democracy. If you do not vote, you do not care".

Kali

Studies of voting behavior in India have pointed out that socio-economic status is not related to voting, and it turns out that citizens with a lower socio-economic status have a higher participation rate compared to those of high socio-economic

status (Yadav 1996; Yadav and Palshikar 2003). The studies shows that people from different social class votes for different reasons. For poor people the vote is considered as a right and a privileged, while for the middle class it is seen as a duty of citizenship.

Being active in a civil organization can also have a positive impact on the individual member's trust in governmental institutions and its officials. In his survey of citizen participation in Italy, Putnam (1993) shows that association members tend to exhibit more social trust and citizen participation than non-members.

5.3. Resident Associations

For my informants that were members of a resident association, their rationale for participation places the concept of trust, or the lack of it, in focus. The lack of trust in the government and politicians that is described here acts as a driving force for this type of participation. Being a member of a resident association can in some ways be considered as an unconventional form for participation. It makes it possible for people to voice their opinions without feeling any sort of attachment to a particular political party. Unconventional actions are often very task-oriented and specific, characteristics that are appealing to the modern identity and its civil society.

5.3.1. Compensating Public Inefficiency

The main interests and issues important for the resident associations are the issues that affect their neighbourhoods and family. The typical tasks of a resident association would be to keep the community clean and safe, celebrate festivals and conduct events and meetings for the whole family and coordinate with government departments such as the Corporation of Cochin and the police department.

> *"We do what is needed to keep our neighbourhood clean and our children safe. The government has failed to take care of pressing issues such as sewage and garbage disposal, if we do not take care of it ourselves who is going to?"*
>
> *Raja*

"People are always talking about problems, but never do anything about it. But we cannot give up, we have a responsibility for our community and our children"

Rahul

"I became a member because I wanted to do something for our community, and my children to be safe"

Rajeev

The statements above describe distrust in the local government and politicians, but they also show how dissatisfaction towards politicians and other citizens, becomes an impetus for engagement. Regardless of the type of neighbourhood they live in, whether it is an apartment building or in houses, the goal of the resident associations is to protect the interests of the community they live in. Many of the resident associations are also involved in settlement of family disputes, education programs for children, health programs, cultural activities and rotating credit associations.

Many of my informants described how they had asked again and again for garbage to be collected, parks to be built or for lights to be installed. For a number of my informants, the solution to these problems was found through resident associations. In some wards, the resident associations perform almost all the functions of the ward committees concerning the development of their ward. They build parks, organize collection of garbage, discuss the local plan, review plan implementations and select beneficiaries (Kamath and Vijayabaskar 2009; Isaac and Franke 2002). Most of the time they do this without any financial assistance from the local government, sponsors are in many cases found within the ward amongst local businessmen and members.

The resident associations are organizations formed by groups of people from a specific geographic community, by neighbours. The members of the resident associations come together to address issues within their neighbourhood and act as a voice for their local community. To begin with such neighbourhood groups were just another novel innovation developed to consolidate linkages between civil society and local government institutions (Williams 2008: 44), and the groups consisted of 40-50 households organized into wards and serves as the bottom tier of local planning. Today they are expanding rapidly in Kochi and other urban areas. It

does not always need to be serious matters they discuss, as long as it concerns the community. I was told that in some cases they conduct a meeting when a new bridge or street needs to be named.

5.3.2. Middle Class Phenomenon

Even though there are neighbourhoods in all parts of the city, resident associations seem to mainly be a middle class phenomenon. This assumption is supported by studies conducted in Chennai and Bangalore (Kamath and Vijayabaskar 2009). The middle class is a strong pressure group, and has a strong impact on which issues the local government choose to put forward and focus on. Even though many of the resident associations have occurred in middle class societies (Kamath and Vijayabaskar 2009), it cannot be said to be homogeneous as their interests and concerns are reflected in their socio-economic situation. I will not give any further definition of "middle class", other than that it within this group also exist a diversity within socio-economic status.

Not all members were active members, and not all participated in the meetings. Sometimes the meetings also took place during the day, when the majority of the members had to work. In all three of the resident associations that I talked to, the board members mainly consisted of people who were retired, and they were mainly men. This is not in any way representative for the composition of the neighbourhood, but for many of the members this seemed natural. It was a shared opinion that the elders know the community best, and they also have more time to spare. For those who are retired, the resident associations were an activity that they enjoyed using their time on. However, I were told that in the neighbourhoods with recently established resident associations, the board members are more likely to be younger.

"In my brother's neighbourhood the board members are young parents who want to create a good environment for their children. They have arranged family nights with dance and music, and they make sure that the parks are green and clean. It is good to see young people take responsibility, and they have many good ideas".

Abeer

The resident associations are also considered as strong political pressure group, especially the ones representing a higher socio-economic status or in religious neighborhoods where they hold the majority of the votes in that specific area.

> *"Strong pressure groups may have the majority of the votes in one area, and they use this to put pressure on political parties to get their own candidate or their issues taken care of, the politicians have no choice than to listen. If they do not listen the people they can loose their support"*
>
> *Adesh*

5.3.3. Claiming payments from government

One interesting development is that many communities, mainly those with resident associations, have started to demand incentives and payments for carrying out tasks that traditionally are considered to be under the local authority's responsibility. More and more resident associations have begun to look at ways to get rewards from the local government for the services they perform. These could be tasks such as waste management, preservation of parks and green areas and neighbourhood watch.

> *"We should get paid to do the jobs that the government fails to do. They cannot expect us to do the job they are supposed to do for free."*
>
> *Raja*

> *"We are doing the Corporation's work, it is their responsibility… why should we do it for free?"*
>
> *Reshma*

The resident associations either take care of the problems personally by organizing groups of garbage collectors or night watch, or they could hire someone to do the work. In some cases the resident associations could also hire private consultants to execute certain tasks for them. This was not the case for any of the resident associations that I talked to, mainly because they could not afford it. This shows that some neighbourhoods are more resourceful than others, and that these resources may determine how much power each resident association have. Access to

resources has an impact on how much they can get done themselves, how much impact they have in the community and how much impact they may have on the local authorities.

5.4.   The Rise of Hindu nationalism

The rise of Hindu nationalism is one of the most important developments in contemporary India (Hansen 1999). The Hindutva (Hinduness) that has emerged and taken shape has done so in the realm of the public space (Hansen 1999: 4). The goal of the Hindutva movement is to "transform Indian public culture into a sovereign, disciplined national culture rotted in what is claimed to be a superior ancient Hindu past, and to impose a corporatist and disciplined social and political organization upon society" (Hansen 1999: 4). An interesting point that Hansen (1999) says is important to have in mind about the Hindu nationalism, is that their political success is a product of:

> "A series of intensely fought elections over the last decade, and of equally intense battles over religious sites, rituals, and spaces; over the meaning of shared symbols in Indian culture; over the meaning of secularism, history, and so on" (Hansen 1999: 5).

One of these "battles" was also fought when I was in Kochi. During my field study there was a day long hartal called by the Hindu Aikya Vedi (Hindu United Front). The Hindu Aikya Vedu was established in 1992 to "protect Hindus, Temples and the culture", and is a common platform for all the Hindu organizations (hinduaikyavedi.org).

The harthal was arranged to protests against the local municipal authorities decision to let a Muslim youth organization conduct a meeting on a ground that by the Hindus are considered holy. I was told that thousands of Hindus was gathered at the ground the protest against the decision. In the end, the Muslim youth organization had to find another place to conduct their meeting.

I wanted to go to the site to try to get in contact with some of the people participating in the protest, as it was not far a way from the office, but I was recommended by my fellow researchers at the Centre for Social-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES) to not go there alone. However, several of the people that worked at the hotel where I as staying were Hindu, so I asked them if they had heard about the protest and of they had, or knew someone that had, participated in the protest. One of them said that it was their right to protests, and that there are several other grounds in the same area that they could have used instead "why do they specific have to use *our* holy place?" I had hoped to be able to conduct interviews with their friends, but unfortunately the timing never matched.

5.5. "I paid a bribe"

The internet can be used to either seek information, or to provide others with information. This information can either back up the authorities' point of view, or it can challenge it. It is a way to redress the balance of power between the state and the citizen.

www.Ipaidabribe.com is a initiative by the non-profit organization, Janaagraha's, to tackle corruption by including the citizens. On the page ordinary citizens can report "the nature, number, pattern, types, location, frequency and values of actual corruption". Janaagraha will use the reports to "argue for improving governance systems and procedures, tightening law enforcements and regulation and thereby reduce the scope for corruption in obtaining services from government". The citizens are able to report different events without providing any personal information, making the threshold for participation very low.

The activity on the site indicates that such measures are very popular among Indians, which also is confirmed when I asked my friends in India. I discovered this page pretty late, but I did have discussions with my Indian friends about the page, its effect and their thoughts in initiatives like these. Based on these conversations and previous interviews and observation, my impression is that the page covers a need to quantify and clarify the issue of corruption. Also, I did not require much

from the contributors.

Unconventional forms of participation like this may be more appealing for the modern citizen and the modern civil society (Bauman 1999). Compared to a conventional participation, unconventional participation does not tie you up to one specific political party and their policy. If you are a member of a political party, in a way you have taken a stand in several social and political issues, at the same time it is also a membership that is not always as easy to end. With the focus on one thing at a time, the unconventional forms of participation make it possible for people to voice their opinions without feeling any sort of connection to a particular political party. Unconventional actions are often very task-oriented and specific, features that are appealing to the more "modern" identity and its civil society.

This is also supported by surveys that have been done on youth values and behaviours. The studies emphasize that young people have progressively distanced themselves from traditional channels of politics, and rejected party affiliation and voting as the main means for participation in social and political life (Mannarini et al. 2008: 96)

5.6.   Summing up

It is important to engage the citizen in maintaining the democratic system, and make them feel that they are a part of it. It is these political institutions that guarantee their rights and ensure stability of norms built upon democratic values. If these institutions loose support and legitimacy, it will erode the foundation for the democratic participation in general.

How different groups of people and associations have chosen to react on their lack of trust and confidence in politicians and government varies. If they choose passive or active ways to participate, depends on the resources available. For instance, people from lower classes are more likely to be more dependent on the government and the services that it provides. While people from higher classes, having more resources may cover those needs themselves. There are resident

associations who have had the possibility to hire consultants, or to solve the communities needs themselves. Thus, even though the poor have significant opportunities in the political arena, their participation is to a greater extent circumscribed by the persistence of traditional forms of social control and material dependency.

The young people of Kochi are tired of years with poorly met expectations and broken promises of economical growth and jobs. They now demand better living conditions and more responsible politicians, with a wish to tackle corruption in Indian industry and where their dreams of education and work can become a reality. However, any my data material cannot say that they choose a specific form of participation, other than indications that informal and unconventional participation seem to appeal the most, one example could be initiatives such as "Ipaidabribe.com".

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Whatever the size of the population, it will always be a challenge to ensure that every citizen chooses to participation in the political processes such as voting or take part in the democratic institutions made available for them. But as we have seen in the previous chapters, as long as the citizens does not feel that the processes are open and fair, and do not see their interests served by participating through formal channels, the chances that they will choose to participate through the existing institutions, will be less.

The citizens' dissatisfaction towards the authorities and negative perceptions of politics and politicians can be traced back to the citizens' feelings and experiences of a strong presence of corruption in their everyday life. Personal experiences, or hearing someone else telling about theirs, can cause a lack of trust and confidence towards the governmental institutions and its officials. In societies where the citizens are sceptical of the government and its politicians, it is important to give them a sense of ownership of the political processes and the decisions that are made. Especially if the issues concern them, which it in most cases probably will do. However, how they choose the react to the distrust in regard to citizen participation may differ. While some have a more passive attitude towards it all, others look for other ways to participate and use it as an impetus for greater participation.

We have seen how different groups based on socio-economic status, religious affiliations have an impact on why and how citizens choose to participate. I believe that maintaining a balance between, what sometimes can be competing identities, loyalties, and interests will be one of the main challenges for the local government in Kochi, as well as for the government of India. In other words, the solution will not lie in overcoming these differences, but rather how to find a way integrate them into social relations and political processes. The need to respect the diversity is an

important aspect of forming a cohesive political society. As such, the process of harmonizing competing loyalties must be achieved by maintaining a balance between the state and the different grouping and communities. The challenge will therefore be to ensure that the ordinary citizens' voices will not get lost in the way up to state government.

At the same time, Heller (2005) warns that too much focus on the special interests of each group in society will produce entrenched interests and institutional ossification. Organizing participation and associations based on narrow groups or specific interests can possibly crowd out a more encompassing policy. Although there are many advantages to organizing interests, one cannot ignore that the upper class and middle classes have the resources to be more efficiently organized compared to associations with people who are less fortunate when it comes to socio-economical status.

I believe that the Corporation of Cochin needs to make the Wards Committees even more available for ordinary citizens. The government institutions need to open up for, and make participation more meaningful for citizens from lower classes. However it will still have to be done through elected representatives, any other way would not be productive. For this to be possible, people need to have better knowledge about the Panchayati Raj institutions, and the importance of participating and maintain them. This can be done by creating new participatory bodies in the urban areas that intersect with local government institutions in a way that makes them more open and accountable.

The need for belonging may be stronger in cities than it is in a more homogeneous rural context. Affiliation may therefore be reinforced in urban areas because of the diversity found in these places. The fact that the Resident Associations have increased in numbers I believe is a result of this vacuum between the urban citizen and the government. I believe that for many of the urban citizens the feeling of citizenship is not that strong any more due to the modernization of civil society, and because the political system is too comprehensive and distant it can create an impersonal distrust towards the whole system. Where distrust has been established, it may be difficult to achieve, or re-establish, trust.

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Antall ord i oppgaven er: 25 021

Alle kilder som er brukt i oppgaven er oppgitt.

APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

Information about the project and rights of the participants

(Information was given orally to the participants before the interview)

I am a master student in sociology from Oslo University in Norway. I am here doing a field study as a part of my master thesis on local democracy and participation. I was in Wayanad studying the Grama Sabha for two years ago, and do to my findings there I wanted to come back to Kerala and study local politics and participation in a more urban area. The purpose of my stay here, and this interview with you is to study different ways of political participation, *why* people chose to participate, and *who* these people are. The reason why I am doing this is to see what challenges a urban city as Kochi meets in terms of local politics, and if the experiences in Kochi can give any guidelines for other cities in Kerala and the whole Backwater Districts.

I will use a tape recorder while we are doing this interview, as well as taking notes. I am going to ask you questions about your name, age, occupation and other questions related to your interest and participation in politics. The information will only be used for my research project, so any information of your name and who you are will be anonymized in the research project. As a researcher I have a duty to protect your privacy, this means that I will treat everything you say with great confidentiality. Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary, and you may at any time withdraw your participation in the study.

Is there anything that is unclear about the project or participation in it? Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

Do you give your consent to be interviewed?

I will now start the tape recorder.

APPENDIX 2: ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF INDIA

Administrative structure of India

Government of India → State Government(s) → Division(s) → District(s) *(Zill-Parishad)*

District(s) →
- City Council(s) *(Nagar-Panchayat)* → Ward(s)
- Municipality(s) *(Nagar-Palika)* → Ward(s)
- Municipal Corporation(s) *(Mahanagar-Palika)* → Ward(s)
- Block(s) *(Tehsils)* → Village(s) *(Gram Panchayat)*