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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the various connections that can exist between the design of participatory processes and the different kind of results that they can entail. It details how effective participatory processes can be designed, whatever are the results that participation is deemed to elicit. It shows the main trends pertaining to design choicesand considers how to classify different arrangements in order to choose from among them. Then the paper deals with the main dilemmas that tend to arise when designing participatory processes. Thanks to this review, the paper argues that participatory processes tend to display a certain degree of ambivalence that cannot be completely overcome through the design choices.

Participation is a loose concept: involved citizens can be few or many, poorly or highly empowered, and their participation can be on-site or online, for short or long periods of time, on high- or low-stake issues, etc. Participatory processes can also include citizens, as such, or only representatives of associations or organized groups. Hence, while for many a stakeholder forum is unlikely to be considered as a participatory tool, the boundary between associative and participatory democracy is quite blurred. Similarly, electoral participation could be included on a list of such tools especially in the form of direct democracy (e.g. referenda and other 'democratic innovations' (Smith, 2009)).

In the literature on policy design, public participation is often mentioned among the procedural instruments policymakers can use when shaping policies (Howlett, 2011). That is, instead of defining all of the content of a measure a priori, policymakers can choose to submit some aspects of it to a procedure in which citizens are involved in the design process. Public participation is thus a procedural tool which allows policymakers to include new actors (i.e. citizens) in a policy network and entrust them with some design-related tasks.

While many scholars have argued that public participation has become a mantra and is common practice (Hoppe, 2011, 163), and that [m]odern societies appear to be undergoing a participatory revolution (Walker, McQuarrie, & Lee, 2015, p. 7), evidence of these movements is thin. Although the mantra and the revolution images could appear appropriate as discourses on participation have been spreading quickly over the last few decades due to the growing perception of the failures of the representative democracy, it is doubtful whether the corresponding practice has become as common

as often alleged: most governments still prefer to keep citizens out of the decision-making arenas and governance arrangements rarely include citizens as such.

In which cases and with which goals do governments choose to co-design public policy through participation? Answering this question is not an easy task, as this choice is fostered through conflicting (and hidden) aims (Hisschemöller & Cuppen, 2015, p. 429).

Three kinds of motivations can push policymakers toward participation: *empowerment, legitimacy* and *learning*: participation can serve to empower people and thus to put in practice democratic ideals, to acquire consensus or to gain inputs from citizens' knowledge when facing complex or badly understood problems (Hisschemöller & Cuppen, 2015). That is, a participatory process is not always used for designing the *substance* of a policy. It can also be undertaken for *normative* or ideological reasons, that is, for example, the desire to implement policy in a fully democratic way and give people (especially the worst-off ones) a chance to be heard, or sometimes for *instrumental* reasons in the hope to increase the legitimacy of the policy choices (and of those who make them) (Fiorino, 1990).[1]

Policymakers often opt for citizens' participation when they need resources that they find difficult to obtain without this means. In so doing, they look to participation as a tool which can provide both cognitive and political resources. The cognitive resources are made up of all the information, practical knowledge and insights that citizens possess and can transfer to policymakers, resulting in wiser or more suitable problem definitions or policy formulations. The political resources consist of the consensus/legitimacy that policymakers can acquire, thanks to the citizens' involvement, in order to, for instance, gain support on contentious measures, avoid conflicts, reduce the disaffection of the public, favor the coproduction of policies or the cooperation of the users during the implementation stage or simply for securing more ready compliance with whatever measure is being considered.

This article presents the various connections that can exist between the design of participatory processes and the different kinds of results that they can entail. It details how effective participatory processes can be designed and whatever are the results that participation is deemed to elicit.

The first section shows the main trends pertaining to design choices. Section 2 considers how to classify different arrangements in order to choose from among them. Section 3 deals with the main dilemmas that tend to arise when designing participatory processes. Section 4 shows that participatory processes tend to display a certain degree of ambivalence that cannot be completely overcome through the design choices. Finally, it concludes that most design choices can be traced back to the two clusters that designers sometimes try to blend together.

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[1]A slightly different classification of motivations has been provided by Font, Sesma, and Fontcuberta (2014) as a support for a quantitative research on participatory processes in several Spanish and Italian municipalities. In their view, the aims of public participation may concern the *polity* (reacting to citizens' dissatisfaction, improving community identity and social capital, etc.), the *politics* (reinforcing the mayor vs. the council, co-opting social movements, strengthening the ideological identities of political parties, etc.) or the *policy* (incorporate citizens preferences or knowledge into policymaking). In their empirical analysis, aims related to politics appear to be predominant (e.g. leftist local governments are more prone to participation), even if sometimes the goal of improving policy is also pursued.

1. Participatory arrangements

Since the reasons why policymakers move toward participation are manifold, inter-twined and sometime conflicting, there cannot be a single definition of effective participatory design. Participatory processes can serve different purposes for different people and their success should be evaluated regarding the different expectations that revolve around their deployment.

Designing public participation processes, however, has become a widespread concern for both practitioners and academics. A great variety of proposals, models, arrange-ments, methods and devices have been produced toward this end.

Designing a participatory process means making decisions on several features, e.g. on the issue that must be submitted to the citizens, on the selection of the participants, on the structure of the process, on the role of facilitation, on the mode of interaction among the participants, on the information to be supplied, on the nature of the output and, of course, on many other aspects. Intense research and experimentation on these subjects have been made over the last two or three decades and nowadays policymakers have at their disposal several devices which combine various aspects to produce some standard configurations of participatory processes.

Some of these arrangements have arisen from a political choice, such as the parti-cipatory budget, introduced in Porto Alegre in the late eighties, which had clear redistributive aims (Baiocchi, 2003; Fedozzi, 1999; Gret & Sintomer, 2005). It then spread, although with several adjustments, all over the world (Sintomer, Herzberg, Allegretti, & RöCke, 2010), including influencing the public debate (*débat public*) on infrastructures introduced in France through a national law in 1995 (Fourniau, 2001; Marshall, 2016). Other devices have had a more academic origin: this is the case of the use of Deliberative Polls (Fishkin, 1991, 1995) and Search Conferences, for example Greenwood & Morten) 1998). Others, techniques such as the Citizens' Jury (Crosby & Nethercut, 2005), the 21st Century Town Meeting (Lukensmeyer, Goldman, J., & Brigham, 2005) and the Open Space Technology (Owen, 1997), have been designed by activists or practitioners. The British Columbia Citizens Assembly for the electoral reform (Warren & Pearse, 2008), for example, was reproduced in Ontario and in the Netherlands (Fournier, Van Der Kolk, Carty, Blais, & Rose, 2011), and its design had an influence on the participatory constitutional arrangements that were setup in Iceland (Bergman, 2016; Landemore, 2015) and in Ireland (Suiter, Farrell, & Harris, 2016). Such devices are manifold and continuously evolving: a list of 57 democratic innovations was provided by Graham Smith (2005); 106 public engagement mechanisms were listed by Rowe and Frewer (2005).

These devices are made up of sets of ready-to-use provisions and some of them (e.g. deliberative pollings) have even been protected by trademarks in order to avoid their misuse. Notwithstanding, most of them are rather flexible. They are adjusted to con-texts, as the story of the curious journey of the participatory budget around the world shows (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012). They are also the subject of an endless process of refinement (Bobbio, Lewanski, Romano, Giannetti, & Crosby, 2006; Carson, 2006) and sometimes are combined in hybrid forms (Carson & Hartz-Karp, 2005).

Nevertheless, the worldwide commitment to such methodologies and the interac-tions among specialists has produced a certain degree of convergence. While the devices

display very different features (e.g. pertaining to the topics they address, to the selection of the participants, duration, modes of interaction, conclusions, etc.), they increasingly tend to share many common aspects (Bobbio, 2003). For example:

- participatory processes are highly structured through well-defined phases;
- their duration is pre-defined; with strict control over time maintained;
- interaction among the participants mainly takes place in small groups; small round tables dominate the participatory landscape;
- complete, balanced and accessible information is supplied to the participants;
- the process is designed and run by neutral moderators or facilitators.

The latter point shows that designing (and running) public participation processes has become a profession (Bherer, Gauthier, & Simard, 2017; Blue & Dale, 2016; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Hendriks & Carson, 2008; Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual, & Gastil, 2006), in which thousands of people are engaged all over the world through non-profit (but also for-profit) firms or associations. Many of the deliberative practitioners who encourage participatory processes (Forester, 1999) are the products of this participatory wave, and at the same time have also contributed to make the participation thrive for both ideal and self-interested reasons.

2. Comparing design options

Nevertheless, despite these common elements, in designing participation processes, policymakers and their advisors still face a vast array of techniques. How can these different design options be compared and their effectiveness assessed?

Much of the literature suggests that participatory models can be ordered according to a single dimension, that is, from less to more or from lower to higher. A seminal example of this approach is that of the famous ladder of citizen participation (Figure 1) drawn up by Sherry Arnstein (1969) in one of the most frequently quoted articles on public participation.

Reflecting on her direct experience in US urban development policies in the 1960s, she concluded that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be included in the future (216).

Despite its prominence, this one-dimensional model has been criticized, because it appears to be too simple to account for the diversity of the processes and of their goals (Tritter & McCallum, 2006). The only dimension that can be used to assess the degree of effectiveness of a participation design is the participants' power in decision-making. The low rungs of the ladder host fallacious designs that provide a specious participation. The design's effectiveness (i.e. citizen power) improves as the ladder is climbed. But participation in some issues (e.g. climate change) should be aimed at social learning rather than at citizen power (Collins & Ison, 2009), and citizen power is not always desirable (Fung, 2003), e.g. when the decision at stake affects a much broader community than that of the participants.

However, various similar one-dimensional ladder-like models continue to re-appear in the literature. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), for
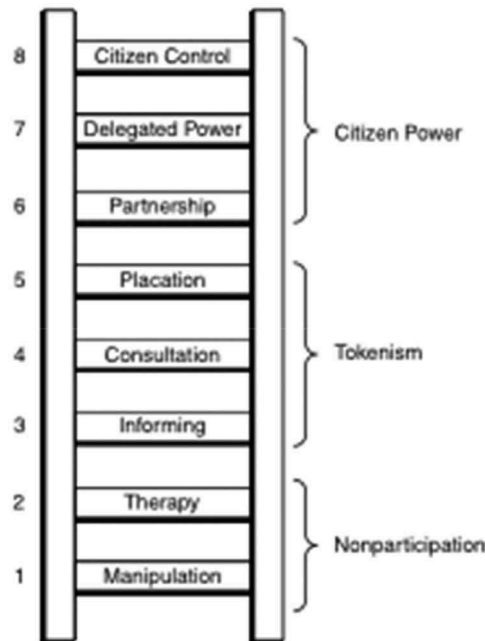
Figure 1. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969, 217).

example, developed a public participation spectrum fashioned on five hierarchically ordered steps (Figure 2). Though three decades had elapsed since Arnstein's ladder was first introduced, the IAP2's spectrum is not very different from that model, except for the labels, which are more neutral and not so value-laden.

These one-dimensional models highlight an important point: citizens' involvement can be more or less intense, that is, more or less influential. Yet, the intensity of involvement and the weight of influence are not the only sensitive dimensions. There is not one single measure of effectiveness, be it empowerment or political influence. Not all participatory arrangements can be ordered in a single ranking.

A step in the direction or rectifying this problem is provided by the three-dimensional model proposed by Fung (2006) (Figure 3). His third dimension, extent of authority and power, is similar to that employed by Arnstein. But the other two dimensions highlight further aspects: the degree of inclusivity and the intensity of communicative exchange among participants. What emerges is a three-dimensional space, the 'democracy cube', in which different arrangements – such as public hearings, deliberative polls, participatory budgets – are positioned. The different arrangements are no longer ordered from below to
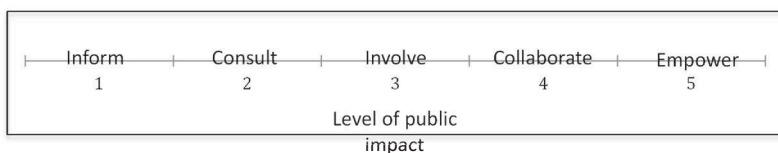

Figure 2. IAP2's public participation spectrum (www.iap2.org).

Participant Selection Methods

Modes of Communication and Decision
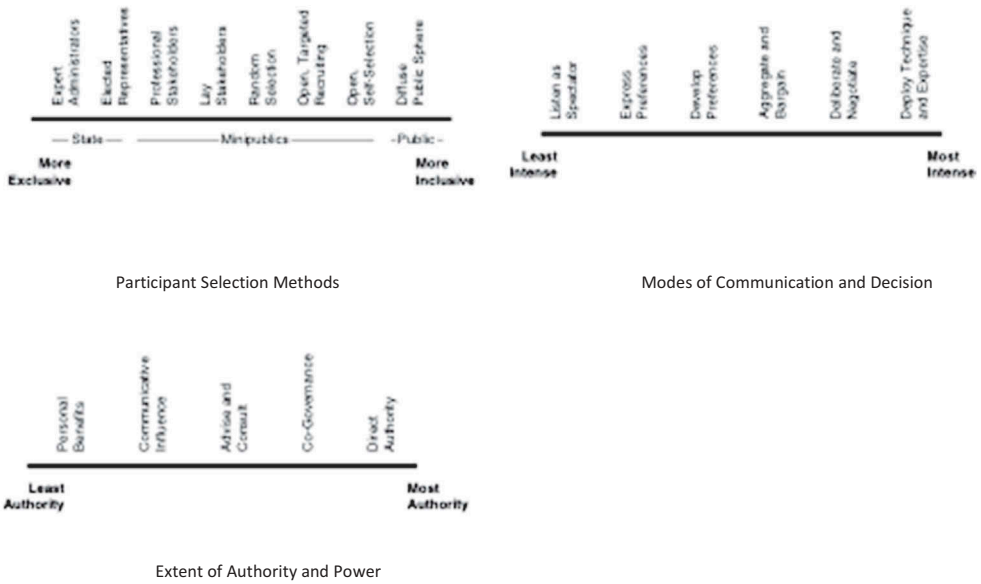
Extent of Authority and Power

Figure 3. The three dimensions of the democracy cube (Fung, 2006).

above in a ladder-like scheme, but are scattered throughout the cube's space, each of them fostering some values and downgrading some other ones. As Fung put it:

> I have argued that participation serves three particularly important democratic values: legitimacy, justice, and the effectiveness of public action. Furthermore, no single participatory design is suited to serving all three values simultaneously; particular designs are suited to specific objectives. (Fung, 2006, p. 74)

The consequence is that a liberal egalitarian 'might be attracted to the ways in which the…. Deliberative Poll informs citizens and perhaps allows them to develop and practice civic virtues associated with participation', while 'radical democrats are attracted to the strong public, empowered, features of…. Participatory Budgeting, but may view weak mini-publics as irrelevant epiphenomena or instruments of co-optation'. (Fung, 2003, p. 365)

If the design of public participation processes can embed different aims and values, and if policymakers have to make some choices (or some trade-offs) among them, one fruitful way to improve the design process could be by illuminating the junctions or the dilemmas that policymakers encounter when designing public participation processes. In this sense, the problem is not to distinguish weak from strong arrangements or bad from good ones, but rather to understand the different design choices that can be made, the problems that can be tackled, the values to be pursued and/or neglected, the trade-offs that can be hypothesized among them and the results that can be attained.

3. Dilemmas in design

In this section, I shall present some recurrent dilemmas in participation design. The list is not exhaustive but rather is an attempt to focus on only those dilemmas that appear

crucial, as they tend to lead to important implications for design decisions. The list is neither parsimonious nor systemic. It does not have the ambition of catching, with a few dimensions or a few axes, the universe of the participatory arrangements, as the models I dealt with in the previous section did. Different dilemmas partially overlap.

3.1. *Participation vs. deliberation*

The terms participation and deliberation are sometimes used as synonymous, the same processes being defined as participatory or deliberative, depending on the case. Quite often participation is meant as an umbrella term that describes the activities by which people's concerns, needs, interests and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015, p. 14) and thus it also includes the deliberative practices that are understood to be part of the more general participatory domain (and in this paper, up to now, I have been talking of participation in this broad sense). But the concepts of participation and deliberation can also been distinguished, as they focus on clearly different aspects (Floridia, 2017; Lafont, 2015; Mutz, 2006).

Both participatory and deliberative democracy aim at involving citizens in public choices, but the former is a more political and a hotter ideal: citizen involvement is conceived as the pressure of people (especially of the worse off) on the government; while the latter is a more philosophical and a colder ideal: that of making public choices arise from a reasoned dialogue among all the affected people. The former is grounded on a dualistic (and perhaps too simple) conception of society, as shaped by the opposition between the powerful and the powerless, between those who govern and those who are governed; while the latter supposes a pluralistic society in which citizens have different and even conflicting interests or ideas that must be tackled through discussion rather than through authoritative or aggregative mechanisms. Though participation and deliberation have much in common, they are – to a certain extent – contradictory: massive participation hinders deliberation, while good deliberation is favored by constrained participation.

Moving toward participation or toward deliberation depends on the problem that has to be tackled and on the expected outcomes. If the problem is that of giving voice to the voiceless, participatory designs are more suitable. As Fung writes: [j]ustice results from the proper counting of their voices rather than from deliberation (Fung, 2006, p. 73). If the objective is to engage citizens in conflict resolution or in problem-solving, deliberative designs should be preferred. It is necessary to distinguish between problems of *will* and problems of *judgment* (Urbinati, 2006). In the former case, the power to decide is crucial (as in Arnstein's ladder), while in the latter influence can also (or perhaps mainly) be attained through the concrete capacity of solving problems or conflicts.

3.2. *Online vs. on-site*

At a first glance, the juncture between online and on-site processes has nothing to do with the previous one, but in fact some connections exist. Policymakers tend to be attracted to a great extent by online participation: it is less expensive and less

demanding, and it can involve a larger number of citizens. The literature that has reviewed the results of empirical researches is more cautious about the comparative advantages of online participation (Friess & Eilders, 2015; Rose & Sæbø, 2010).

Online platforms provided by governmental agencies are not usually as crowded as one could expect. There are technical barriers, but also cultural and political ones, i.e. a widespread mistrust toward politics and government. Moreover, online arenas seem to be unfit for deliberation, as Internet participants tend to stick to positional confrontation and to limit their contacts to like-minded fellows. In deliberative capacity, face-to-face (F2F) practices outscore keyboard-to-keyboard ones. Online participation works better when it is aimed at gathering information or at receiving inputs (such as suggestions, proposals, ideas) from citizens. A good example is the online platform *Decidim* (Let's decide), setup by the new municipal administration in Barcelona, which, in just a few months in 2016, received (and partially implemented) about 10,000 proposals (even though the title of the project *decidim* is a little misleading).

A more interactive possibility is the use of the Internet for crowdsourcing. This worked in an interesting way in the writing of the new Icelandic constitution (Landemore, 2015). In general, online arrangements seem to be more suitable for less demanding participatory processes, where information or consultation are at stake, while their performance is poorer when deliberation is requested. It can be supposed that a sort of division of labor exists between online and on-site designs, the former addressing more simple, non-deliberative arrangements, the latter more demanding ones, although improvements in design may affect the quality of online deliberation (Wright & Street, 2007), as the positive online implementation of Fishkin's deliberative polling seems to demonstrate (Smith, 2009). Online and on-site modes may also be combined. There have been cases of discussions that occur simultaneously in a mini-public and on the web (Lanzara, 2013) and cases of a F2F deliberation that has been followed by an online vote, as in some participatory budgets.

3.3. *Open-door settings vs. mini-publics*

Participatory designs are aimed at involving all the people affected by the policy at stake. But, in practice, only a tiny – a very tiny – minority of them can actually participate. As a selection is bound to take place, the problem is how to make it occur. Designers can rely on two broad alternatives that tend to generate the most important distinction in participatory arrangements: (i) *open-door arenas*, i.e. venues where anybody can step in and where participants are thus *self-selected*, and (ii) *mini-publics*, i.e. venues that claim to represent some features of the affected population on a small scale; in this case, participants are selected by the organizers through a certain criterion (e.g. random selection, representation of interests, ideas, discourses). The former is aimed at individual freedom, spontaneity and openness, the latter at building up a reasonable sample of those affected. The open-door setting is typical of conventional participation (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015), such as public hearings, but also of more recent devices, such as participatory budgets and the French *débat public*. Mini-publics include citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, citizens' assemblies and other similar devices. They are the new frontier of deliberative democrats: contemporary theoretical and empirical research is mainly concentrated on them (Grönlund, Bächtinger, & Setälä, 2014), while the open-door approach is often overlooked.

Self-selection is preferable when one wants to underline the openness of a process and the fact that nobody is excluded, but it runs the risk of setting up a biased arena. There may be social biases (well-off and educated people are more likely to show up than the worse-off and the uneducated), biases based upon time availability (retired people are more likely to participate than young mothers or busy people) or upon intensity of preferences (the participatory process mainly attracts those who have a great interest in the issue at stake). The latter bias may have a positive effect because it tends to raise information, attention and concern within the arena. Moreover, it may counterbalance the social bias when the issue at stake is mainly perceived by the worse-off. This is the case of the original Porto Alegre participatory budget, where poor people attended in overwhelming numbers or that of the French *débat public*, where the meetings are dominated by local opponents to large infrastructures. Some distortion can be useful if it serves to give voice to interests that would otherwise remain unheard.

Mini-publics do not incur such biases, because they gather a balanced sample of the affected population, but they tend to suffer from other drawbacks (Lafont, 2015). The participants are mainly chosen through a random selection process, and this entails an enormous democratic fascination because it solemnly underscores the full equality of all citizens, that is, of each person having the same probability of being chosen, and because it trusts in the wisdom of ordinary citizens. Again in this case, some self-selection is likely to occur, as only a small minority of those selected actually agrees to participate. However, even though a good demographical representation is reached, some problems may arise. Minorities tend to be under-represented or not represented at all, especially when the number of participants is low (as in the case of citizens' juries). In the lottery for the British Columbia assembly, no member of the First Nation was drawn (Warren & Pearse, 2008); in the Turin citizens' jury on urban traffic, none of the jurors was a frequent cyclist (Bobbio & Ravazzi, 2006). What is needed the most in deliberative settings is not the correct demographic representation of the universe, but rather the representation of all the possible positions on the same issue in a specific society. As Elster (1998, 13) stated, if deliberation is the key to political decision-making, what matters is the full representation of views rather than individuals. In this vein, Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) proposed setting up a discursive representation and suggested to use Q Methodology to detect the complete set of discourses that revolve around a given problem in order to grant each of them a representation in the deliberative arena.

Moreover, open-door settings are more flexible than mini-publics, because new participants can step in during the process and offer new ideas. What is sometimes needed in a contentious participatory process is not a good representation of people (or of discourses), but rather the possibility of opening the doors to actors who are capable of introducing innovative ideas and ... useful 'bridge-proposals' to redefine the stakes and to stimulate the formulation of constructive solutions (Ravazzi & Pomatto, 2014, p. 10) or even to unblock deadlocks.

3.4. *Hot vs. cold deliberation*

One of the hardest dilemmas in participation design, and which is in part linked to some of the above-mentioned ones, concerns the heat of the interactions among participants (Fung, 2003). It is possible to wonder whether participatory forums should

be open to partisan actors (movements, associations, interest groups, activists, stakeholders) or whether they should be made up of ordinary citizens in a non-partisan setting. Most deliberative democrats are prone to the latter solution: they view participatory processes mainly as a means of cooling down the debate, of replacing passion with reason and of favoring a constructive dialogue among people. Partisan actors can be involved as witnesses who present their position to the participants and answer their questions, but are kept out of the deliberative arena. The idea behind this is that of creating a protected space – a safe haven (Chambers, 2004) – where deliberators, who were not previously involved in the issue to any great extent, feel free from pressures and are able to engage in cold, dispassionate deliberation. Most mini-publics are conceived in this way.

While cooling down some hot debates may be considered as a wise move and the virtue of open-minded discussions is widely recognized, these non-partisan forums risk being too detached from the real world to gain sufficient legitimacy. As John Parkinson wrote, regarding some citizens' juries held in the UK:

> What reasons did the protesters have for agreeing with the jury's decisions? On what grounds could they be persuaded to accept the outcome without participating in the debate directly? Why should they think, after months of hard work, that this group of sixteen people chosen by a market research firm should have the decisive voice? (2006, p. 1)

The opposite solution, which is preferred by participatory democrats, and also, of course, by the stakeholders (Hendriks, 2011), consists of forums in which partisan positions are admitted, where hot deliberation prevails over the cold one, and a stormy (but real) sea is preferred to a safe (but artificial) haven. The main risk here is that of positional confrontation, without any form of learning. Some design choices can, however, reduce such risks, as happens in French public debate. In this case, open-door hearings are associated with narrower venues (*ateliers*) where (colder) deliberation can take place. As the official aim of the *débat public* is not that of making a decision, but that of gathering all arguments that pertain to the proposed project, the participants have no incentive to prevail over each other.

When a contentious issue is at stake, designers have to cautiously navigate between the Scylla of cold deliberation in safe havens and the Charybdis of hot deliberation in stormy seas. The possibility of combining the advantages of both and of eliminating their drawbacks, i.e. assuring a good degree of legitimacy through a close linkage to the real world and at the same time triggering sound deliberation, is one of the most exciting challenges of participatory design.

3.5. *Decision-making vs. consultation*

The dilemma between decision-making and consultative arrangements was long considered by many scholars as a crucial one: participatory arrangements were mainly classified, as seen above, according to the degree of power they enjoyed. The same idea is continuously put forward by social movements, advocacy groups and activists, who never cease to request that participatory settings are formally empowered and to complain if they are not. However, this dilemma appears to be overestimated, because granting formal power to a participatory arena is neither a necessary nor a sufficient

condition for influencing the content of a public policy. Moreover, claiming that a decision made by a mini-public or by a public meeting should be binding for the larger community is bound to be controversial.

However, there are several arrangements though which a certain degree of formal power may be granted to a participatory arena. The strongest (but seldom practiced) one is probably the commitment to submit the recommendations issued by a mini-public to a referendum, as in the case of British Columbia's assembly on the electoral reform or the case of the Irish constitutional convention. In the case of participatory budgets, the local authorities agree to finance the projects suggested by the citizens' assemblies as long as they meet certain criteria: such devices are often defined as cases of shared decision-making (Gret & Sintomer, 2005). A weaker form of empowerment that is sometimes granted to mini-publics is the commitment, by the public authority, to either adopt their proposal or to publicly motivate the refusal; sometimes authorities just promise to take the participation's outcomes into serious consideration.

On the other hand, there are several cases in which no formal power has been granted, and yet the participatory arenas do not necessarily lack influence. Deliberative polls, like all polls, have the aim of detecting participants' opinions and of analyzing whether they changed their mind after the deliberation, and, if so, in which direction; yet in some cases, they have had a concrete impact on lawmaking (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006). French public debates are not entrusted with making either decisions or recommendations, but just with bringing to light all the arguments pertaining to an infrastructural project. After the conclusion of the debate, the project's proponent is free to accept or reject the proposals that have arisen from the debate. However, they often modify their project according to the outcomes of some public discussions (Revel et al., 2007). These examples suggest that influence does not necessarily stem from formal power, but can also depend on the quality of the deliberation and of its outcomes. A deep deliberation process that opens up new possibilities and new ways of seeing an issue may be more effective than a poor decision made, thanks to formal power. Moreover, formal power can inhibit deliberation because it induces people to indulge in positional confrontation, while deliberation needs informal interactions that are free from the pressure to decide.

Recent literature tends to reframe the influence issue in terms of micro–macro relations. It wonders through which paths the micro participatory events may be connected to the macro public sphere. A mini-public or a participatory process is not the only game in town (Parkinson, 2006, p. 95): other games, with other players and other rationales, are played simultaneously elsewhere on the same policy field. The problem is hence to understand which links (if any) are established between the sites (whether institutional or not; empowered or not) in which a policy is tackled or – it is possible to say – what is the structure of the overall deliberative system (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). Different parts of the system are coupled loosely, so that ideas and reasons coming from other parts of the deliberative system can be accepted through processes of convergence, mutual influence and mutual adjustment (Mansbridge, 2012, p. 23). Hendriks (2016), through the analysis of the relations between a citizen jury and a parliamentary committee in an Australian state, has recently argued that coupling informal and formal sites should be designed in order to favor exchanges, interactions

and mutual learning. How this connection can be arranged is one of the most challenging issues of participatory design (Setälä, 2017).

4. Coping with ambivalence

The participatory processes promoted by a public authority, and especially those with a higher stake, are often criticized by stakeholders, political opponents or activists as being harmful traps that pretend to give voice to citizens, but actually only serve to legitimize decisions that have already been made and to strengthen the power of those who promote them. Policymakers have been accused of displaying a false openness, of practicing tokenism and of manipulating citizens' goodwill. It is difficult to find a participatory arrangement, which – sooner or later – has not been suspected of being located on the lowers rungs of Arnstein's ladder. These allegations are often made in a strategic or specious way by political opponents who want to discredit the majority, by interest groups that have been cut off the process (especially in the case of mini-publics formed through random selection) or by the media eager to attack those in government.

Yet, these allegations often have a kernel of truth. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, participatory arrangements are intrinsically ambivalent: they give voice to citizens, but at the same time they use them to gain legitimacy; they are open to new solutions, but often force participants to confirm those that have already been made; they aim at making policymakers learn from citizens, but, at the same time, they put the participants in the position of having to discuss within pre-defined agendas and already framed problems. Some processes are unbalanced on one hand, some on the other, but a certain degree of ambivalence often affects them. For instance, the 'citizen dialogue' program enacted by the municipality of Gothenburg 'can be understood from both idealist and cynical perspectives', as it served both to deepen 'local democracy by empowering citizens to voice their needs and ideas' and to handle 'the anticipated conflict expected from the inevitable measures of austerity' (Tahvilzadeh, 2015, p. 249–50).

Some scholars, moving from the dark side of participatory processes, end up denying they have any validity. They argue that participation contributes to the stabilization of neo-liberal policies (Moini, 2011), reinforces inequalities (Lee, McQuarrie, & Walker, 2015), leads to de-politicization (Clarke, 2010), is aimed at avoiding conflicts and fostering an appeasement that advantages those in power (Gourgues, Rui, & Topçu, 2013; Pellizzoni, 2015), is just 'a buzzword in the neo-liberal era' (Leal, 2007) and appears as a democratic illusion (Fuji Johnson, 2015): through participation, social movements are bypassed in favor of ordinary (and meeker) citizens.

Designing participative arrangements is seen as an *ingénierie participative* (Mazeaud, Nonjon, & Parizet, 2016) supported by a public engagement industry (Lee, 2015) that curbs protest and builds a technical cage that can be used to tame the wild nature of people participation. These accounts, which mainly stem from an agonistic conception of democracy (Mouffe, 1999), have been criticized because, for instance, social conflict is not always crushed by participation, it is often fed by it (Bobbio & Melé, 2015), and it may help it (Polletta, 2015). But, above all, these accounts look at just one facet, and they do not see the ambivalence or the contradictions that characterize participative processes. The latter can

develop in different ways: they can be entirely predictable, but they can also be unexpected. In many experiences, some conflict appears between those who would like to normalize it and those who want to push it – at least partially – off the rail.

Several arrangements exist that have the aim of preventing manipulation or any instrumental use of the goodwill of participants, e.g. offering balanced information, expertise and witnesses to participants, entrusting the management of the process to skilled outsiders, setting up an advisory committee in which all the stakeholders are represented, denying any privileged position to the promoters. These or similar arrangements are normally present in participatory designs, but they are not always completely successful: the ambivalence of participatory processes cannot be overcome completely.

5. Conclusion

Policymakers who wish to include citizens in the policymaking process can rely on a rich toolbox that is continuously being widened, enhanced and refined by a vast community of academics and practitioners all over the world. The crisis of representative democracy on one hand and the rise of populism on the other have encouraged the search for solutions that are supposed to overcome, at least in part, the drawbacks of both phenomena. In fact, participatory arrangements seem able to counteract the oligarchic tendencies that have emerged from the 'crisis of representative democracy' as they call for the direct involvement of citizens in public choices and, at the same time, fight against the populist idea of a people with a single voice by fostering a careful discussion among citizens on the merits of specific issues.

Nowadays, this research area is one of the liveliest fields within political philosophy, political science, sociology, policy analysis, planning and other disciplines. How can a policymaker find his/her way within the vast array of tools and arrangements that crowd his/her toolbox? In this article, I have suggested that different arrangements tend to embed different goals or a different conception of effectiveness, and hence that policymakers have to make a choice (or a trade-off) at any juncture of his/her design-making process.

Table 1 lists the five dilemmas I presented above in this paper. The two columns outline – in a very rough way – two possible modes of designing public participation.

Temporarily leaving aside the online vs. on-site dilemma, the column on the left depicts a cluster of arrangements based on free access venues – that are then open to militants and stakeholders, and that are endowed with some decision-making power and prone to tackle hot issues through adversary confrontation. These can be called *participatory arrangements*. The items in the column on the right outline a set of arrangements based on a sample of the affected people, which relies more on the possibility of influence than on formal power, where ordinary citizens, rather than stakeholders, play a leading role and where the heat of the

Table 1. Dilemmas in public participation design.

Participation	vs.	Deliberation
Online	vs.	On-site
Open-door settings	vs.	Mini-publics
Decision-making	vs.	Consultation
Hot deliberation	vs.	Cold deliberation

discussion is cooled down in order to foster rational deliberation. These can be called *deliberative arrangements*. The dilemma between online and on-site participation can also somehow be introduced: as seen above, F2F interactions are more likely to develop sound deliberation than virtual ones, while online processes are more suitable for simpler and less demanding arrangements.

The two clusters that emerge, though roughly, from the two columns in Table 1, echo the division that exists in both the literature and in practice between the world of participation and that of deliberation. This is the main dilemma policymakers face and some sort of trade-off between the properties of each of them is needed, depending on the nature of the context and of the expected results. Several combinations of the items in Table 1 are possible, and many positions in between may be found for each row. Participatory and deliberative settings should not be seen as completely alternative paths, but rather as suggestions that can be hybridized. The most interesting arrangements are found somewhere in between.

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