

Participatory Performance in Research Program Context

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Abstract

Public engagement (PE) refers to activities where there is a distinct role for citizens or stakeholder groups in research and innovation processes. The concept of PE alike thinking of science in society generally, has evolved from information dissemination toward more interactive and consequentialist models. In our previous research we studied how ‘participatory performance’ varied between 38 European countries. In this paper we start a critical discussion on the factors that contribute to participatory performance at the level of research programmes and projects. Different contextual factors are relevant there, and we observe that criteria such as flexibility and reflexivity are important features of programme design supporting an active culture of PE. To counter an instrumentalist tendency of PE development, it is important to keep on speaking of the purpose and problem solving capacity of PE. Finally, we identify a number of specific areas for further research contributing to resolving paradoxes of effective PE.

Introduction

Theories of public participation have received considerable academic and political attention since the early 1990s, but have been a source for debate for more than fifty years. Participatory and deliberative democratic processes have developed significantly since their inception in the late 1960s and institutionalization in the 1980s and 1990s (Dryzek 2000; Geurts and Mayer 1996). Inspired by the insights of deliberative democratic theorists (Habermas 1997; Rawls 1993), various democratic innovations have been proposed, such as modifications in conventional institutions of government, ways of communicating between governmental and with civil society agencies, usage of e-governance tools and mass-mediated deliberations, surveys, and citizen panels or ‘micro-publics’, where lay citizens and non-partisan actors gather together to discuss topical matters of policy relevance (e.g. Dietz and Stern 2008; Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Renn et al. 1995; Pytlik Zilling and Tomkins, 2011). These participation approaches have given the public a more meaningful role in policy formation, including science and technology (S&T) policy, but at the same Wilsdon and Willis (2004) argue the engagements of public often do not take place early enough in the decision-making process and the impacts of public inputs on policy outputs are unclear and uncertain (Pytlik Zilling and Tomkins, 2011).

In this article we study public engagement (PE) activities and answer the following questions: How public participation is performed in the countries investigated? Which practices in the field of PE could be identified? What factors are relevant in understanding participatory performance at the level of research programs and projects? Although the focus of the article is on research programs, the issues raised can be applicable to other policy programme contexts as well. The constructed model of ‘participatory performance’, resulting from the empirical research performed by the authors in 2011-2012, refers to level and quality of public dialogues on science, technology and innovation. Factors contributing to participatory performance have been modeled at the level of national performance, including participatory resources, demand conditions, related and supportive factors, governmental strategies and other factors. This paper opens a critical debate about such factors at the level of research programmes. This field lacks theoretical models of PE on programme level that could advance research and

guide practitioners in S&T field. Therefore we additionally examine the social science literature relevant to PE in general and in relation to research programmes in order to identify the factors of meaningful public input on programme level.

Definitions, model and methods

Our focus will be firstly on ‘participatory performance’ of the countries and second on PE factors at the level of programmes, and projects. We understand PE as activities where there is a distinct role for citizens or stakeholder groups in research and innovation processes. The concept of PE has evolved steadily from information dissemination to a more interactive one with regard to scientific education, ways of transmission and accountability, and we find it easy to support the idea of A. I. Leshner (2003) that simply trying to educate the public about specific science-based issues is not working in a global market.

PE tools and instruments in S&T have developed significantly during the last 30 years in Europe. Examples of active fields of research and development include technology assessment and foresight, risk studies, social study of science and technology, sociology of public understanding of science as well as studies in deliberative democracy (Joss, Belluci, 2002; Jaeger et al., 2005; Jasanoff, 2005; Collins and Evans, 2002; Wynne, 1995; Gastil, 2005). Synthesizing the results of the analysis of the MASIS project data on PE activities, Rask et al. (2012) constructed a model of ‘participatory performance’ that is used to describe the level and quality of PE activities in 37 European countries. The higher participatory performance, the more country supports public dialogues on science issues, and the more it possesses structures to host deliberations. The lower the participatory performance, the less there is evidence of supporting open dialogue and public deliberation (Rask et al. 2012).

Our analysis is supported by model of participatory performance, which consists of the four components: participatory resources (supporting regulations, supporting infrastructure, funding opportunities, etc.), demand conditions (level of education, culture of public dialogue, social capital, etc.), supportive factors (CSOs, networking, good practices, etc.), and governmental strategies (strategies of PE, national priorities etc.). The model has roots in the Dryzek and Goodin’s (2009) model of the deliberative system,

and in Porter's 'diamond model' of the national economic systems but our focus is more limited regarding the area of interests: PE activities in the area of S&T.

Evaluating the Participatory Performance

Majority of the 37 investigated countries share similar political considerations related to economic growth, environment, health, energy, innovations and technology. Still each country has its own peculiarities that provoke particular political debates, for example, on ethnic and linguistic diversity in Belgium; interpretation of history in France; employment and immigration in Germany. Following Porter's (1998) reasoning of the dynamics of the economic system, we hypothesize that the level of participatory performance is influenced not only by the impact of one individual component or factor, but also by their synergic influence (Rask et al., 2012).

The countries are classified in six groups depending on their overall level of participatory performance with low or moderate performance level "B" and with high performance level "A". In evaluation one letter indicate the lowest level, more letters indicate better performance level and the best performing country could have maximum rate of AAA.

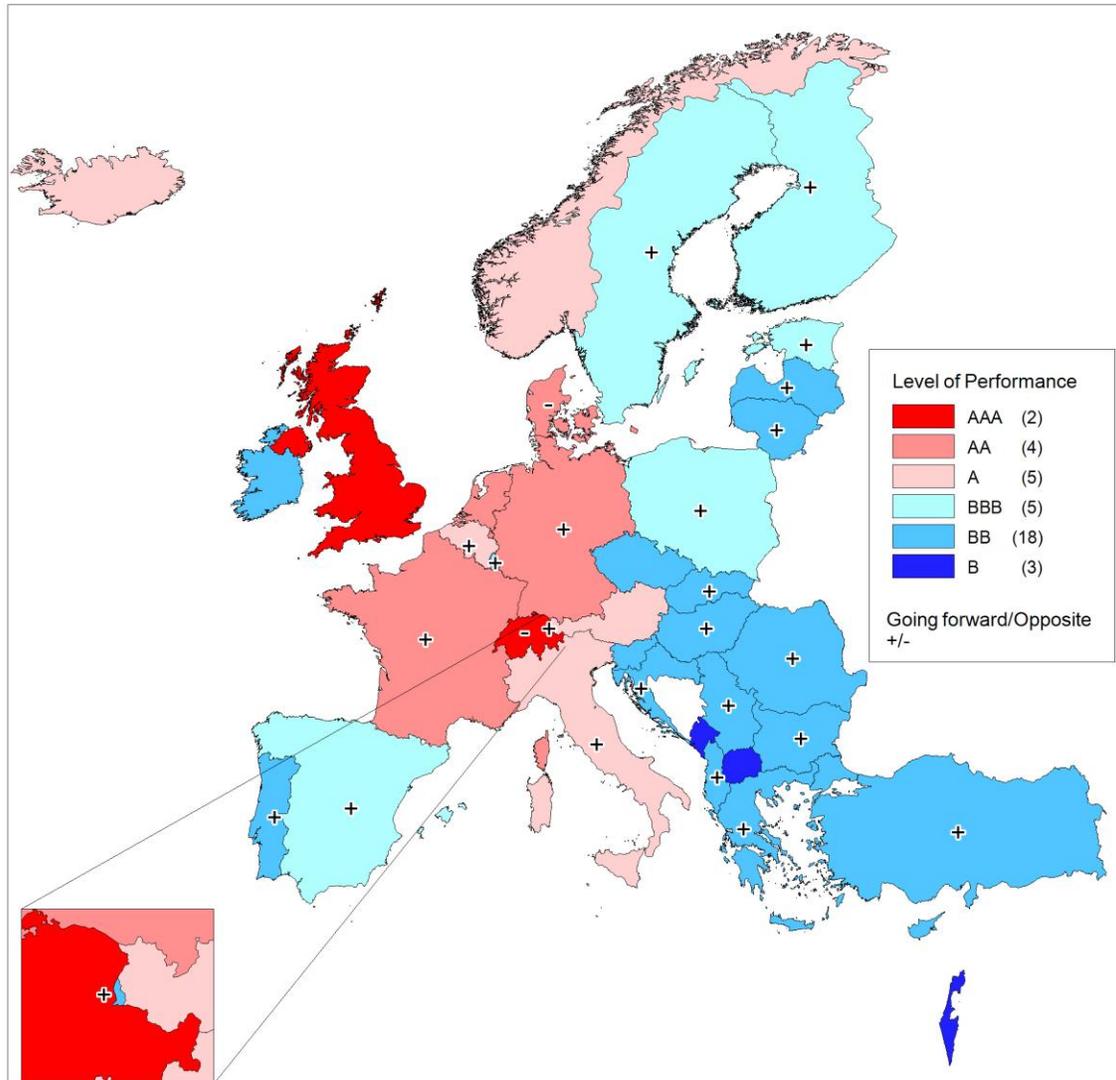


Figure 1. Participatory Performance in the Countries

The participatory performance evaluation highlights differences between countries. The highest levels of participatory performance can be found in Western European countries where all A-category countries are located. With some exceptions, all the B-category countries are located in the Eastern part of Europe. We therefore can assume that the past division of Eastern and Western Europe still plays a role in explaining the differences of participatory performance levels, while there are also additional explanatory factors (Rask et al., 2012). The analysis shows that the contextual factors influence the way that the different countries prioritize their strategic goals and approach the issues of science and PE. Still, in reviewing different countries, we see that most of the national research

programmes take ‘one size fits all’ and top-down (McEven, 2011) approach in expressing the expectations of programme designers rather than building approaches that support cross-institutional and bottom-up deliberation of research needs and priorities.

Analysing Public Engagement on Programme Level

The discussion regarding the dimension of power of PE appeared already in the early 70s (Arnstein, 1969; Windly and Cibulka, 1981; Skinner 1995, etc.). A classical theoretical work on public ‘power’ is Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation corresponding to the extent of citizens’ power: non-participation, tokenism, and citizens’ power. The ‘ladder model’ has been criticized for its broadness, but still it helps to understand the increasing demands of active citizenship. A particular defect of the ladder model is that it implies that more control by the citizens is always better, even though the public does not always want to control, and an increased control without supporting capacity can lead to a failure. Later, various researchers have evolved the ladder model by complementing it with different participation instruments and establishing a ‘model of power’. Power can be concentrated (held by a particular group of people) or dispersed (open for all) arising the problem for determination in which issues the public is ‘allowed’ to be involved. And this is the central question for understanding the nature of civic empowerment.

To our view, PE, by definition, is as a form of *partnership* with the goal of generating mutual benefit. This is especially tangible on programme and/or project level. The French REPERE Program, for example, runs an Observatory of Citizens’ Participation in Research and Expertise, and funds research projects carried out by researchers and civil society. An important prerequisite for partnerships to occur is that participation is based on individuals’ genuine contribution (e.g. Glass et al. 2011; McEven 2011). The challenges of organizing such processes have been discussed under the labels of ‘paradox of empowerment’ Skelcher (1993) and ‘cycle of disempowerment’ (Participation a Theoretical Framework, p.7) and ‘tragedy of citizen deliberation’ (Rask 2013).

We assume that among different possible facilitating factors not only level of education or cultural environment matter when increasing PE on programme level, but

also citizens' understanding. Firstly, understanding of risks (climate change, GMO, etc.). For example, McEven (2011) in his studies notes that public *understanding of risk* requires understanding of science. He draws on action research from two community science engagement projects on flood science, and notes that public needs knowledge and power in order to face risks, in that case flood risk. Another is citizens' *understanding of impact*, which according to Dryzek and Goodin (2012) may come in the form of actually making policy or participating in the policy process. This would require that participatory 'mini-public' processes would impact the 'macro' world of politics, as for example in Denmark, where the FORSK 2015 foresight project was organized to scan new research themes through an open web consultation, or in Iceland, where ordinary citizens were included in the discussions of how Iceland should look like in 2020, and in Luxembourg, where 100 ordinary citizens were asked to identify and assess future national domains of socio-economic benefit.

On the basis of our literature review we are arriving at an understanding of criteria contributing to a high participatory performance at the context of research programmes. Programme design should be both *flexible* and *reflexive*, allowing participants to alter the direction on changing priorities and needs (Arvanitakis et al., 2012). Arvanitakis and Hodge in their study on 41 universities of Australia focuses on Australian Research Council funded project. At the base of this research project a micro-public event called "From Sitting on the Couch to Changing the World" was organised, establishing meaningful links between universities and public around a sense of common purpose. Transnational micro-public processes might also lead us beyond information dissemination or citizenship education, e.g. the CIVISTI project that involved citizen panels in seven EU countries to identify future research needs for the EU.

Effective PE is built not only on the type of activity or correct understanding of risk or impact, but it is also dictated by its stated *purpose* that impacts its desired and potential outcomes. The UK Administrative Research Network in its report "Improving Access for Research and Policy" (2012) notes that in case of citizens empowerment, the purpose of engagement is to work with the public enabling them to play key roles. Indeed there not so many examples on 'top' policy level, but yet programmes and projects has a definite potential to increase PE. And funding is one of the major supporting factors

leading to a more effective engagement and even having an indirect influence on purpose. We believe that the availability of EU funding programs, such as those under the FP7 Social Sciences and Humanities Programme, EU structural funds and its various integration programs, have contributed to the emergence of initiatives on PE in the high number of countries, for example Science and Society Project Support Programme in Turkey and Local e-Democracy National Project in the UK. But it is essential to examine whether initiatives of PE continue to proceed after funding ends and what is a long-term impact of temporally funded programmes or projects on efficiency of PE.

Discussion

A number of specific areas for further research can be identified from this discussion which may contribute to resolving paradoxes of effective PE in S&T:

- A more detailed analysis of complementary components on PE in achieving civil empowerment. This would involve a construction of model related to the evaluation of engagement impact;
- An analysis of resources which people need to be able to become more engaged, and which of them are low cost and high benefit;
- An analysis of ‘successful’ science engagement projects. This would involve an analysis of engagement mechanisms in relation to a purpose;
- An analysis of whether and how the structures of programmes/projects include the interests and needs of the public;
- A more detailed analysis not only on engaged citizens and stakeholders, but also on engaged researchers is needed. This would involve the construction of an alternative model on the citizens as ‘partners’ approach.

Conclusions

Our participatory performance model highlights differences in national situations and reinforces the importance of different strategies in developing PE activities. As PE is becoming a professional activity (UK, Scandinavian countries, France) therefore the influence of the national history, culture and political environment has become even more vital. PE on programme and project levels mostly remain locally oriented, so the

evaluation of its impact on ‘macro’ policy making remains a challenge for research. Still, we can identify that such PE mechanisms as coach workshops, citizen panels, e-portals increase civil empowerment and support transformation of understanding on the role of public.

PE has too often been translated into formal exercises based on procedures and techniques, and it has been ‘separated’ from its initial roots; to counter this tendency we support speaking of purpose and problem solving. With the emerging reconsideration of science and its benefits to society a critical analysis of PE is necessary.

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