Democratizing the Climate Negotiations System Through Improved Opportunities for Participation

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DEMOCRATIZING THE CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS SYSTEM THROUGH IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION

Melanie Müller and Heike Walk

1 Introduction

The conversion of the carbon-based economic model into one of sustainable economic growth requires not only the development of economic and technological potential; it is first and foremost a political and societal project. In addition to the mitigation of climate change through significant reductions in CO₂ emissions, adaptation to its consequences through protective measures is increasingly the focus of public debate. However, the implementation of such measures is difficult and requires the agreement of diverse actors and interests. Thus, the democratization of the climate negotiations system through the expansion and institutionalization of opportunities for citizens and civil society groups to participate is of great importance. Such participation should help to prevent one-sided economic interests from dominating, as well as help those states and populations that are weaker and more affected by climate change to be included. Calls for more participation are gaining support from ever more prominent actors, such as the recent example of the latest release from the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WGBU) “World in Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability.” At first glance, the call for increased participation appears to be extremely feasible and straightforward. On closer examination, however, things get somewhat more complicated, as participation puts considerable demands on the ways in which public opinion is informed and how cooperation takes place locally, nationally, and globally, requiring intervention in existing systems. The consistent evaluation and institutionalization of opportunities for participation puts the logic of state institutions into question, both in terms of hierarchical decision-making processes and in terms of representative political models.

These complicated processes and requirements, which are necessary for participation in democratic systems, can be particularly clearly observed in the international climate negotiations. Accordingly, there has been an increase in the number of publications that address the question of democracy in connection with solving the climate problem (Shearman and Wayne Smith 2009; Welzer et al. 2010; Saretzki 2011). Some sketch out the domain of the problem and point
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out existing difficulties, while others attempt to address the generalized attribution of guilt in democratic systems as well as the associated lobbying activity and selective representation of interests. Still others enthusiastically praise authoritarian climate regimes. The latter generally do not lead anywhere, as the analyses are generally superficial and draw premature conclusions. Democratic systems cannot be blamed for climate change per se (and if so, only to the extent that they have been slow to respond), but nor can authoritarian systems solve the climate issue. Rather, it makes more sense to concern ourselves with practical prospects for participation and obstructions in democratic systems and the identification of alternatives (Leggewie 2011).

In accordance with this, this article seeks to pay particular attention to precisely these questions and problems concerning democracy and participation in the climate negotiations since, after almost 20 years of discussion about the opportunities and limits associated with opening up international politics, actual power structures have hardly changed at all. Our aim is to highlight these obstructions to participation and the resulting drawbacks and missed opportunities. Although many political programs advocate the participation of citizens and cooperative politics, it can still be seen that ministries, administrative departments, and politicians continue to harbor concerns about the effectiveness of political decision-making processes based on the broadening of participation, as well as diffuse fears of loss of power. Specialist administrations frequently question the specialist knowledge and long-term reliability of the citizenry. Conversely, many citizens speak of the inadequate implementation of participatory outcomes and the fact that such processes of participation are merely fig leaves.

Although scientific analyses do address the need for a capacity for societal change and an increased willingness to commit in order for participatory processes to be carried out, these are generally not discussed in connection with capacities for democratization (see Klein et al. 2010). Here we find a considerable deficiency in the discussion of the dilemmas of democracy. We seek to examine this by means of a theoretical discussion of the various forms and functions of participation as well as of the empirical underpinning of the current activities of civil society in the context of the climate negotiations. In addition to affecting access, resource endowments, the setting of agendas, and most importantly the legitimacy of decision-making, the dilemmas of democracy also affect the democratization of international climate governance through rules governing appropriate procedures as well as the transnational integration of processes for decision-making and informing public opinion. Indeed, until now there have only been extremely selective opportunities for participation for individual well-organized groups, while the citizenry acts more as a democratic paper tiger, occasionally registering their presence through protest.

2 What does participation actually mean and why do we need it?!

Civil society groups justify calls for increased participation by reference to improved democracy and more transparent democratic structures. Political decision-makers, on the other hand, justify measures for increasing participation on the basis that they are a necessary requirement for a cohesive society and can counter political apathy (see Gabriel 1999; Abromeit 2002). Of course, there are still critics who see (broader) participation as an added complication (that is to say an increase in time and cost) to the already difficult process of decision-making. In the analysis, the notion of participation attributes particular significance to the involvement of various civil society and private groups. The thesis behind this is that a functioning democracy requires the dedicated participation of the citizenry. Proponents of this thesis include Carol Pateman (1970), Benjamin Barber (1994), Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (2003), Ansgar Klein (2001), and Heike Walk (2008).
Participation does not necessarily have to be a process of cooperation, however. On the contrary, exchanges involving conflict between different opinions can be a fruitful part of the political process. We will examine this in greater detail later. Instead, it is important to recognize the great significance of political education and other efforts at educating the public in connection with processes of democratization. In doing so, democratic rights are closely tied to demands for individual self-determination and collective empowerment. According to the views of Pateman, this requires a targeted broadening of participative structures and educational elements at the local level in order to develop the necessary individual and collective democratic qualities:

Society can be seen as being composed of various political systems, the structure of authority of which has an important effect on the psychological qualities and attitudes of the individuals who interact within them; thus, for the operation for a democratic polity at national level, the necessary qualities in individuals can only be developed through the democratization of authority structures in all political systems.

(Pateman 1970: 35)

Public discussion and communication thus becomes a significant element in contributing to common welfare and promoting the democratic process. In order to achieve this, sophisticated procedures for the regulation of communication are considered necessary.

According to this interpretation, the development of learning processes and capacity-building is associated with the concept of empowerment (Stark 1996). Knowledge is, and generates, power. At the level of the individual, empowerment means that people move out of a situation of powerlessness and helplessness and (re)discover their strengths. At the level of the group, empowerment is paraphrased as the process by which individuals in a group, through group decisions and activities, become aware of their increased strengths and capacity to act. They serve to promote the development of envisioned solutions to problem areas and the development of possibilities for implementation. At the structural level, empowerment can result in changes in ossified structures and conditions, thus providing impetus for organizational development and political reform.

The problems of democratic systems result primarily from a lack of willingness to provide decision-making freedoms for endeavors at empowerment, as well as an unwillingness to acknowledge empowerment as an asset to political decision-making. The relationship between the state – that is to say government, ministries, parliament, administrative departments, public authorities – and civil society is changing. With the new governance systems and regimes, which rest on private organizations and include them in consultation processes, the political process is extending far out into the social sphere. This necessarily results in a change in, and reconstitution of, interests and the forms of organization which these interests take, in the actors and their actions, as well as in the kinds of negotiations taking place between these actors. In a number of cases, civil society organizations are more or less built using public funds, in order for European and national authorities to be able to find communication and negotiation partners, draw upon expertise and acquire policy advice, or to legitimately arrive at the decisions which they expect expanded participation to lead to. Time and time again, state-level actions and the implementation of programs are delegated to private or nongovernmental organizations.

Civil society organizations, professionalized methods of campaigning, media relations, fund-raising, lobbying, the acquisition of expertise, and political participation are thus not merely activities of the citizenry, by which citizens temporarily take their interests into their own hands, but are actually new professional fields and thus additional forms of organization, expertise, and
knowledge, which surround formal politics. Accompanying this development is the formation of multiple new channels for the developing informed political opinion. This presents representatives of civil society organizations with completely novel challenges. They must have the ability to take part in such governance mechanisms, acquire and maintain access to the various official decision-makers, maintain an overview of the area and all participating interest groups in order to notice shifts, apply for funds, make sure they receive the funds, and ensure that they do not become sidelined in the process of competing with other civil society organizations. Participation in international systems thus has far-reaching consequences for society itself, in that it creates new professions, differentially regulates the distribution of public and private funds, reshapes the formation and expression of interests, and reorganizes processes of negotiation.

At the same time, after 15 years of climate negotiations, it is clear that only limited progress has been made with respect to the transparency of participating actors, empowerment, and missing regulations concerning participation. As before, there are unclear power structures and insufficient possibilities for monitoring. There are now a number of studies that explore the problem of selective participation (Papadopoulos 2004; Blatter 2007; Walk and Demirovic 2011). At a first glance, the climate change regimes favor consultative participation and orientate themselves for the most part towards deliberative models of democracy, that is to say a discursive formulation of a consensus opinion, whereby organized civil society is targeted. The encouragement of democratic competence and democratic communication behaviors does not, however, play a role in the climate negotiations, and opposition movements and protest groups are likewise uninvolved in the negotiations. The initial problem of unequal participation has not been solved by the opening up of the structures, but has rather been shifted. Power relations have thus become more complex and simultaneously less transparent. While the dividing line previously tended to run between governments and civil society, civil society groups now compete with each other more than ever for influence on the political landscape. Well-organized organizations, as well as groups, who already have a strong connection to the government’s position, are usually at an advantage. Important possibilities for political innovation, which lie in the resolution of conflicts between opposing groups, remain hidden from view. At the same time, decision-making structures remain untouched, that is to say, the emerging requirements for participation fit into the existing political system very well.

3 Challenges for the theory of democracy

One challenge to the removal of barriers to participation hence lies in identifying possibilities for institutionalizing the participation of special interest groups with occasionally divergent interests and the development of sophisticated procedures for the involvement of these differing groups as well as possibilities for integrating new forms of participation.

Roth (2005) has proposed a number of ways to improve structures which could be useful in this context: The diverse political activities and activists can be roughly divided into three groups which should be taken into account in the climate negotiations: **First**, there are political activities that can be described as lobbying. These are described as legal, partly institutionalized, and mostly temporary forms of participation with a high degree of legitimacy. **Second**, there are political activities that are often characterized as counter-public. This includes legal forms of protest such as approved demonstrations or social fora which present a space for discourse or promote political education. Though these forms of participation are not institutionalized, they have a high degree of legitimacy. **Third**, there are activities that are better described as self-help. In doing this the broad spectrum of people affected is restricted to organized self-help groups. Naturally, the more abstract the problem in question is, the more...
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difficult the identification of these three groups becomes. Nevertheless, this rough structuring does make analysis easier.

In addition to structuring public opinion, it makes sense to engage with the various different functions of participation and to explore the question of which ideas are being pursued with the participation of civil society groups. The more precisely the interests connected to the participation are disclosed the better the participation procedures can be conceptualized. In doing so, the analysis can take the various following starting points into account:

- **Broad participation of all relevant groups if possible:** Identification of all relevant stakeholders and establishment of the criteria used to select participants.
- **Recognition of power of decision:** Identification of decision-making structures.
- **Disclosure of conflicting aims among groups of actors:** Assessment of the transparency of the various interests of the actors.
- **Recognition of power hierarchies:** Identification of interest groups and structures of dominance.
- **Confrontation vs. consensus:** Identification of the various political modes of action, communication, and cooperation.
- **Encouragement of democratic processes:** Assessment of contribution to the encouragement of society’s ability to shape politics.
- **Societal learning:** Identification of learning and emancipatory processes.

Taking all of these approaches into account is, of course, very demanding and calls for a comprehensive empirical analysis. With the help of research that has been carried out in the area of climate politics in recent years, it is possible to carry out an analysis from the point of view of the actors. Though this interpretation does not provide a complete picture, it does, however, offer an insight into the possibilities for deepening knowledge which arise when taking a targeted approach towards locating barriers to participation.

### 4 Structures of participation in international climate policy

Various forms of participation are used in the area of climate. These have developed in different ways at different levels and have led to some groups being subjected to strongly selective involvement at the very least. At the international level, the participation of civil society groups takes place primarily through the participation of NGOs in international conferences. They are able to register themselves for participation in the negotiations and to accredit their staff. However, the term ‘civil society’ applies not only to ‘NGOs,’ but also to other interest groups, research institutes, and trade associations. With the rising importance of climate policy, the number of registered organizations has also risen. At the first COP in 1995, there were just less than 200 organizations which registered for the negotiations. In the years since then, the number has continually risen, and by the 14th conference of the parties in Poznan, the number of organizations exceeded 1,000 for the first time. The highest number of participating organizations occurred at the Copenhagen conference, for which over 1,400 organizations registered. A total of 25,000 people took part in the conference, which was expected to be one of the most important conferences in the history of the international climate negotiations. After the disappointment of the proceedings in Copenhagen, approximately 12,500 participants still traveled to Mexico, and in 2011 more than 13,000 found their way to Durban, South Africa (UNFCCC 2012). While the first years of the international negotiations on climate policy were dedicated primarily to the gathering of evidence and the struggle to get anthropogenic climate change
recognized, from the end of the 1990s, the negotiations became increasingly restricted to marketable solutions and detailed technocratic questions (Brunnengräber et al. 2008). Many NGOs reacted to this development and shifted their focus in accordance with the official agenda.

At present, the inclusion of NGOs takes place in the context of their function as consultants. Their main task at the international level is to lobby. There are, however, a few powerful, internationally active NGOs that have, to some extent, been granted the right to speak at the negotiations, and delegates of these nongovernmental organizations are given the floor during the negotiations. These procedures are often emphasized by political decision-makers whenever they find that they are being criticized for being insufficiently inclusive. The fact that these organizations only represent a small fraction of civil society thus remains ignored.

All that remains for the other NGOs that have registered for the negotiations is ‘observer status.’ They can also run side events during the negotiations and use these to make their positions known and raise controversial issues. Whether these positions actually have any influence on the government positions, however, is generally more dependent on the lobbying activities of the groups concerned (Müller 2010a, 2010b). By the time of the negotiations in Copenhagen, a crack had appeared in cooperation with civil society. As the two weeks of negotiations had been organized very badly, and the pressure on the delegations in the conference center was continuously increasing, the majority of the civil society representatives were excluded from participation in the conference towards the end. On the last Friday of the conference, a mere 90 or so delegates from civil society organizations were allowed to take part (Fisher 2010: 14). In the run-up to the negotiations, civil society organizations had already announced that there would be massive protests. However, the exclusionary behavior of the authorities in Copenhagen may well have further contributed to the protests (Bergfeld 2011). Critical organizations in particular, such as staff of the Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz Deutschland, which as a part of Friends of the Earth International had participated in the call for the protests, were refused reentry into the conference center (Klimaretter 2009).

Besides these political conflicts, a structural problem is apparent with regard to inclusion at the international level which above all affects those NGOs with limited finances, who can therefore either not participate in the negotiations or only do so to a very limited extent. This applies to groups from what is termed the Global South which, in contrast to their counterparts in the North, often have too few financial resources and personnel in order to be able to continuously follow the negotiations and to put their positions forward. The imbalance of power between the ‘developed’ countries as opposed to the ‘developing’ countries is thus also reflected at the level of civil society. About 25 organizations from Brazil registered for the negotiations, for example, and 17 organizations came from Kenya. However, only one NGO registered from each of the smaller developing countries such as Zambia and Senegal. In contrast, European states such as Germany mustered over 100 organizations (UNFCCC 2011). Especially in view of the different positions adopted by civil society organizations in the North and in the South, equal participation would be all the more urgent (Unmüßig 2011). In such a situation as this, it is indeed honorable when development-oriented NGOs attempt to strengthen the position of the Global South. Many activists from those countries which ‘should be helped,’ however, often take a skeptical view of this proxy position. Some South African NGOs still remembered the behavior of international partners who attempted to act in the role of advocates for the organizations at the 2002 WSSD in Johannesburg. For some South African NGOs, this looked like an attempt to dominate the local agenda and to push their own positions while disguising them as an expression of collective solidarity. South African organizations in particular have therefore become a lot more careful when it comes to cooperation with international partners, and for
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them the right to self-representation at the national as well as the international level is an important concern (Interview, see Adam 2011).

5 Alternatives: national ministries and the organization of counter-summits

It is often the case that, for some organizations, processes of inclusion work somewhat better at the national level than direct access to the climate conferences does. During the negotiations, as well as in advance, individual NGOs are invited by their own governments or their own delegations to meet in order to discuss the progress of the negotiations and the positions taken by the ministries concerned. In Germany, a process of continuous exchange between individual civil society groups and the ministry has developed. Within the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety the department responsible regularly meets with a number of NGOs before the big rounds of negotiations in order to discuss the progress of the negotiations as well as the position to be taken by Germany at the European level. A true setting of agendas is, however, not possible for the organizations (Müller 2010a, 2012). This co-opting by civil society actors can be even more clearly seen in countries with only weakly developed ministerial structures for environmental matters. In such cases, it is often the civil society activists who have extensive, often professional, experience in environmental matters and who are thus brought into political decision-making processes as advisors. Chile, for example, very specifically involves its environmental policy activists in the political processes of the Environment Ministry (Müller 2010b). The same goes for the Philippines, which has included several representatives from NGOs in their delegation, who take part in the working groups on political decisions.

Many of the civil society organizations that are closely involved in the advisory process in this way receive criticism from their fellow campaigners for their proximity to the technocracy and the realpolitik of the discussion process. They are accused of having lost their distance from governmental positions, a distance which is necessary in order to remain critical. At the international level, these criticisms have even resulted in splits. The Climate Action Network (CAN), an amalgamation of various climate-related NGOs has been heavily criticized since 1997 for operating more of a lobbying-orientated strategy. Out of this criticism arose Climate Justice Now!. This network takes a very skeptical view of collaboration with governments and ministries as well as of policies at the level of the UN, and pursues a strategy of confrontation (Bond 2011). Even some of the activists who work together with the ministries hold partly critical opinions concerning their lobbying work. The slow progress of the processes of negotiation has left many with doubts as to whether there is any sense in lobbying when no firm agreements are produced anyway, and when it is hardly possible to challenge free market policy positions anymore. In the run-up to the 2011 McPlanet congress in Berlin, the debate concerned the weak and largely uncritical bias of the German environmental movement (Weber-Steinhaus 2012).

More radicalism is often seen at the counter-summits, which have been held regularly since 1995 by environmental policy groups and initiatives at the venue of the respective climate conference. At these events, there is rather more of a focus on controversial and critical topics such as questions concerning climate justice between North and South or vulnerable groups (see Tokar in this book). The most recent example is that of the South African negotiations in Durban, where local civil society set up a “People’s Space” for the civil society organizations where the detailed technical questions of the international conference were discussed, as were alternatives to existing systems. The meetings took place at the same time as the 14-day conference of the UNFCCC and were held at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Besides the South
African nongovernmental organizations, academics from the university also supported the People’s Space, and promoted an ambitious treaty in South African and international newspapers and magazines (Bond 2011).

Unfortunately, in just under 20 years of the negotiations marathon, there has been hardly any effort to unify this counter-summit with the official agenda and thus to enrich the official negotiations system with an alternative program. There is, however, an important exception: The “People’s Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth” which took place in 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, was significant. A total of 35,000 participants from 142 countries took part in the alternative summit, which was supported by the Bolivian government and which had an anticapitalist focus. The critical points of the conference were expressed in a “People’s agreement” and were ultimately brought into the official climate negotiations by Venezuela (Russell 2012). Without the support of the Bolivian and Venezuelan governments, the integration of these demands would barely have been thinkable. The states that dominate the international climate process, most of all the European Union, have made minimal efforts to accommodate suggestions from civil society in the negotiations.

6 Few opportunities at the European level

A similar situation to that occurring at the international level can be found at the level of the European Union, where lobbying often presents even greater challenges to civil society actors. Involvement at the EU level occurs primarily via the mediation of interests by associations and lobby groups within EU institutions, principally through the Commission and the many working groups and committees which have formed around the Commission. Depending on the policy area and the significance of the policy decision, there are different processes, each having a distinct political organ at the European level with important rights of co-determination and decision-making at its disposal (Schmidt 2006). Thus, the European procedures are often only comprehensible for those organizations who are already familiar with the area in question and who have sufficient finances and personnel at their disposal. Despite the high hurdles, a number of civil society organizations with an environmental focus have active lobbying operations in Brussels.

It is, however, primarily the influential and cooperative NGOs that are able to gain access to the administration of the EU. Here, again, the majority of the cooperation taking place at the European level is best understood in terms of a strategy for increasing the efficiency of political institutions. The selective participation of societal groups is primarily intended to improve political results. Thus, the focus is neither possibilities for democratization nor the broadening of the scope of the negotiations and decision-making powers of civil society actors. By bringing in civil society interests, the basis for the legitimacy of the Commission as well as the expertise and information available for various political committees and institutions are increased. A series of studies has demonstrated the selective participation of environmental groups in EU committees (Hey and Brendle 1994; Swyngedouw et al. 2002). To summarize: The European Union is a long way from possessing transparent and reliable political decision-making structures and is often difficult to understand even for skilled connoisseurs of Brussels. A recent study undertaken by the Otto-Brenner-Stiftung shows that nontransparent decision-making systems endanger both the political system and democracy itself (Kolbe et al. 2011).

The rights to participation of civil society organizations have, however, been strengthened by the coming into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. The extent to which the new possibilities for inclusion are going to change the dynamics of the involvement of civil society, or have already done so, has been little explored as yet. To date, it appears that protest movements have
not regarded the European Union to be a target worth their while. Ultimately, there has been little in the way of political protest concerning environmental and climate policy in Brussels in comparison to the protests of European farmers, for example. On the one hand, this can to an extent be explained by the general difficulties for organizations at the European level, an example of this being the poor institutional infrastructure of most civil society organizations in Brussels, and on the other hand the problematic conditions for the organization of protests in all European countries, the organizations’ lack of networking at the European level and a lack of knowledge of the structures of the European Union (Roose 2003). In contrast to lobby groups, the European level is clearly not yet of great relevance to climate and environmental political protest groups and is rarely used by social movements in general. Organized protest occurs much more at the national level, thus having a ‘bottom-up’ influence over decisions taken at the European level. However, this also changes the framing of the social movements and increasingly addresses European politics, even if only at the national level (della Porta and Caiani 2009).

As far as the problems of democracy in the context of a lack of opportunities for participation is concerned, the international and European levels present us with a disappointing picture: There is certainly no sign of broad participation by all relevant groups. Neither are many stakeholders included, nor are there broadly based and defined selection criteria. In most cases, the NGOs that take part are those who see eye-to-eye with the government, that is to say, those which have accepted the discourse of the negotiations in question. In terms of climate policy, this means that the only topics that get discussed are the ones that are on the official agenda of the climate negotiations. New topics, which are disputed and subject to controversy, generally find no place in the discussions. On the contrary, the climate negotiations processes are characterized by language which is strongly orientated towards science and technology. Political issues are hardly discussed during the negotiations any more. The technocratic decision-making mechanisms are specialized to such an extent that not only non-specialists, but also experts who work in similar areas, find them barely comprehensible. One of the most important functions of civil society, namely that of exercising influence over the form of the agenda, is thereby curtailed. As the above examples show, the NGOs have few decision-making or co-determination rights, meaning that the decision-making structures of the negotiations system are hardly, if at all, influenced by the participation of NGOs.

7 The democratic potential of the counter-public, protest, and local involvement

The selective participation of NGOs has contributed at neither the international nor the European level to processes of democratization in terms of the development of the democratic skills and functions of the citizenry through the encouragement of mutual learning and communication processes. A broadening of the rights of citizens to self-fulfilment and self-determination has not been observed at the international level. This could change through the establishment of climate camps which have been organized by radical environmental activist groups across Europe since 2006. In Great Britain and the US, as well as in Germany, climate camps have been organized by leftist activists who have a dismissive attitude regarding the hitherto market-orientated handling of climate change and who instead opt for a combination of knowledge exchange (through workshops), networking, and publicity-generating direct action. The organizers of these camps also took part in the massive protests in Copenhagen. Following the disappointing negotiations, the movements put more of a focus on a local approach, which should above all take local energy problems into account. During 2011, three climate camps with an overriding focus on energy-related issues took place in Germany alone. It remains to be seen to what extent
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the climate camps will be able to influence the public and policy discussions and what form the
communication between the civil society actors will take. So far, no clear overall cross-or-
organizational identity has developed within the movement, although the groups taking part
have converged strongly and are on their way towards developing shared aims and a shared
identity through participatory and grassroots approaches (Indymedia 2011). The development
of democratic skills and the democratizing functions of the citizenry through the encour-
agement of mutual processes of learning and communication can be most effective at the local level.
This is because such processes of cooperation contribute in a very unique way to the integration
of everyday problems into the political system, to the harnessing of additional information and
knowledge resources, and to the setting into motion of emancipatory processes. Energy coop-
eratives are a good example of this. The first initiative in Germany, 'die Stromrebellionen von
Schönau' (the electricity rebels of Schönau), who took over their local power network in a
spectacular fashion, first convinced the locals of their district and residents of the broader region,
and paved the way for a broad public discussion. Through strong local and regional networking
and the initiation of an intense debate concerning possibilities for a green, decentralized energy
supply owned by the citizens themselves, the initiative quickly became an example for other
networks and communities and motivated a great number of citizens to get involved in the
energy sector (Graichen 2003).

Participatory projects which satisfy the standard demands of open participation in the sense
of a maximization of citizens’ opportunities for self-fulfilment and self-determination are most
easily identified at the local level. Although the increased consolidation of powerful interest
groups and an increase in the number of market-orientated actors at this level of the climate
sector can be seen (accompanied by the simultaneous dwindling in the presence of actors rep-
resenting social solidarity and societal aims), efforts concerned with the support of democratic
skills and democratic communication practices are still most clearly pronounced at the local
level.

There are also a few examples in which strong public opinion has stopped political projects
for which plans had already been made. The most recent example of this is the Tar Sands Move-
ment in the US, which argued against the construction of a pipeline for the extraction of tar
sands. The extraction of tar sands is not only energy-intensive but also has immense environ-
mental impacts. Following massive protests and the encirclement of the White House, US Pres-
ident Barack Obama announced a review of the construction of the oil pipeline, which was to
take 12–18 months. Some experts interpret this review as signifying a moratorium on the project
(Tar Sands Action 2011).

Particularly with regard to the development of strategies for adaptation to climate change,
increased incorporation of indigenous knowledge into political programs would be an important
step. While indigenous groups have contributed the least to climate change, they are, neverthe-
less, affected to a large degree by climate change. This is largely due to the fact that these groups
are more dependent on the use of ecosystems, biodiversity, and local farming. When climate
change alters local conditions, it is these communities which are often the first to feel the effects.
Conversely, indigenous communities often have a large amount of knowledge at their disposal.
They know their territory well, have already developed their own adaptation strategies and pass
on their experiences from one generation to the next (Nyong et al. 2007). In recent years many
tailor-made political programs, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and pro-
grams taking place within the context of REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and
Degradation), have missed opportunities to actively integrate this knowledge beforehand (Ray-
gorodetsky 2011). The cultural characteristics of local communities have also been neglected.
Truly sustained inclusion of local cultures and groups, not only in order to legitimize political
programs, but as an end in itself, would have prevented the failure of a number of development projects in recent decades (Escobar 1994).

It is precisely the systems of climate negotiation that offer a great deal of potential to think about opportunities with respect to participatory approaches. It is not only in Germany that the numbers of those supporting increased participation and shaping of the system by societal actors are constantly increasing. Other countries have also seen an increasing understanding that a reconfiguration of the energy system and a climate-friendly infrastructure is not possible without societal involvement (Adger 2003). There is, therefore, an urgent need for a continuing scholarly discussion about practical possibilities for NGOs to be actively involved in the shaping of (inter)national systems of climate negotiation and to have a voice in them. An example of one possibility would be additional chambers, for a, and panels with differentiated voting rights and clearly established participant rights (there is a particular need for juridical input here). At the same time, the international negotiations could make use of new participatory models in which international decision-makers not only cast their votes, but also work through the ideas and projects of societal interest groups in discursive workshops. Shared knowledge and the inclusion of different perspectives generally lead to long-term solutions, but also result in innovative and creative ideas and can assist in speeding up the search for solutions in the otherwise very structured and drawn-out parliamentarian or ministerial process (Roth 2010). By these means, unforeseeable side-effects could also be better taken into account. Integrating local knowledge into political programs can improve them even in advance. Besides these functional aspects, however, genuinely broad participation, in the sense of the shaping of agendas and participation in decision-making, remains an intangible commodity and should be viewed as a democratic ideal in political decision-making procedures.

Note

1 Some passages are based on an older contribution by Walk: “Partizipative Governance. Beteiligungs­formen in der Klimapolitik” in Walk and Demirovic (2011).

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