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Conclusions: Politicizing Social Participation

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While social participation may not be new rhetoric, it has resulted in a profusion of regulations and been associated with a wide variety of organizations in recent years. The water domain has been particularly drawn in, from user associations to international forums including river basin organizations, river contracts and rural and urban water conservation programmes. At the same time, water has long been the domain of conflicts ranging in scale from neighbourhood to international disputes, with increasing territorial, regional and river basin concerns. Given that society involves the co-existence of antagonistic interests, social participation, as shown in this book, is not only an institution-driven arena, but also includes many struggles to (re)organize society or, at least, to allow oneself to be heard. Consequently, two concepts can be distinguished: participation *stricto sensu*, meaning formal dialogue generally framed by regulation or policy, and participation *sensu lato*, meaning the embeddedness of participatory stages within political struggles.

Examining formal regulations and policies alone is insufficient to understand the political influence of powers. Participation must be politicized in its conceptual framing as well understood through the democratization of its solutions. This concluding chapter examines the political dimensions arising from earlier chapters in the book and the extent to which social participation has become politicized. Approaching this through a politicized understanding may provide insights into questions posed in the introduction about the balance of administrative controls within social participation, the inclusion/exclusion of certain parties, power differentials and how actual experience with social participation meshes with rhetorical appeals.

Initially, politicizing social participation means conceptualizing powers as key features in society. Note the use of the plural as power is not monolithic. Some powers are socially and politically organized, some are constructed through conflicts or even formal processes of consultation, and still others are small yet significant powers that arise because of the impossibility of curbing

them through denunciation, norms or public authority. Powers can be mobilized as symbolic or material resources to convince, unify, build legitimacy or otherwise activate people or groups. Yet powers seldom appear as such, because speeches and narratives rely on general principles of justice, rationality or any general values, such as those related to the environment. Although participation is constructed through relationships between powers, it is seldom able to curb or even reveal them. In the case of social participation, this is largely due to its openness to the public, which often leads to new speeches and arguments built on general principles or specific expertise but is rarely directed toward the interplay of powers.

Politicizing social participation also leads to questions about the political nature of its origins, rooted in interventionist governance in Western countries and, more recently, within processes of globalization. While governments may see increasing representation as an assault on their powers, the political and administrative elite are often at the core of participatory governance (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). As proposed by Smyrl and Genieys (2008), we explore the idea that implementation of social participation may be used to preserve the established order, in particular for the elite. If the assumption turns out to be true, this seems to be exactly the opposite of what social participation is supposed to solve through curbing unilateral administrative or other powers.

Globalization of Social Participation

As Liang Chuan and Yue Chaoyun (Chapter 8) point out, China is committed to environmental protection and participatory irrigation policy. How could it be different, even under an authoritative regime? Indeed, the national elites feel the need to be legitimate and to justify the role of skilled leaders vis-à-vis popular masses, who are supposed to be poorly aware and with little training. However, political interpretations could reverse such an explanation, starting with a population informed through the daily media and international forums about the dire straits of the environment and the need for participation as the means to reduce crises (in particular for water, which holds a special meaning in the country). The population would not understand that leaders are engaged in such a modern worldwide move. Instead of exerting leadership, the elite may be more reactive to popular expectation than proactive. This first point suggests the possibility of understanding participation in China through a political reading of the emergence of participation by analysing the elite. The second interpretation, which the authors adopt, considers poor implementation of participation at the local level, highlighting the gap between national speeches and local reality. Bureaucracy remains intact and there is an absence of financial autonomy for associations, so effective participation has not occurred. The proof is shown by the continuation of civil resistance (refusal to pay, reluctance to maintain canals, questioning faulty administration) and while demands for state assistance continue, they are

underscored by a general mood of formal apathy because of the seeming impossibility of making improvements to the hydrologic and social systems.

Conversely in Quebec, Canada, Milot and LePage (Chapter 7) found participation was imposed on the provincial government in response to a broad-based movement against neoliberal attempts to privatize water. Nevertheless, the resulting participation within new river basin organizations did not turn out to be particularly engaging. Many conflicts were contained, alternate institutional arrangements were limited and some key actors, such as the municipalities, were not fully engaged. Generally speaking, political struggle for participation in integrated water management has not been common when legislators and political leaders in countries, determine top-down both the implementation and the details of participatory devices.

In France and Israel, participation was enacted early through legislation, although effective implementation was delayed for several decades in Israel (Pargament et al, Chapter 11). Such a delay underscores the gap between speeches aimed at the appearance of modernity and the understandable tendency of the government elite to maintain its prerogatives, powers and interests. The lag also reveals the lack of widespread concern in the civil society at that time. In France, if participation did not result from social demands, its early implementation made the country a pioneer on the issue.

A theory on the programmatic elite (Smyrl and Genieys, 2008) casts light on the underside of powers. Indeed, the elite is said to produce programmes to preserve its legitimacy. However, elites are not monolithic and various groups compete for ideas and resources that the government arbitrates. In France's interventionist government of the 1960s and as a reaction to state centralization, a small group of technocrats promoted river basin management open to some participation (Warin and La Branche, 2003). This change convinced the national government, which was facing conflicts between local governments resulting from a sector-oriented approach within a welfare state. At the same time, those who did not get their way, such as other technocrats, received political compensation in order to accept the new organization (Lewis, 2001). Subsequent policies in France have reinforced social participation with watershed management plans and river contracts, the latter being designed to be more flexible with greater acceptance than master plans (Allain, Chapter 5).

In a number of cases, administrative governance has generated participatory approaches, aimed both at preventing conflicts and avoiding judicial actions as much as possible. In the case of the United States described by Fisk et al in Chapter 1 this seems to be an element of the federal government's strategy. Further investigations should explore these issues, which are political to the extent that the judicial option has often been associated with poor publicity for democratic governments. Consequently, limiting judicial actions may take varied forms, from administratively framed participation to weighty procedures. Moreover, uncertainty in verdicts and sometimes ineffective sanctions against government agencies have hindered judicial strategies and

favoured participatory approaches, such as contracts with groups, associations, farmers, industrialists, fishermen and others (Gramaglia, 2008).

These examples highlight the interests of the elite in social participation. There is not an opportunity here to explore the reasons why the globalization of participation is occurring at this point, as this would require a detailed historical analysis. Yet these global processes hint at the political interests behind participation, which are underscored through its implementation.

Politics in Social Participation

Social participation practices show the determining influence of power relations. In this vein, three types of participatory dialogues are presented:

1 tough debates and stalemates arising from major asymmetries in powers;
2 intermediary situations that articulate formal participation and struggles;
3 situations perceived as successful and apolitical.

We also analyse forms of politicization by expanding an examination of actors beyond negotiation tables, speeches and formal institutions.

The chapters addressing Mexico, South Africa, Peru, Nepal, India and Brazil show the tendency for antagonistic postures between power holders and exclusion for those who have little power. In Mexico, power asymmetries associated with the absence of a countervailing civil society produces different types of negotiations:

- façade negotiations, where a powerful administration is dominating small organized groups (Mollard et al, Chapter 6);
- conflicting negotiations often resulting in recurring victories for organized groups, such as industrialists, farmers or city mayors whose territorial-based power prompts elected officials and the administration to join them;
- violence-driven negotiations when a group and/or the political administration resorts to violence (Maganda, Chapter 13).

In South Africa, successful negotiations exist, but are frequently restricted to more powerful groups of contractors, firms, mining companies or others who seek common agreements to protect their interests. On the other hand, the inclusion of disenfranchised people in suburbs or rural areas seems doomed to failure. The poorest do not manage to be heard in spite of government's efforts. Thus, being a housewife living in the tail end of an irrigation canal results in no reliable water. In addition to the fact she is not heard in water or community committees, she may have no time, money or inclination to participate in water governance. This failure to engage the disenfranchised in social participation may reflect a collective loss of values and more systemic failures. If social participation *sensu lato* involves mobilization against institutions, the fact that it is frequently directed against the state, such as the South African

movement 'break the meters', also underscores a more broad-based loss in values (Wilson and Perret, Chapter 9).

Such inequalities anchored in culture include not only the domination of the rich over the poor, but also have a basis in gender. Promoting participation for dominated people is all the more difficult when it is connected to daily relations where social barriers are exceptionally strong. As Zwarteveen et al (Chapter 4) emphasize, in Peru and Nepal women's difficulties in engaging in community governance and challenges in expressing themselves in community venues or to engineers, have disconnected them from actively participating in many formal water governance structures. Yet, women's influence is expressed in many routine practices of water management with significant implications. Berry (Chapter 3) similarly calls upon gendered cleavages, in this case between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in arid India, that want to enhance women's roles in participation, and villagers, who may be invested in the status quo. The paradox is materialized through the experiences of the NGO's fieldworkers. Social participation in rural water supply management is constrained because it can neither be at odds with villagers' ideas nor with the global forces behind donors and institutions supporting gender-based participatory approaches.

The political drives underlying negotiations over water materialize clearly in the second situation, where intermediary situations articulate formal participation and struggles. This type of situation may present itself with an artificial character of participation, which sometimes takes on an opportunistic strategy, such as when an official state agency realizes that its strategy (to build a dam, for example) fails (Forline and Assis, Chapter 2). Such a case demonstrates how much participation is at stake for powers, including those exerting a determining influence beyond the negotiation table.

Of particular salience in Latin America, the sequence of political and formal phases shows that participation is not neutral when one powerful actor decides the agenda (topics and timing to be discussed), participants and what information is considered useful and relevant. As shown in Mexico by Maganda (Chapter 13), deciding the rules for participation may be a significant issue. Indeed, the NGO-shaped Latin American Water Tribunal invited the government to neutral discussions with dam opponents at the same moment that the official World Water Forum was defending participation. The government, however, rejected the invitation and even tried to dissuade the international jury from entering the country. Social mobilization prior to formal participation may make it possible to build identity-based powers that establish, or in some cases seize, the capacity to organize participation (Walker et al, 2007).

Retaining native rights to establish protocols for participation was a key point in the Indigenous Peoples Kyoto Water Declaration of 2003 (Boelens et al, 2006). In Ecuador, Indians and peasants mobilized against government-led irrigation programmes that privileged the urban population; they organized themselves, decided rules and ultimately invited other actors to discuss water

rights distribution between equals. Different from neoliberal equality, which may only represent potential, real equality is not issued, it must be seized (Boelens, Chapter 12). In Brazil, participation occurred not once but twice. In the first instance of participation, indigenous groups struggled against the construction of a dam, with mobilization and participation *sensu lato* bound up with the establishment of social identities. Indigenous success in halting the proposed hydropower project may have been temporary, succumbing to the fate of many proposed water projects that disappear and then reappear sometime later when political and economic conditions favour development. The second, more recent phase of social participation was orchestrated by state agency proponents of the project with the goal of winning local support and co-opting project opponents (Forline and Assis, Chapter 2).

Given that the two first types of participation are politicized by powers, we are allowed to wonder about the politicization of every type of negotiation, including the apparently apolitical ones, which is the third type of situation examined here. River basin negotiations in Canada, Israel and Sri Lanka show the appearance of friendly, open and effective negotiations where everyone seemed satisfied with successful results ascribed to goodwill. Theoretically, apolitical negotiation may be possible if everybody agreed and a lot of money and/or water can be distributed to avoid conflicts. In Canada, people even noticed the absence of conflicts that would make debates more focused and help preserve the watershed organizations in charge of participation (Milot and Lepage, Chapter 7). In Israel, most of the population seemed to subscribe to the restoration of a highly degraded urbanized basin (Pargament et al, Chapter 11). Many of the substantial decisions, however, may have been determined not by the participatory committee, but by the national legislature and executive agencies through providing the funds necessary for restoration and changing agricultural water rights so as to circumvent local conflicts. Moreover, there was little debate over whether local agreements were carried out at the expense of other basins. Participatory programmes in Sri Lanka, as well as in the Rio Bravo river basin in Mexico, had engaging dialogues but may have been spurred on with the benefit of substantial financing, which may have attracted and motivated all involved (Shanafield and Jayaweera, Chapter 10). Political clout may not be very evident without directed investigation in cases where participation seems successful, as even successful participation can generate tensions, clientelist public actions, attempts to political neutralize opponents or simply enable opportunistic activities.

In the three negotiating situations, participation is politicized as it is criss-crossed with power struggles. At the same time, however, participation requires that every stakeholder is fair in front of the public. For that reason, stakeholders may not be able to actively display their power and may reference general principles, rather than their own interests. Thus, the world of appearances may obscure the reality of powers, particularly when civil society is used to bear witness to the values of participation. It also seems that the more the state asserts the rule of law, the more the power struggles are

obscured by refined standards, political promises and institutional control and regulation. The height of sophistication is undoubtedly France (Saul, 2000), where bureaucratic centralization was one of the first, paradoxically, to practise participation. In other cases legislatures may become involved and, as in Mexico, negotiations that did not meet the anticipated results have led to new bills aimed at changing discussions already under way. Questions about whose interests are served through official participatory actions may be reorganized to cover up processes embedded in the dialectic between the world of civic appearances and the reality of contradictory interests, in which decisions about social trade offs are made while preserving the appearance of the rule of law.

Democratizing Social Participation

Recognizing asymmetrical power relations at the core of participation leads one to wonder about more politically equal negotiations and how to regulate powers more effectively. We propose two tracks for the democratization of participation and realistic development, one in the short run, the other longer term.

By democratization, it is not only a question of creating arenas for discussion, but also better technical democracy where scientific knowledge would be accessible to many, training in dialogue such as adaptive management or social learning, or any formal devices of empowerment and inclusion of disenfranchised groups and individuals. As pointed out in the previous section the advantages of participation as it is generally practised seem insufficient to curb powers, modify values or guarantee the success of public action. Several chapters pointed out questions about the representativeness of negotiators and whose values were being represented. Generally speaking, participation does not draw the attention of most people, at least in regards to water. Participation may attract some elected officials to whom it offers a political platform or who may send assistants for electoral intelligence (Gourgues, 2007). Social participation may also bring in groups affected by a project but which are likely to disappear as soon as their objectives are achieved, as well as other NGOs, as in the case of participation in Turkey, where elites were able to restructure participation (La Branche, Chapter 14). Neither real decision-makers, lobbyists nor general civil society, however interested in water management, are spontaneously present. Typically they intervene only when their interests are concerned, sometimes apart from the dialogues of participation themselves (Massardier, 2009). Consequently, democratizing participation aims to regulate the powers of influential stakeholders to avoid their control over process, monopolization of debates or skewing of outcomes and to introduce more plural interests within participation in water management.

In the short term, democratization of participation aims to improve information flow and introduce realizations about the political dimensions of social participation. Rather than denying the determining influence of powers,

it would be more effective to acknowledge them so that environment and exclusion might be explicitly taken into account when possible. This could, for example, involve traditional leaders taking personal interest in projects so as to reverse the usual direction of training. Decision-makers and technical experts could be educated about the political dimensions of water projects, rather than developing new educational community campaigns that are unaware of constraints and political dynamics bearing upon traditional practices, such as farming (Adams, 1992). If they were convinced of any electoral benefit, decision-makers might be much more attentive to water governance. For NGOs, it may be less a question of giving a voice *a priori* to excluded groups or creating formal forums than consolidating and allying with local authorities when possible. Building political alliances based on consensual and realistic objects of development, NGOs may find participation to be an effective political leverage.

In the long run, the democratization of participation aims to promote regulation of asymmetrical powers. For example, such regulation would attempt to avoid coalitions that reinforce asymmetry of powers or lead public authorities to circumvent law, while preserving appearances with promises and ad hoc programme evaluations. Democratization may rest on social struggles, such as in Brazil where anthropologists publicized indigenous struggles for recognition and against their exploitation by hydropower project proponents (Forline and Assis, Chapter 2) or in Turkey where international pressure was exerted upon a national government (La Branche, Chapter 14). Moreover, it is furthered through institutions and laws supporting the plurality of powers and checks and balances within governance structures.

Civil society in general is a good countervailing power to prevent coalitions of user groups, politicians and government agencies with disproportionate powers. Whereas civil society may seem omnipresent in negotiations, as the public is used as the basis to articulate each actor's own values, it is actually absent. Moreover, civil society does not have power to control or evaluate except by general elections, denunciations or judicial rulings. By institutionally guaranteeing the plurality of powers (for example, independent administration or less powerful governors) and by designing participation as checks and balances that obliges government not to influence coalitions and to enforce the law, the public could play a political role in water governance. All this remains to be seen, however. A plurality of powers must be the way to democratization, to social participation and to realistic water governance.

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Social Participation in Water Governance and Management

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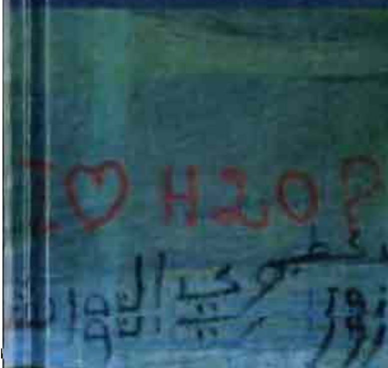

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earthscan
publishing for a sustainable future
London • Sterling, VA

First published by Earthscan in the UK and USA in 2010

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ISBN: 978-1-84407-885-1

Typeset by FiSH Books, Enfield
Cover design by Dan Bramall

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Earthscan
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22883 Quicksilver Drive, Sterling, VA 20166-2012, USA

Earthscan publishes in association with the International Institute for Environment and Development

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for

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