From Activated to Active Citizenship. Reflections on Citizens’ Participation in Processes of EU Governance

Thomas Pfister*

This paper starts from the premise that the European Union’s Lisbon strategy, can be understood as a conceptual debate promoting ‘activation’ and the ‘activating welfare state’ as new guiding principles for welfare state reform. By producing new knowledge about what constitutes ‘modern’ social policy, this comprehensive program has significant effects on the constitution of European welfare states. In particular, this knowledge intensive and knowledge creating governance regime vitally contributes to the epistemic context in which important contents of (even national) citizenship are renegotiated. However, its conceptual debate is closed to citizens’ participation.

Against this background, the first part of the paper explores the need and the possibilities of opening the process to citizens’ direct participation. Mainly drawing on James Tully, it argues that citizens’ participation in such transnational debates is indispensable. But rather than seeking universal participatory practices, the latter have to be developed in concrete contexts. The second part presents examples, of such practices and how social science and philosophy can contribute to their development.

citizenship; participation; knowledge intensive governance; democracy; inequality

* Fellow in the Program on Science, Technology, and Society, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Contact: t.pfister@daad-alumni.de.
Introduction

Throughout Europe we are witnessing a massive drive for reforms in two respects. First, the roles of the state and the relationship to its citizens have been massively redefined in the context of an increasing interconnectedness of societies, a globalising economy and various discourses questioning traditional notions and functions of the state – especially of the European post-war welfare state. A central element in this context is constituted by a discourse promoting “activation” or an “activating welfare state” as a new paradigm for social and economic modernisation in Europe (for example Jepsen & Serrano Pascual 2006; Jenson & Saint-Martin 2006; Serrano Pascual 2007). In addition to this substantive discourse reformulating the basic concepts and goals of social policy also new governance instruments through which they shall be realised are developing on a large scale. New softer forms of governance are spreading rapidly; traditional top-down modes of governing are increasingly accompanied by new practices which are less hierarchical, involve different actors, and – in addition to their specific political substance – draw on concepts as diverse as New Public Management, policy learning, customer-orientation, or community/civil society involvement.

Taken together, the consequences of this move towards activation reach far beyond single policies or institutions. Various studies have demonstrated the consequences of the increasing dominance of this new welfare paradigm. It affects the normative and epistemic foundations of European welfare states involving new guiding principles, new meanings of existing concepts and redefined the relationships between them. Moreover, this process has implications for the everyday life of the individual citizens on the ground. Across Europe, the resources and services that are provided for the citizens have changed in qualitative and quantitative terms. For example, unemployment and social benefits have been reduced but also merged and based on more differentiated entitlements in many European countries (for example, the UK and Germany). Secondly, the activation discourse has introduced new roles
for the citizens and new principles defining their adequate conduct. Previously, it was the responsibility of the post-war welfare state to protect its citizens from the structural risks of the capitalist economy. Now, they are largely seen as self-reliant life-course entrepreneurs and the responsibility of the state is reduced to assist them in developing their social capital in the long term and to creating equal opportunities for the disadvantaged in the short term – mostly in terms of access to the labour market. In addition, public agents have gained new competences and discretion including stronger instruments for disciplining citizens who do not meet these expectations – mostly based on conditionalities applied to previously unconditional social rights. Finally, these new roles and virtues of the citizens have consequences for the (collective and individual) relationships amongst citizens themselves. For example, while “full employment” primarily meant the employment of the male half the population in the Keynesian welfare state, its meaning has now been extended to include literally everyone (see Jenson 2007). Consequently, the trend towards activation also implies a shift of the traditional gender contract from a male breadwinner/female caregiver model to an adult worker model. Yet while the importance of childcare in order to increase female employment rates is widely acknowledged aspects of job quality or unequal pay receive much less attention. Similarly, categories of disability and incapacity benefits are under review in many countries and benefit recipients have been discovered as resource for promoting employment growth and curbing public expenditures (for a good example, see Freud 2007). Equally important, the strong emphasis on services, mobility and flexibility has contributed to an increasing diversification of economic activity (see Supiot 2001).

The European Union (EU) is a major driving force behind the activation discourse, especially through the social policy elements of its Lisbon strategy for Growth and Jobs (in 2010, a follow-up strategy on the same basis has been launched) which is a comprehensive programme promoting economic and social “modernisation”. Moreover, due to a lack of legal competences of the EU in this area the Lisbon agenda is heavily based on new modes of
governance, which keep the sovereignty of the member states formally untouched.¹ Therefore, while this broader process does not directly intervene in citizens’ rights at the national or EU level, it plays a crucial role in providing analyses, problem definitions, solutions, theories, methodologies, instruments, and a conceptual language. From a theoretical perspective on EU governance this influence can be conceptualised as conceptual debate (Pfister 2008; forthc.). In short, the governance processes of the Lisbon strategy cannot directly regulate national policies but rather contribute to the social construction of knowledge and, thereby to the conceptual and normative context in which practices, institutions, and relationships surrounding welfare are renegotiated. In this manner, the Lisbon strategy also allows for insights how policies and everyday practices of bureaucrats and experts contribute to constructing and connecting the transnational European polity (drawing on Hajer 2003).

Concerning democracy, at least in theory, debates about new governance regularly refer to community involvement, customer orientation, or the inclusion and deliberation of multiple actors. Nevertheless, in practice, these processes of EU governance have been described as exclusive and detached from citizens participation and parliamentary control in practice (for example, De La Porte & Nanz 2004; Kröger 2007). In fact, despite their insistence on equal opportunities and social inclusion, these processes have been criticised for being blind to structural inequalities (see Fagan, Grimshaw, & Rubery 2006; Jenson 2007).

From a theoretical perspective, these transformations have significant consequences for the constitutional order of both European welfare states as well as the EU. As mentioned above, their full extent becomes probably best visible with regard to citizenship. In fact, they affect citizens’ rights and duties, of participation and their access to societal resources. Even more important, it can be expected that the increasing dominance status of activation also

¹ Most important with reference to social policy and welfare reform are different processes based on the so-called open method of coordination (OMC), for example, the European Employment Strategy.
implies major shifts of the exclusionary aspects that are also essential elements of citizenship.\(^2\)

Most accounts of constitutionalism and citizenship have so far neglected questions of conceptual debates, knowledge construction and their political impact. Drawing the attention to these processes is the particular aim of this paper. I argue that transnational constitution building through conceptual debate within the Lisbon framework impacts on citizens’ everyday life and therefore needs an element of political citizenship. In particular, participatory practices can be seen as key to give citizens voice in the construction of political knowledge. As soft governance on the European level is about the social production of knowledge, the unique knowledge of the citizens should not be excluded. The paper argues that social scientific reflection is not external to conceptual political debates and not in the position to authoritatively prescribe its solutions to the citizens. Rather, social scientists and philosophers have to participate in the conceptual debates on equal par and to expose their insights to the scrutiny of public deliberation. For this purpose, the next section surveys issues of justice, equality, and democracy under conditions of diversity in more general terms. The discussion of the third part presents more specific reflections about the value added of citizens’ direct participation in substantive conceptual debates. While the paper is particularly tied to the activation discourse that is taking place in the transnational environment of the EU its discussion is formulated its argument should also apply to other cases.

**Democracy, voice and diversity**

Over the past decades, political theory has experienced the rapid proliferation of a number of sophisticated approaches acknowledging and problematising difference and diversity as essential features of contemporary societies. These contributions search for new

\(^2\) On the Janus-faced nature of citizenship see, for example, Lister (2003).
ways of citizens’ participation in the political sphere and new ways of imagining citizens or groups of citizens in general. Many of among them acknowledge diversity as essential condition of social life and, therefore, call for new and more opportunities to direct participation in political discourses, practices, institutions. Diversity, in this context is becoming manifest in the different identities, meanings, cultural practices and needs of different groups and individuals but also in how these people are seen and identified by others, most importantly, the state. In this context, participatory democracy in an inclusive public sphere shall make the different norms, needs, and expectations of disadvantaged groups visible to free them from domination (for example, Young 1990). In addition, public discussion is said to be necessary to discover one’s own needs and interests and could eventually contribute to empowering the excluded (Phillips 1993). While the demand for participation can be generally based on the aim to provide modes for self-realisation and self-governance in a diverse democracy this paper chooses a more narrow focus: structural exclusion and inequalities as consequence of (missing or insufficient recognition of) diversity.

These arguments also apply to the social policy OMCs under the roof of the Lisbon agenda. On the one hand, most of them claim to address the needs of particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in order to increase their opportunities.3 On the other hand, they are heavily contested for having become increasingly indifferent towards specific aspects of exclusion and inequality (for example Fagan, Grimshaw, & Rubery 2006; Rubery, et al. 2004). Overall, diversity as essential condition of human social life makes appropriate decisions on behalf of the citizens rather impossible. Thus, they have to speak for themselves instead.

The need for participatory elements is increased by the large distance of most new modes of governance in the EU like the EES from parliamentary control and legitimacy. In

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3 For example, the European Employment Strategy or the Open method of coordination on social inclusion include specific provisions with regard to disabled people, women, lone parents, older workers, unskilled people or migrants.
In this context, Veit Bader quite rightly points out that neither deeper integration nor subsidiarity or federalism should be misunderstood as democratisation. Instead, he promotes a “principle of correspondence of powers and democratic say” (Bader 1999: 165-166), on the basis of which all pleas for shifts in the distribution and allocation of powers had to be accompanied by adequate democratic control and legitimation. Thereby, Bader opens up a new thread of discussion about the importance and the place of democracy in a polity that is not only characterised by diversity but also by increasing transnational interdependence and interconnectedness of several sub-polities. In fact, the Lisbon project as a whole clearly fails the test concerning Bader’s principle of correspondence of powers and democratic say. It therefore has to be seen as deficient with a view to its democratic qualities.

A plethora of work has attempted to come to terms with the democratic deficit of the EU. Moreover, within this field there is a significant tendency to look beyond traditional institutions of representative democracy for a solution to this problem.

In general, many schools of direct democratic participation such as (civic) republicanism, deliberative democracy, or agonistic pluralism are characterised by two characteristics. First, they are not revolutionary in the sense that they call for entirely replacing the representative institutions of liberal democracy with practices of direct participation. Rather, these practices are mostly presented as complementary. Second, all of them are aiming for far reaching social, cultural, and political transformations as precondition for making their theoretical systems work in practice (drawing on Pateman 1970). They have to defend some form of transformative potential in order to manage key tensions, for example, between respect for diversity and solidarity within a polity. This is where accounts of direct participatory democracy are visionary of an alternative social world.

In most cases, participatory democracy and the political agency of citizens are seen as mutually constitutive of each other. Therefore, the institutionalised practices of participation and a culture and identity of politically active citizens are embedded in each other and should
grow alongside each other in the course of practicing democratic participation. However, approaches differ in their concreteness of how exactly this dual transformation towards a more democratic polity and politically active citizens could be achieved. Therefore, in the following, the discussion concentrates on James Tully’s agonistic pluralism since this perspective on politics offers quite concrete advice for its realisation and can even be promoted under the “imperialism of the present age” (Tully 2008b: 243) due to a focus on practices, the essentially contested nature of politics, and the omnipresence of unequal power relationships.4

At the outset, Tully identifies two core principles for constitutional democracy: The principle of constitutionalism (or the rule of law) and the principle of democracy (or popular sovereignty) (Tully 2002: 205). Furthermore, he describes the last decades as a period of rapid constitutional change. In particular, he sees the principle of democracy under pressure from an increasing global juridification accompanying the globalisation of capital, increasingly devolved and dispersed forms of political power association, and finally, from declining democratic deliberation within the traditional institutions of national representative democracy. One if not the dominant response to global challenges to democracy is characterised as general acceptance – either as mere resignation or in the celebratory forms of neo-liberalism or the Third Way. In fact, the emergence of the activation discourse and of the new modes of governance under the Lisbon roof fit perfectly in this category of celebratory responses to current challenges to democracy. On the one hand, the origins of this modernisation project are closely connected with the search for optimistic alternatives to neo-liberalism (Jenson & Pochet 2006), especially with ideas originating in Third Way rhetoric. On the other hand, the Lisbon Strategy also has to be seen as optimistic reaction to globalisation, new challenges to the welfare state and more pessimistic arguments about ‘races to the bottom’ or the ‘end of work’ (for example Beck 2000). In contrast, Tully invites

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4 The following presentation is mainly based on Tully (2002; see also Tully 2008a; 2008b).
us to take a more critical stance. He holds that all those optimistic-defensive approaches would portray current developments as given and inevitable; also the newly emerging regulatory system would be presented as too fragile and too complex for democratic procedures. In the process, he accuses such perspectives of limiting democracy to “lifestyle politics” (Tully 2002: 214) and of being content with the limited private “freedom of the moderns” in the market (Tully 2002: 214).

In contrast, Tully’s own response is based on two key elements: first, the argument that both fundamental principles of legitimacy – constitutionalism and democracy – are of equal value and that adherence to constitutionalism cannot justify compromising democracy. In this manner, the new EU governance practices that promote the activation discourse could be described as building a constitutional order among the member states but undermining democratic debates about employment, social and equality policies. The second element consists in his practical, critical, and historical approach (Tully 2004: 80). The starting point for such an approach consists in a transition of political philosophy from reflecting on societal processes from a higher and external perspective to positioning oneself within society and a focus on practices. On this basis, Tully can supply robust support for the initial hypothesis that increased participation might provide remedies against exclusion fostered by policy-processes which might take on constitutional qualities. In addition, he provides important insights about how such problems could be identified and approached.

[Philosophers should] start from and exercise the same types of reflective practical reasoning as other participants, aiming to bring critical clarification to existing or possible practices of deliberation by presenting their (contestable) reasons to their fellow citizens, rather than prescribing the bounds of reason to them. They too learn to exchange practical reasons about these matters through practice (Tully 2002: 217).

Tully, too, emphasises the transformative potential of dialogue. However, two aspects of his concept are particularly appealing. On the one hand, he focuses on transforming concrete social practices rather than people’s minds or identities (as, for example, I. M.
Young or advocates of deliberative democracy seem to suggest). On the other hand, he stresses the essential importance of political contestation rather than the corroboration of difference. Moreover, the orientation towards practices also suggests possible starting points for the investigations of such a critical practical survey.

In his words it is essential to study practices of governance vis-à-vis practices of democratic freedom. In order to detect instances of unfreedom, analyse them, and suggest alternatives, theorists should pay special attention to (and depart from) situations where individuals or groups contest an existing practice of governance. Wherever citizens would criticise existing practices of government and power relations as unjust or exclusionary, they would take over ownership of their own affairs debating and contesting their views and rules in the political realm. Importantly, this contextualised, historical and practice-oriented approach allows including an analysis of power. Strongly influenced by Foucault, Tully’s perspective accepts the omnipresence of asymmetric power relations. At the same time, they are neither given nor fixed but can be criticised and modified. According to him the task of philosophy and science is not providing solutions but enabling critical and inclusive debate in practice. In general, he claims:

Because an intersubjective relation of power or governance is always exercised over an agent who is recognised and treated as a partner who is free, from the perspective of the governed, the exercise of power always opens up a diverse field of potential ways of thinking and acting in response (Tully 2004: 87).

More recently, Tully has also applied his vision to European integration and formulated the idea of a specific mode of democratic integration as alternative to the predominant ‘technocratic-elitist’ or ‘restricted democratic’ approaches:

The general definition of ‘democratic integration’ is that the individual and collective members who are integrated into the European Union must have an effective democratic say over the norms of integration to which they are subject. The norms of integration must be ‘open’ to the democratic negotiation of those who are subject to them. Those who are subject to them must be
‘free’ to enter into these negotiations, in the sense of actually being able and encouraged to participate, either directly or indirectly through trusted representatives who are held accountable in turn by practices of democratic negotiation by those they claim to represent (Tully 2007: 72, emphasis original).

While this unrestricted and open-ended approach to integration is not a part of existing political practices at national or EU level, Tully argues that it can be found in the everyday practices of the people living in the EU (not just EU citizens in the formal sense) who interact in such ways in their daily activities at work, school, in their neighbourhoods and civil society organisations. In this manner, for example, multiculturalism (with all its tensions and inequalities) has become an essential feature of everyday life in each post-colonial city. Again, Tully describes the task of the social researcher to uncover such practices, to critically reflect on them and to connect them with policy-making processes.

More empirically interested social scientists should not be deterred by the fact that Tully primarily formulates an argument about the role of political philosophy instead of proposals for institutions or policies since his approach is historical and empirical as it rejects first principles in favour of studying actual language games and power relationships. (see Tully 2004: 80). In fact, this view on the nature of human life as contextualised, contingent and rooted in the language games, practices, and power relations of the particular constitutes the particular strength and fascinating element. Hence, the challenge with regard to the discourses about social policy modernisation in the EU is only to a lesser extent one of institutional design. There is no universally applicable practice or institution of participatory democracy. Moreover, the principle of democracy requires that such practices itself are open to contestation and renegotiation through the citizens. Hence, when initiating such practices, it is necessary to start from a specific context, to subject the resulting processes to continuous scrutiny and to develop them through critical reflection. For example, investigating new forms of participation in the UK, Janet Newman points to the fact that such practices are democratic but at the same time ‘technologies of power’ constituting certain views of ‘citizen’ and ‘the
public’ (see Newman 2005a). Nevertheless, those practices also create opportunities for more democratic practices. According to Tully, it would be the task of social theorists to point out elements of illegitimate relationships and to suggest better alternatives.

Finally, it is important to point out that Tully is not promoting a notion of radical democracy that just aims to replace all traditional institutions within and beyond the state with activism. Instead, the critical scrutiny of political practices also has to be applied to the contestations by non-state actors. In fact, given Tully’s claim for contestability and disagreement, these principles have to be seen as fundamental normative projects that have to be constantly promoted and reproduced rather than as universal principles existing outside the realm of human practices that can be taken for granted. Nevertheless, based on these principles, dissenting voices have to be made visible because they can point to existing unfreedom and can offer useful alternative practices. Moreover, when dealing with these practices, theorists cannot withdraw to some neutral space detached from them but have to get involved – permanently and on equal terms. What is important is to get a dialogue going and to give everyone the opportunity to enter it. Since this is happening in the area of politics, this dialogue will always be controversial and consensus is a most unlikely end product (and a most unlikely objective).

Based on these considerations, the next section engages in a double exercise. On the one hand, following Tully’s proposal, it engages in the search for actual practices of participation in similar conceptual debates that could work as blueprints or templates for democratic participation within the Lisbon framework. On the other hand, it attempts to extend the focus to exploring what impact such forms of participation could have.

**Including the knowledge of the affected**

One characteristic that is regularly attributed to governance (as opposed to ‘government’) is the claim that the former would be less confined to traditional institutions
and could include more and different actors. However, there is also scepticism whether this could be realised and create a stronger ground for legitimacy in the EU (Magnette 2003; see also Newman 2005b; Walters 2004). Yet, however vague, driven by public criticism, the EU has entered this dialogue and made a respective promise. For example, the EU Commission’s White Paper on Governance listed participation as one of the five major principles of good governance (European Commission 2001). This inherent promise provides an opportunity for increasing the substantive involvement of citizens in processes of EU policy-making. Promoting this aim is a deeply political project involving two key challenges: The first and more general problem consists in promoting the very idea of direct participation, which still seems to be counterintuitive to many and is often met with scepticism and prejudice. Reviewing traditional theories of representative democracy, Carole Pateman has identified strong resistance against direct participation of citizens that is mostly based on concerns about the stability of democratic institutions or about the intellectual capacities that would be required to participate, see (Pateman 1970) Moreover, reservations are often based on ideal-analytical notions of participation neglecting the contingent nature of human practice which will never correspond to products of analytical philosophy. In short, this has to be seen as an ongoing political undertaking that will not be finished by a single institutional innovation. Closely connected with this general problem, the second challenge is to find concrete procedures and examples for such participation. For this purpose it has to be emphasised again that there are certainly many options of participatory practices and, equally important, that it will be impossible to theoretically design and apply one single perfect practice. Rather, this search should build on existing practices, on concrete problems of inequality, and has to be gradually developed through the type of critical practical reflection this paper is suggesting. And indeed, there are actual examples of how policy-making has been made more open and inclusive in specific contexts. Taken together, these cases certainly constitute promising starting points from which to engage in a critical reflection on democratic practices
vis-à-vis practices of governance in the sense proposed by Tully. In addition, besides providing templates for possible applications in another area, these practices also provide significant insights about the value added by citizens’ direct involvement as well as about specific challenges and requirements. In this spirit, the following paragraphs draw especially on examples which simultaneously qualify as instances of participatory practices in conceptual debates about social policy and as instances of a critical and practical social science. While it is acknowledged that thorough analyses of the constraints and limitations of such practices constitute a key element of such an enterprise (see Newman, et al. 2004), the main focus of the following cases is on presenting productive yet overlooked alternative practices and their respective relevance for conceptual political debates.

To begin with, Peter Beresford explores struggles for democratic-participatory practices in the field of social care and welfare services (see Beresford 2000; 2002). He is not only interested in closer involvement of users of welfare services in social work and service provision but also in the academic reflection and the theorising of social policy as a discipline. He points to the emergence of different genuine movements of users of social work and social care, for example mental health service users/survivors, people living with HIV/AIDS or disabled people, over the last two or three decades (in the UK). Two key insights are highly relevant in the context of this discussion. First, by organising themselves and voicing their concerns, these movements have enacted counter-discourses contesting dominant discourses of policy-makers and professionals. Using Tully’s terminology they thereby create practices of freedom vis-à-vis practices of governance; (see Tully 2002). For example, the disability movement has successfully challenged dominant medicalised and individualised concepts of disability and promoted an alternative social conceptualisation (see, for example, Barnes & Mercer 2004). In general, it is these counter-discourses – however marginal – one could look for when searching for democratic practices and contestations on the ground and possible starting points for academic investigation. Second, and equally important, these movements
possess and develop their own specific theories and concepts. Their knowledge is unique and distinct from professional/expert knowledge because it is “based on direct experience of […] policy from the receiving end” (Beresford 2000: 493). Since such knowledge is a crucial asset Beresford argues that users have to be included on equal terms in the practice of and in even the theoretical reflection on social work and care. In short, political struggles are not limited to issues of the design or access to institutions but always have an important epistemic dimension containing the underlying norms and concepts.

With regard to anti-poverty policies, Ruth Lister argues for the need to empower and to involve people living in poverty and their organisations in all stages of policy-making at all levels (Lister 2004). She understands poverty not only as a material condition but also points to its relational and symbolic aspects, which are characterised by powerlessness, stigma, othering as well as by low self esteem and shame (Lister 2004). Accordingly, instead of a mere redistribution of material resources an adequate response to poverty should consist in a politics of recognition and respect. Hence, she strongly emphasises equal citizenship and equal human rights of people living in poverty. Locating participation as a key requirement of full and equal citizenship, Lister particularly emphasises the importance of agency.

To act as a citizen requires, first, a sense of agency, the belief that one can act; acting as a citizen, especially collectively, in turn fosters that sense of agency (Lister 2003, emphasis original).

Following these points, it can furthermore be argued that increasing transnationalisation of conceptual debates, for example as in the case of the soft EU governance of social policy, implies a potential increase of such a denial or non-realisation of citizenship. In addition to these theoretical considerations that connect citizenship, recognition, empowerment, and poverty/social exclusion, Lister also presents some informative empirical insights about actual participatory initiatives to include people living in poverty in the UK. Concerning models for
new participatory practices, the case studies are valuable in a number of ways. Most important, they clearly demonstrate the need for assisting and empowering citizens in order to be capable and confident enough to participate in general (see also Lister 1998). The different projects did not only aim at building confidence and the capacity to speak in front of a bigger audience but also at fostering the ability to go beyond talking about one’s personal experience to reflecting on it. In addition to getting the opportunity to present claims and ideas to policymakers and experts, other meetings were designed to provide space for people living in poverty to learn from each other and to connect their personal experience with the way society works. Furthermore, the cases also make clear that meetings between officials, social policy experts and people living in poverty can be challenging to all participants – for example, because the latter present their opinions in ways officials are not used to or challenge expert knowledge on the basis of their experience. Moreover, the different barriers to participation become visible – some arising from the specific situation of the individual (for example lone motherhood), others from structural problems (for example stigmatisation). Also, and particularly interesting for this discussion, Lister presents a number of actual practices and institutions of giving voice and enabling dialogue – different hearings, fora, commissions – from the local to the national level. In addition, it is important to see that there are specific methods that can make the communication and participation in a meeting more fruitful. Here, Lister notes the method of ‘participatory appraisal’ that was used by the UK Coalition against Poverty in its ‘Voices for Change’ project. With respect to the overall picture, again, the specific direct experience of people living in poverty generates important knowledge, which officials and experts are lacking and which could crucially increase the quality of policies as well as their legitimacy.

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5 Lister presents the cases of ATD Fourth World, Church Action of Poverty and its ‘Local People, National Voice’ project, the UK Coalition against Poverty, its ‘Voices for Change’ project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power. For the sake of brevity, a full presentation of these examples is omitted (based on Lister 2004; see also Lister 2007).
While the previous two examples concerned activists challenging policy-makers and professionals in (UK) social policy, the next one attempts to take the discussion to a more general level. It is to a lesser extent a concrete example for existing practices of participation but rather about the significance and the value of critical interventions at the nexus of policy-making, knowledge production and activism. More precisely, this final example consists in a brief and selective overview of feminist interventions in EU policy-making and EU studies. Not only do they qualify for Tully’s idea of critical and practical theory, they are also most relevant for conceptual debates as in the case of the Lisbon OMCs. Certainly, this critical strand is a very broad school producing a rich and wide range of diverse concepts, theories and political claims. Moreover, it should not be overseen that feminist theorists are among the main driving forces developing general arguments for participation based on diversity as discussed in the previous section, exposing existing inequalities and articulating powerful critiques of the androcentricity and gender-blindness of mainstream political theory. Historically, activist struggles have played a crucial role in shaping the EU’s political (equality) agenda. Students of these developments have, for example, described the gradual extension of gender equality norms and practices throughout the Union (for example Wobbe 2003; Rees 1998; Pollack & Hafner-Burton 2000; Hoskyns 1996). Furthermore, feminist EU lawyers have pointed to the important role of law as an opportunity structure and crucial site for social struggles (for example Shaw 2000; 2002; Barnard 1999; Zippel 2004). In addition, law is the area where important instruments to identify and to remedy inequalities, such as the concepts of indirect discrimination or sexual harassment, were developed and eventually promoted by the EU.

Furthermore, many contributions engage in producing knowledge suitable for developing and critically evaluating the key concepts, strategies, policies and legal instruments of (gender) equality policies in the EU. Especially gender mainstreaming has become a key concept in this respect and feminist contributions are of essential relevance for
related policy-making as well as for the deeper theoretical understanding of the links between inequality and politics. Such reflections and refinements of the concept are of essential importance for any basic understanding of the nature, the implications, the necessary requirements and the risks involved in this strategy. For example, feminist scholars have pointed to the dependency of gender mainstreaming on a corresponding vision of gender equality (Verloo 2005). Furthermore, Judith Squires points to the importance of the political-strategic contexts within which equality policies had to be located. She distinguishes between strategies of inclusion seeking gender neutrality, positions of reversal aiming for recognition of specifically female gendered identities, and positions of displacement seeking to deconstruct gendered divisions as such (Squires 2005: 368). Closely associated with these views on equality, it is possible to discern integrationist, agenda-setting and transformative approaches of gender mainstreaming (Jahan 1995).

Overall, such feminist accounts provide key concepts, categories and arguments to fill the “empty signifiers” (Verloo 2005: 356) of gender mainstreaming and gender equality with productive meanings. They also provide important expertise to assess and to evaluate existing equality policies and practices of mainstreaming with regard to their inherent potential and limits. Moreover, this knowledge is crucial for the further development of these instruments. Categorisations such as Squires’ distinction of underlying strategic frameworks, Jahan’s typology of gender mainstreaming approaches (Jahan 1995) or the distinction between expert-bureaucratic and participatory-democratic approaches (Beveridge, Nott, & Stephen 2000) do not only function as analytical descriptions and categorisations but also as critical-theoretical assessments challenging present practices and contributing to the conceptual debate around future practices. Finally, this strain of critical thought is a good example that contestations from activists and critical academics are not always based on fixed interests corresponding to group identities. In contrast, there is evidence for a process of intellectual self-reflection that clearly exceeds mere articulation of group interest and which can be instigated by debates.
about specific practices. For instance, feminist debates had a crucial influence on developing contemporary thinking about the meaning of equality. While the latter was traditionally understood as sameness, then challenged by a concept of equality as difference, this division has now been overcome by the more fluent and dynamic concept of diversity (see Squires 2005). In fact, acknowledging the diversity of women and the intersectionality of all inequalities, feminists themselves have taken up the challenge to include other forms of inequality into their theorising and their political struggles. As a consequence, new claims for mainstreaming equality in general have been raised and the need for participatory practices has been further underscored.

Enabling excluded groups to unsettle institutionally accepted conceptions of equality will require a parity of participation, which makes democratic inclusion central to both the meaning and realization of equality (Squires 2005: 380).

So far, many of the claims mentioned are still coined in expert language of social theory and law. However, on the one hand, they provide sophisticated knowledge to courts, legislators or (especially equality) institutions. On the other hand, by interacting with these institutions and by suggesting alternative practices based on their expert knowledge, feminists also make their arguments public and expose them to public scrutiny and debate. And who would argue that feminism had no success in influencing citizens’ perceptions of gender relations and questions of equality? Overall, these claims are perfect examples for the value of a critical and practical social science and philosophy which is based on the general premise that tackling existing forms of inequality constitutes a key element in the pursuit of democratic practice. Moreover, they make clear that the way to more democracy and less inequality is long, difficult and requires a multitude of activities from direct political action to critical academic reflection. Overall, relating this discussion to the preceding section it becomes, again, clear that the way to Bader’s principle of correspondence of powers and democratic say does not lie in a one-off institutional adjustment but that a broad strategy is necessary to explore the problem and to
continuously reflect on and deliberate about potential alternative practices on the basis of current contexts. This is even more the case when the focus is on knowledge (production) as element of EU governance – an area until now not in the immediate focus of theories of democratic citizenship.

**Conclusion**

To summarise, including affected citizens in the conceptual debates constituted by specific governance processes would provide the most reliable safeguards against exclusion and inequality resulting from them. Furthermore, the substantive quality of governance could be notably increased by incorporating the specific knowledge that citizens gain from their direct experience with the effects of governance or with exclusion in a more general sense. Because governance is closely tied up with knowledge and its production, citizens must get the chance to participate and to contribute their own knowledge. We might not be able to entirely transcend the complexities of human life and interaction through mere observation and objective analysis. However, we are able to engage in organised and collective reflection on the latter in order to enhance our knowledge about the social world as well as our practices of conduct and interaction within it. If this reflection shall eliminate exclusion, it has to be inclusive itself.

However, the examples presented above also demonstrate that some assistance and empowerment are necessary to enable the step from the individual experience to reflecting on the situation of a group in a certain social context and to translate this reflection into claims, wishes and responses to policy-makers, professionals and academics. The examples of welfare service user movements and participatory anti-poverty policies especially document the necessity of confidence- and capacity-building measures. The case of feminist social and legal (EU) studies even shows how a movement has managed to get access to the academic
disciplines and how this allowed the movement not only to voice its concern in a form that can be understood in the academic and political world. Moreover, it could develop its own scientific and political exert knowledge in a critical and reflexive way that marks a departure from pure interest or identity politics. Indeed, this is not only an argument for participatory democracy with regard to politics but also for an intellectual and disciplinary pluralism on the side of science. Finally, the inclusion of feminist perspectives in various academic disciplines is a good example of how the tension between inclusivity and solid expertise can be managed. Politically motivated activist knowledge does by no way need to be less systematic and reliable. This also implies that there still is a need for the state and its agencies, for international organisations or for structures at the local level, which organise and fund such measures and provide the reference frame in which dialogue can take place. As emphasised above, such measures always have to be accompanied by critical practical reflection due to their ambivalent nature as practices of democracy and as technologies of power.

The notion of a democratic deficit clearly points to problems where the emerging polity of the EU is lacking democratic legitimation. At the same time, it also demonstrates that the EU is under much greater scrutiny than the established orders of its member states with regard to its democratic qualities and under much greater pressure to remedy perceived problems. Also for this reason, it has already made some first attempts in the right direction but still quite a long way to go. For example, the European Economic and Social Council (EESC) has conducted several Regional Stakeholder Fora using the „Open Space Method“.

According to first impressions, the latter seems to have a high potential to generate new ideas. When looking for other participatory practices at EU level, we also see some first experiments with citizens’ conferences (Boussaguet & Dehousse 2008) and the possibility of a citizens’ initiative which was created with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 and whereby the

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6 The author attended such an event on 9 – 10 June 2006 in Budapest; on other events and the Open Space Method, see http://www.eesc.europa.eu/stakeholders_forum/index_en.asp [03.03.2007]
citizens of the EU (at least one million from a significant number of member states) can ask the Commission to make specific proposals for legislation. One key challenge in this regard is to build such instruments of more open knowledge production into the core of governance. For example, in the context of conceptual debates on socio-economic modernisation of the Lisbon strategy also the discussion about its central objectives and targets needs to be exposed to public participation. Governments and EU officials should not be afraid of contestations from a public that has different concerns and uses different conceptual frameworks to articulate them. However, all models would still require much further analysis and critical reflection in order to be evaluated as appropriate and applied to new areas. As soft governance on the European level is about the social production of knowledge, the unique knowledge of the citizens should not be excluded.

References:


