From collective to reflexive forms of participation?
Theoretical reflections and empirical examples

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the debate on changing forms of participation. Echoing the logic of broader modernization and individualization theories, scholars in the field herald a transition from old, traditional, or collective to new, modern or reflexive action repertoires. The increasing self-reflexivity on the side of the participants is expressed as a shift from the politics of loyalties to the politics of choice (Norris, 2003); from group-based politics to lifestyle or everyday politics (Bennett, 1998; Bang and Sørensen, 2001); or from participation channeled through grand ideological narratives to involvement based on self-authored individualized narratives (Micheletti, 2003).

In this paper, a more complex classification scheme is advanced so as to arrive at a more profound understanding of the complex meanings ingrained in the commonly self-evidently used concepts ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’. It is argued that one cannot adequately assess the ‘collective’ or ‘reflexive’ nature of different modes of involvement if one does not systematically distinguish between sources of determination and their outcomes, both in terms of individual dispositions and practices (compare Wohlrab-Sahr, 1997). An analytical cross-classification of (1) sources of determination or authority (collective monitoring – reflexive or self-monitoring); (2) subjective outcomes (collective orientations – self-orientations); and objective outcomes (standardized or collective practices – destandardized or individualized practices) results in eight analytical variants of ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ forms of participation. These multiple scenarios are discussed and illustrated with empirical examples.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, expanding modernization and individualization processes have fuelled academic debate about the condition and prospects of civic engagement in Western societies. The pessimistic view of a steady erosion of civic participation and social capital has found ready perception, not in the least since the publication of Robert Putnam’s resonating book *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 2000). Advocates of this decline thesis, however, have been accused of conceptual one-sidedness, in that they focus exclusively on the disappearance of traditional
participation mechanisms and fail to incorporate new modes of involvement (for a detailed discussion, see Stolle and Hooghe, 2005). This counter-argument is commonly referred to as a gradual transition from ‘old’, ‘traditional’ or ‘collective’ to ‘new’, ‘modern’ or ‘reflexive’ action repertoires. The increasing self-reflexivity on the side of the participants is expressed as a shift from the politics of loyalties to the politics of choice (Norris, 2003); from group-based politics to lifestyle or everyday politics (Bennett, 1998; Bang and Sørensen, 2001); or from participation channeled through grand ideological narratives to involvement based on self-authored individualized narratives (Micheletti, 2003).

Such observations clearly echo the logic of broader sociological time diagnosis in terms of a modernization-driven erosion of traditionally collective frames and modes of living and a progressive individualization of the life course. It is more or less implicitly assumed that modes of involvement are biographically embedded and determined patterns of behavior, and that biographical transformations find their reflection in shifting styles of involvement (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). Although the distinction between collective and reflexive action repertoires has found ready perception among scholars in the field, the complex meanings ingrained in these concepts, as well as the exact interactions between them, remain largely obscure. In this paper, a more complex classification scheme is advanced so as to arrive at a more profound understanding of the commonly self-evidently used concepts ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’. Multiple scenarios are discussed and illustrated with empirical examples.
INDIVIDUALIZATION: A SHIFT IN THE SOURCE OF DETERMINATION

Since Ulrich Beck introduced the notion of individualization in his seminal work *Risikogesellschaft* (Beck, 1986), it has become the master concept for understanding recent changes in life situations and biographical trajectories. Individualization, a process that has been gaining momentum since the 1960s, is commonly understood in terms of a twofold mechanism: “individualization means, first, the *dis*-embedding of the ways of living of industrial society (class, stratum, gender role, family), and second, the *re*-embedding of new ones, in which individuals must produce, stage, and cobble together their biographies themselves. The standard biography becomes a chosen or reflexive biography, a ‘do-it-yourself biography’” (Beck, 1998: 33).

In essence, individualization involves a process toward an increasingly active self-direction of the individual life trajectory. To use an easy metaphor formulated by Peter Berger (1996, 1997): instead of the former collective, tightly scheduled, and unidirectional transport by train, we now are able to drive our own private car when and in whichever direction we desire. The reason why individualization is so often misunderstood and dispraised in terms of rising levels of utilitarian individualism and self-interest, however, is that one fails to recognize that it is not the direction in which we drive that touches the heart of the matter, but the simple fact that we (are able to) drive the car ourselves. The core underlying principle has been well pronounced by Rosenmayr and Kolland: “Die Theorie der Individualisierung bezieht sich nach ihrem Begründer Ulrich Beck auf die Auf- und Ablösung industriegesellschaftlicher Lebensformen durch solche, in denen die einzelnen ihre Biographie selbst herstellen müssen, und zwar ohne die stabilen sozialmoralischen Milieus, wie sie durch die Industriemoderne hindurch gegeben waren. *Der begriff Individualisierung*
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sagt dabei noch nichts über die lebensformen aus. Er konzentriert sich auf einen bestimmten Aspekt der Lebensweise, auf die Lebensführung” (Rosenmayr and Kolland, 1997: 259 – emphasis added)\(^1\). What these scholars rightly point at, is that the current individualization process induces a “Wandel des Handlungsmodus” (Beck and Sopp, 1997a: 11), that is, a shift in the mode of life conduct.

In essence, this idea refers to the cultural diagnosis of a de-traditionalization (Heelas et al., 1996; Felling et al., 2000), which basically “involves a shift of authority: from ‘without’ to ‘within’.\(^2\) It entails the decline of the belief in pre-given or natural orders of things. Individual subjects are themselves called upon to exercise authority in the face of the disorder and contingency which is thereby generated. ‘Voice’ is displaced from established sources, coming to rest with the self” (Heelas, 1996: 2). In other words, instead of ‘external’ or ‘supra-individual’ voices of authority, control, and destiny (ibid.: 3), the organizing principle of ‘self-determination’ becomes the norm (i.e., “ein aktives Verständnis von ‘Lebensführung’” – Berger, 1996: 14). The individual has become the centre of action, “the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on” (Beck, 1992: 135).

‘Reflexivity’ is the key notion used in this respect and principally refers to a twofold mechanism (Lash, 1994: 115-116). First there is structural reflexivity, in which the institutional rules and resources that structured early modern life are changing. Structural reflexivity becomes manifest when the guiding ideas and core institutional responses of

\(^1\) “Beck’s theory of individualization is concerned with the dissolution of industrial life forms and their replacement by new forms in which the individuals must construct their biography themselves; and this without the stable social and moral milieus of industrial modernity. The notion of individualization however does not say anything about the nature of the life forms. It is concentrated on one particular aspect of the mode of living: the conduct of life”.

\(^2\) Cultural individualization is intertwined with structural individualization or de-institutionalization, which refers to the exodus from traditional institutions (such as churches, trade unions, and political parties) (Felling et al. (2000: 41-45).
industrial-modern society (e.g. the gender-imbalanced nuclear family, standardized full employment, the abundant exploitation of nature and accumulation of waste materials in the name of progress) no longer appear self-evident, infallible or sacrosanct (Beck, 2001: 23-24). Following the same line of reasoning, the essence of the structural reflexivity of modern life has been well pronounced by Van Loon: “all ‘expert systems’ of modern society have been forced to surrender more of their previously unchallenged claims to authority. This is not to say that their authority was never challenged before, but simply that such challenges have become normal rather than exceptional. The effect of these challenges is an increased disembedding of individuals from positions assigned to them by these authoritative institutions within the structures of modern life” (Van Loon, 2002: 25-26). If the densely knit institutional structure of traditional society is opening up and individuals are uprooted from their collectively configured positions, the other side of the picture consequently is a steady increase in the individual freedom of action. The second type of reflexivity therefore is referred to as self-reflexivity, or the individual reflection of these changing institutional configurations and conditions. It involves a shift in emphasis from heteronomous and socio-centric monitoring of agents to the autonomous, active and permanent self-organization of individual life narratives (Lash, 1994: 115-116; Heelas, 1996: 4). Social relations, individual lifestyles and self-images are becoming ‘reflexive’ so that they have to be established, maintained, and constantly renewed by individuals (Beck, 1992: 97; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 35). In an era of reflexive modernity, “the institutional conditions that determine individuals are no longer just events and conditions that happen to them, but also consequences of the decisions they themselves have made” (Beck, 1992: 136 – emphasis added). Self-reflexivity consequently is not synonym with an individual agency set free from social structures, but refers to an institutional environment that is much more susceptible to individual variations and modifications in social practices and life trajectories.
NEW INSTITUTIONAL DEPENDENCIES AND CONTINGENCIES

The increasing reflexivity results from the *dis*embedding component of individualisation. The emancipation from traditional socio-cultural milieus and the newly gained individual freedom, however, has its limits and drawbacks. The active direction of the individual life trajectory is delineated by new institutional conditions and constraints. To complete Berger’s metaphor, we are granted the liberty of driving our own car *only* on the condition that we can afford a car, pay insurance, are competent enough to get a driver’s license, find a garage man that is trustworthy, and are not obstructed by a traffic diversion or a traffic jam. In other words: the nature of the individualization process cannot be fully grasped without a profound understanding of its *re*-embedding component as well.

Beck (1986/1992) refers to the *re*-embedding component in terms of a shift in dependency from primary to secondary institutions, that is, from direct to indirect institutional imperatives (*indirektive Handlungssteuerung*). This indirect institutional influence should be understood as simultaneously *favoring* and *enforcing* individualized modes of action: “the decisive feature of these modern guidelines is that, far more than earlier, individuals must, in part, supply them for themselves, import them into their biographies through their own actions. This has much to do with the fact that traditional guidelines often contained severe restrictions or even prohibitions on action […] By contrast, the institutional pressures in modern Western society tend rather to be offers of services or incentives to action – take, for example, the welfare state, with its unemployment benefit, student grants or mortgage relief. To simplify: one was born into traditional society and its preconditions (such as social estate and religion). For modern social advantages one has to *do* something, to make an active effort. One has to
win, know how to assert oneself in the competition for limited resources – and not only once, but day after day” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 25 – emphasis in original).

The intensification of this indirect institutional grip on the individual life – mainly through an extension of (welfare) state regulations and (consumption) market dependency – implies that individualization is not exactly a fairy-like story about individual emancipation, autonomy and authenticity but rather about an increased institutionalization and standardization of ways of life through more abstract forms of regulation and control (Beck, 1992: 90, 2000: 166). The ‘re-embedding’ component of individualization is therefore most accurately understood in terms of ‘institutionally dependent individual situations’ (Beck, 1992: 130) or the “institution-dependent control structure of individual situations” (ibid.: 131). The newly gained individual latitude is thus framed by institutional opportunities, control mechanisms, and disciplinations: “From pension rights to insurance cover, from child benefit to tax rates – these are all institutional standards, which fix the horizon of our thinking, planning and acting” (Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 140).

It is important to note that no equivalent relation exists between primary and secondary institutions (van der Loo and van Reijen, 1990; Beck and Sopp, 1997a). The re-embedding part of individualization is less effective than its dis-embedding component (Van Loon, 2002: 33). Structural reflexivity essentially means that the coherence and authority of secondary institutions and expert systems has broken down. In this respect, Van Loon states that there is nothing free about this individualization as it “is a default outcome of a failure of expert systems to manage risks; neither science, governance, media, commerce, law nor even the military are able to provide sufficient closures of risks to enable people to place their thrust in these institutions. As a consequence, people are thrown back onto themselves, they are
alienated from traditional communal systems but have nothing else instead.” (Van Loon, 2002: 32 – emphasis added). Whereas the collective arrangements and highly organized practices of organized modernity still meant a relatively firm closure of biographical contingency and insecurity, these industrial-modern institutional buffers have been replaced by secondary institutions that are substantially less trustworthy and pass on the ultimate decisions and judgments to the individual. In the reflexivity of modernity, consequently, “the apparent outside of the institutions becomes the inside of the individual biography” (Beck, 1992: 130). Institutional pitfalls and biographical risks must now be identified, evaluated and processed by individuals themselves (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 27).

The indirect (that is, through the active intervention of individuals) operation of secondary institutions and abstract systems implies that *individualization is the indispensable competence for modernity* (Leisering, 1997: 148). In contrast to the collective monitoring of early modernity, individual competences such as educational attainment, readiness for retraining, mental and geographic mobility, the ability to obtain and use specific information, acquaintanceship with electronic hypertext, communication and social skills, self-assertion, and so forth, determine whether one stands firm in the institutional jungle and regulatory density of reflexive modern society, a “work of art of labyrinthine complexity, which accompanies us literally from the cradle to the grave (for there is no life without certificates of birth and death)” (Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 140). Individualization clearly creates winners and losers, or, in the more lyric terms of Zygmunt Bauman (1997), ‘tourists’ and ‘vagabonds’, depending on the ‘reflexive competences’ of the individuals. A successful self-reflexive life conduct consequently is the privilege of ‘clever people’ (compare Giddens, 1994: 7).
It should furthermore be emphasized that the re-embedding dimension (to which Beck refers as the ‘control or reintegration dimension – Beck, 1992: 128) is mainly defined in terms of new disciplinary systems having power over the individual life course, whereas new modes of integration and community building are hardly at all or only vaguely touched upon. This might be explained by the difficulty of conceptually and empirically grasping the nature of individualized social ties, precisely because of their presumably de-institutionalized nature (for a discussion, see for instance Keupp et al., 2001). With regard to the consequences of individualization for social integration, a pessimistic view prevails. One predicts a growing disintegration of society and considers the loosened and ‘ad hoc’ connections between individuals as the soil for temporary and ‘pseudo’ communities at best. From an optimistic perspective, individualization offers new opportunities for the integration and flexibility of society. It open a new social space characterized by a diversified understanding of society, the formation of communities beyond traditional boundaries, a richness of experiences, and a greater tolerance towards alternative life forms and lifestyles. Junge (1996), however, argues that the consequences of a subjectivization of society have not yet been seriously challenged by the current individualization theory.

REPLACEMENT OR COEXISTENCE?

A final important issue to discuss is whether it is appropriate to conceive of individualization as a process of (gradual) replacement of collective by reflexive forms, as usually suggested in the current debate. Two important considerations could be mentioned. First, we are not dealing with an evenly spread, linear or progressive process of increasing self-determination for an increasing part of the population. As already discussed, individualization clearly creates

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3 This, in fact, is what Granovetter already in 1973 referred to as the ‘strength of weak ties’ (Granovetter, 1973).
4 The taken-for-granted distinction between traditional and modern social realities typically reflects what Paul Heelas coined as ‘radical before-and-after theorizing’ (Heelas, 1996: 3).
winners and losers, depending on the ‘reflexive competences’ or the ‘cleverness’ of the individuals. And these are still bound to differential levels of economic, cultural, and social capital, be it that “the discrepancies between collective and individual rates of success and failure will increase” (Van Loon, 2002: 31). In addition, Heelas and colleagues (1996) have convincingly argued that the thesis of a radical de-traditionalization wrongly suggests that traditions, even the modern ones, gradually decline and eventually cease to play a meaningful role in the individually monitored life course. In other words, it is hard to deny that processes of de-traditionalization take place alongside the persistence, renewal, and (re-)invention of traditional beliefs and practices. The decline of traditional authority and justification should therefore not be equated with the demise of tradition, but rather indicates that its nature and role have been changed (for a profound discussion, see Thompson 1996).

These caveats warn against thinking in terms of a general and linear process in which one era is completely replaced by another, that is, in terms of radical epochal contrast. In the current transition stage of modernity, and even in a (prospective) fully reflexive modernity, there is no theoretical evidence to argue that firstly, the individual life conduct by definition is based on the principle of self-determination, and secondly, that traditional sources of determination by definition have lost their significance for the individual life conduct. We consequently agree with Heelas (1996: 13) that “theorizing should concentrate on ‘coexistence’ and ‘interpenetration’ rather than on ‘replacement’ [of tradition with modernity]” and that we should “see our times as a mixture of various trajectories, from the more tradition-informed to the more individualized” (ibid.: 11). At issue in this coexistence thesis is no longer a periodizing contrast between ‘pre-modern/traditional’, ‘modern’ and ‘late modern’ times, but a characterization of contemporary life in terms of overlapping eras, characterized by an
obscure mixture of continuity and discontinuity, of collective and reflexive sources of
determination.

Although this sounds like a plausible assumption, the crucial question however is how we can
deal with the almost incalculable biographical complexities implied in this coexistence thesis.
We believe that the most advisable strategy is to think in terms of two different biographical
ideal types against which the contemporary life conduct can be contrasted. On the basis of the
preceding discussion, these may best conceptualized in terms of a ‘collectively defined’ and a
‘reflexively designed’ life course. The ‘collective’ biographical ideal type is embedded in the
group-based practices of organized modernity, whereas the ‘reflexive’ biographical ideal type
refers to the individually monitored but institutionally dependent life situations of reflexive
modernity. Life in contemporary society, then, should be situated in the tension field between
these ‘pure’ ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ prototypical forms of biographical monitoring.5

COLLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE BIOGRAPHIES: ANALYTICAL VARIANTS

Fully in keeping with Weber’s line of thought (1949; for a discussion see: Bailey, 1994: 17-22; Hendricks and Peters, 1973), we consider the ideal type as a mental construction
(‘Gedankenbild’) that is based on a one-sided accentuated or magnified representation of
certain conditions or empirical features found at particular historical instances in a society. On
the basis of ‘plausible motivation’, these one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints are combined
into a unified analytical construct. Two features are at the heart of using the ideal types as a

5 At a more fundamental level, both biographical roots may also cohere with two different forms of self-
understanding or identity: “collective identity refers to the sense of oneself as a member of a social group or
collectivity; it is a sense of belonging, a sense of being part of a social group which has a history of its own and a
collective fate. Self-identity refers to the sense of oneself as an individual endowed with certain characteristics
and potentialities, as an individual situated on a certain life-trajectory” (Thompson, 1996: 93). It is important to
note that both forms of self-understanding have their roots in the symbolic materials of tradition (ibid.). A
profound discussion of the question of identity in late modernity however is beyond the scope of this article (see
for instance Bendle, 2002).
method for sociological inquiry (Bailey, 1994: 17): firstly, the ideal type is not found empirically; and secondly, the ideal type is used to study the degree to which a concrete empirical case differs from the ideal type. Precisely because of its extremeness, the ideal types can be used as a criterion point, distant from reality, which serves as the exemplar against which one should compare the empirical reality. This idea of an ‘ideal-real comparison’ (Hendricks and Peters, 1973: 33) also implies that the ideal type is taken as the main point of reference for selecting categories of observation and acquiring relevant data (ibid: 35).

Being confident of the heuristic and comparative utilities of the ideal typical construct, we will thus search for ‘plausible accentuations’ of contemporary action repertoires on the basis of the theoretically delineated ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ biographical models. The ideal types drawn are assumed to be of an extremely or fully ‘collective’ and an extremely or fully ‘reflexive’ nature. In order to understand the precise scope of the conducted ideal-real comparison, it is therefore crucial to further clarify the nature and position of these ideal-typical extremities.

Although we have argued in favor of a coexistence between collective and reflexive biographical sources of determination, we did not further specify the precise relation between both prototypes. The delineation of two distinct ideal types may falsely suggest the existence of a dichotomy or continuum between two opposite poles. We however are not dealing with an ‘either-or’ scheme: ‘collectiveness’ and ‘reflexivity’ are no contrary, mutually exclusive categories. A ‘reflexive’ life course does not preclude the presence of ‘collective’ orientations or modes of conduct, whereas ‘collective’ biographies are not by definition without any sense of reflexivity. In order to fully understand the exact nature of both concepts, as well as their interrelation, two critical points need to be raised. Both issues evolve from the observation
that modernization theorists as yet have failed to recognize the analytical complexity of what ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ life trajectories exactly entail. As a result, theory and discourse rely on vague, ill-considered terms in which different analytical levels are lumped together, and which leave a number of crucial theoretical matters undiscussed.

Firstly, and this is an issue we already touched upon, although individualization theory clearly builds on a twofold mechanism in terms of (objective and subjective) dis-embedding and re-embedding (and consequently does not place the actor outside social structures, but implies an intrinsically contextualized process), the latter is predominantly understood in terms of new systems of regulation and control, that is, a new dependency on secondary institutions. A late modern social ‘re-integration’ in the sense of newly shared beliefs and practices, and new forms of community building however remains largely intangible. The main reason why popular discourses on individualization in terms of a complete breakdown of the social and a rapid advancement of the ‘elbow’ or ‘ego’ society have not yet been counterbalanced by arguments about the forging of new social configurations, is that this transformed, ‘reflexive’ relationship between (subjective) agency and structure remains a theoretically unsolved issue (Junge, 1996; Lorentzen, 2002). In order words, the nature and status of (‘traditional’ and ‘new’) institutions, communities, groups and so forth in a late modern environment remains largely unspecified.

Conversely, the precise position of the (‘collective’ or ‘reflexive’) actor in relation to the changing social environment also lacks theoretical clarity. This brings us to the second subject of discussion. It is our contention that one cannot adequately assess the ‘collective’ or ‘reflexive’ nature of biographical trajectories if one does not systematically distinguish between the sources of biographical determination and their outcomes, both in terms of individual dispositions and practices (compare Wohlrab-Sahr, 1997). In order to fully grasp the meaning of the concepts of ‘collectiveness’ and ‘reflexivity’, it does not suffice to
distinguish between heteronomous and autonomous forms of monitoring individual life courses (Heelas, 1996). It is equally fundamental to conceptualize the structural-behavioral and cultural-attitudinal outcomes that both types of monitoring may produce.

This analytical distinction enables us to go beyond stereotypical and persistent equations between individualization and boundless egoism, or between collectivism and complete individual docility. It is crucial to realize that different orientations and practices may stem from the same source of determination, and that similar orientations and practices can evolve from different sources of determination. For a clear understanding of the matter, it must be explicitly underscored that increasing individual ‘reflexive’ abilities (‘Reflexionsfähigkeit’) do not run parallel with a retreat from the social context or a complete concentration on oneself.

Through the continued undifferentiated intermingling of biographical sources and outcomes, one risks to submit the individualizing social world to a dogma of reflexivity (Hustinx, 1998: 141). That is, one fails to recognize that a broadening self-reflexivity not by definition turns into a fully conscious or completely self-directed way of life. A heightened ‘sense of possibility’ (Laermans, 1994: 362-363) may be curtailed by practical constraints; or the autonomous actor might become paralyzed by the burden of biographical uncertainty and ‘change the cage of freedom for the freedom of the cage’ (Beck, 1997: 22 on the basis of Barker, 1997). Moreover, a ‘reflexive re-enchantment’ with collective traditions or the ‘reflexive’ creation of ‘new’ group belongings sounds very plausible (Lorentzen, 2002). As a result, what appears to be ‘collective’ may be the result of a very ‘reflexive’ choice, or conversely, of the obstruction of that choice.

On the other hand, efforts to reveal more self-directed intentions or behavior under the banner of collectively led life are seldom made. In our ‘Schmerz’ about the corrosion of traditional community life, we forget to remember that not everything in the collective garden was lovely and that not everyone was striving for the good of the community on an unconditional basis.
The persistent tendency to think in logical and uniform categories combined with the difficulty of accurately unraveling the complex interplay between ‘collective’ or ‘reflexive’ biographical sources and their potential outcomes largely explain that ‘collectiveness’ and ‘reflexivity’ remain unsatisfactorily defined concepts.

The analytical categories identified however enable us to address this conceptual negligence. Although the ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ biographical models clearly refer to different sources of determination, we assume that they may result in similar attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. To conceptualize the outcomes of ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ forms of biographical monitoring, we therefore rely on two analytical continua. We consider the attitudinal axe as a continuum between ‘collective orientation’ and ‘self-orientation’. With regard to the biographical practice, we put emphasis on the difference between standardized (i.e., socially uniform, collectively defined and structured) and de-standardized (i.e., individually differentiated, pluralized) patterns of behavior. It is precisely the idea of an ongoing process of dis- and re-embedding that enables us to conceive of self-orientations and de-standardized practices in the context of a ‘collectively’ organized life course, and of ‘collective’ orientations and practices resulting from a ‘reflexive’ biographical monitoring. Combining the dimensions identified (i.e., biographical sources, attitudinal outcomes, behavioral outcomes), we can derive eight possible biographical variants from the ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ denominators. These biographical scenarios are shown in table 1.1. and demonstrate that, based on the three analytical criteria mentioned, it becomes possible to clearly delineate the nature of the ‘collective’ or ‘reflexive’ model to which one specifically refers.
Table 1. Analytical variants of ‘collective’ and reflexive biographies in terms of biographical sources and outcomes

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<th>OUTCOME</th>
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<td>Collective monitoring (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORIENTATION</td>
<td>Collective (1)</td>
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<td>PRACTICE</td>
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<td>De-standardized (2)</td>
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At a single glance, the obtained classification undermines the common univocal use of the concepts ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’. We have to conceive both notions as referring to a multi-layered reality that is too complex to grasp with general terms. Furthermore, against the background of ongoing processes of dis- and re-embedding, the biographical scenarios in table 1.1 are not static certainties. An individual may shift between the various biographical positions from situation to situation, from practice to practice, or over time. Bearing in mind that the possible attitudinal and behavioral outcomes represent continua between two poles, we moreover expect multiple scenarios to emerge in between the elaborated models. As a result, the biographical models presented conceal an intrinsically multiform and dynamic reality (which is in keeping with the hypothesized differential effects of modernization processes). Our model consequently warns against adopting a too linear perspective on modernization or individualization processes as if increasing levels of modernization always cohere with more individualized practices or orientations (see, for instance, Felling et al., 2000).
On the basis of table 1, we can further specify the ‘extremeness’ of the ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ ideal-types (compare Bailey, 1994: 25-26). It appears that there are two cells that are ‘accentuated’ or ‘pure’ on all analytical criteria, namely the combinations (1,1,1) and (2,2,2). The first combination represents a ‘collectively monitored’, ‘collectively oriented’ and ‘collectively structured’ biographical frame. The second combination embodies a ‘self-monitored’, ‘self-oriented’, and ‘de-standardized’ life course. Based on this threefold conceptual delineation, we may consider both ideal types as polar opposites.6 In their extremeness, these purest possible combinations evoke the images of an over- and under-socialized individual. Whereas the former is completely determined by the social context, the latter is completely detached from it. The fully collective form of participation involves orientations and behavior that are initiated, stipulated and supervised by groups, regardless of the intentions or preferences of the individual group members. They think and act on behalf of the collective. The fully reflexive variant, on the other hand, represents an atomized actor that seems to fit most properly into a rational choice paradigm, in which individuals are portrayed as being driven by a narrow utilitarian pursuit of self-interest. Individual choices, and concomitant orientations and practices, are guided by selective (material, social, psychological) incentives and sources of utility. This model is connected to the classical participation paradox (cf. Olson, 1965).

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

The remainder of this paper discusses and illustrates the multiple ideal types (hereafter abbreviated as IT’s) in Table 1 by means of empirical examples in the field of civic

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6 It should be noted that, for example, the combinations (1,2,2) and (2,1,1) also represent polar types, but that they are not quite as extreme as the ‘pure’ combinations.
participation. When studying civic engagement, it is difficult to leave the collective element out of sight. At least some spark of collective orientation or action is expected, be it in combination with some form of self-interest. I therefore argue that the current debate on a shift from collective to reflexive action repertoires more accurately corresponds to a shift from IT(1,1,1) to IT(2,1,2) – as marked in gray in Table 1. These analytical variants to a large extent reflect the difference between what Micheletti (2003) coined as *collectivist collective action* and *individualized collective action*. The first stands for conventional conceptions of political participation and is defined as “*taking part in structured behavior already in existence and oriented toward the political system per se*” (Micheletti, 2003: 25). It is typical of representative democracy, which presupposes collective agency, that is, pre-existing political groupings based on ascribed social ties and group-based identities. Representative democratic structures are built on the principles of mass-party politics, social interest aggregation, and the delegation of power to a political elite. Collective monitoring thus refers to political engagement channeled through established political homes (Micheletti, 2003). The collective orientation and standardized practices are reflected in the fact that political participation “*takes place in a given arena and in accordance with a given mode of activity and a given agenda*” (Micheletti, 2003: 25). Wagner (1994) refers to this classical model as ‘organized politics’; Norris (2003) speaks of the ‘politics of loyalties’ as forms of civic engagement that emphasize the role of citizens within representative democracy.

This classical model of political action has recently been opposed with more individualized collective action repertoires, which Micheletti defines as “*citizen-prompted, citizen-created action involving people taking charge of matters that they themselves deem important in a variety of arenas*” (Micheletti, 2003:25). Opposed to the collectivistic collective action model, this type of action is clearly rooted in the principle of ‘self-monitoring’. According to
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Micheletti, it is connected to self-authored and self-authorized individual biographical narratives, and initiated by individual citizens themselves in settings outside conventional channels of participation. This type of political participation is closely linked to the notion of subpolitics, which refers to a process of political re-modernization that “disempowers and unbinds politics and politicizes society” (Beck, 1992: 194 – emphasis added). In this respect, Beck (1992; 1994; 1997) speaks of a sub-politicization of society. “Sub-politics is distinguished from ‘politics’ first, in that, agents outside the political or corporatist system are allowed to appear on the stage of the social design (this group includes professional and occupational groups, the technical intelligentsia in plants, research institutions and management, skilled workers, citizens’ initiatives, the public sphere, and so on), and second, in that not only social and collective agents but individuals as well compete with the latter and each other for the emerging shaping power of the political” (Beck, 1994: 22 – emphasis in original). IT(2,1,2) thus represents a form of de-institutionalized political action that breaks through the convention that politics occur within the institutional boundaries of the political system. At the same time, it embodies a re-embedding in, and identification with new political practices. Most typical of these new practices is that they blur the traditionally strict boundaries between the public and the private. They stand for practices of “responsibility-taking for common well-being through the creation of concrete, everyday arenas on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems that they believe are affecting what they identify as the good life” (Micheletti, 2003: 25-26). Political participation takes place in the daily lives of citizens, giving expression to more personal concerns about public and private issues. This is typically referred to as everyday politics, lifestyle politics, or politics of choice (Bang and Sørensen, 2001; Bennett, 1998; Norris, 2003).
It is important to note that individualized collective action is characterized by a combination of self-interest and the general good. In this sense, it may be situated in the gray area between IT(2,1,2) and IT(2,2,2). Micheletti (2003: 20-21) frames it in a private virtue tradition of politics, in which citizens take action based on private worries shared by others. She exemplifies this point with the phenomenon of political consumerism. Initially, it is often rooted in the realization of self-interest. Self-oriented consumers choose certain products over others, for instance because their children are not allergic to one particular type of soap. This could be the same soap as a green activist buys to reduce water pollution or to support sustainable trade. Micheletti then argues that although only the latter consumer acts on the basis of a public virtue tradition of politics, the former consumer may be more dedicated to promoting the product because it directly solves a problem in the private circle of concern. The former consumer thus may be more willing to engage in boycotting harmful products and influencing producers with regard to ingredients used and manufacturing practices. Moreover, by meeting other families in stores with similar problems, private worries might be pooled in forms of collective action. At this point, the form of participation shifts from IT(2,2,2) to IT(2,1,2). IT(2,2,2) in its purest form, however, represents a self-orientation that does not turn into public voice. It stands for a retreat from public concerns and participation into a purely self-interested conduct of life.

In Table 1, the heralded shift from collective to reflexive forms of participation thus follows the arrow from IT(1,1,1) to IT(2,1,2). Next, it should be noted that the purest model of collectivistic collective action, IT(1,1,1), has three closely related analytical variants: IT(1,1,2); IT(1,2,1), and IT(2,1,1). IT(1,1,2) stands for collective monitoring, collective orientation, and destandardized practices. It corresponds to the idea of a structural disembidding of individuals from traditional institutions. In spite of a ‘collective’
biographical monitoring and a ‘collective’ identification, the individual patterns of behavior deviate from what is collectively prescribed. An empirical example may be found in the classic distinction between ‘conventional’ and ‘protest’ politics, referring to a first stage of diversification of political action repertoires in the 1960s en 1970s (compare Norris, 2003). Barnes and Kaase’s seminal study of political action (1979) identified protest as citizens’ engagement in acts of dissent, including unofficial strikes, boycotts, petitions, the occupation of buildings, and mass demonstrations. However, once regarded as ‘unconventional’ or de-standardized practices, these actions have become mainstream today.

The second analytical variant, IT (1,2,1), represents forms of participation typified by heteronomous sources of biographical determination and in the collectively stipulated way, but that are primarily self-oriented. This type reflects the idea that traditional civic life can have a protective function, relieving the individual from the active and risk-filled search for an individual biography and identity (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). It for example corresponds to the status, prestige, or public identity that the ‘organization men’ and ‘club women’ of the 1950s received from their community participation (Wuthnow, 1998). These gendered prototypes were primarily motivated by an obvious sense of duty or responsibility to a local community or more abstract collectivity. Their involvement was embedded in a religious tradition of benevolence and altruism, or inspired by a coordinating ideology or meaning system (Beck, 1997; Jakob, 1993; Voyé, 1995). However, this pervasive emphasis on community commitment did not reflect the traditional stereotype of the totally self-sacrificing volunteer (Beck, 1997: 14-15). Through devoted community service, biographical stability is guaranteed and collective identity is reinforced. Embedded in predefined ‘normal’ role behavior, individuals are relieved from the inevitable ‘reflexive’ alternative of autonomous identity and biography construction (Jakob, 1993: 229). Wuthnow (1998: 32-33)
for example portrays how male involvement in community organizations in the 1950s is a matter of professional pride and prestige, a symbol of decency and reliability. Civic engagement is a favorable instrument for career and status enhancement within the community of reference (Jakob, 1993: 116-117). On the other hand, women’s participation in community life is motivated by their search for a public definition beyond their ordinary life as a housewife (Wuthnow, 1998: 34). These rather self-oriented motivations however are inextricably bound up with clearly defined positions and roles in a (relatively) closed community of relevance.

A more recent case in point could be found in the progressive institutionalization of community-based learning into higher education, inducing some scholars to speak of a ‘university civic engagement movement’ (Ostrander, 2004). At the individual level, the promotion of service-based learning can be understood as a response to a widely perceived crisis in community involvement that seems particularly critical among the youngest generations (Speck, 2001, p. 6; Ostrander, 2004, pp. 89–90). It is argued that higher education should play a leading role in educating students for good citizenship and to teach them skills for participation in a democratic society. The goal of service-learning pedagogy is precisely to ‘enhance the students’ learning experience to create self-motivated learners who become skilled and committed civic participants’ (Marullo & Edwards, 2000a, pp. 747–748).

Curricular community service can be considered as other-induced, collectively prestructured participation that is primarily self-oriented. It is instrumental in that it is a mean to obtain study credits, and can be used within the frame of individual career planning. The objective of a truly transformative education, which not only seeks to produce educated, but also (long-term) committed citizens, is not by definition obtained (for a discussion, see for instance Hustinx et al., 2005). This is an example of new institutional frames monitoring individual
behavior (cf. indirect institutional grip, institution-dependent control structure of individual situations).

Thirdly, IT(2,1,1) combines reflexive monitoring with collective orientation and standardized behavior. Examining possible outcomes of a ‘reflexive’ biographical monitoring, this type clearly embodies a ‘reflexive traditionalism’ (Lorentzen, 2002), or a ‘reflexive re-enchantment’ with ‘collective’ patterns of behavior and modes of thinking. We could easily imagine a reflexive choice for conventional political action repertoires, such as voting or party membership.

IT(2,2,1), next, seems more closely to the individualized collective action model IT(2,1,2). It combines reflexive monitoring and self-orientation with standardized behavior. On the one hand, this could point at objective constraints impeding a reflexive choice. Due to time constraints, citizens for example may not be able to translate their private concerns into public action. On the other hand, one could reflexively opt for conventional action repertoires to solve one’s private concern, for instance by getting in touch with an elected representative or government official because one deems this particular act most instrumental to solve personal problems. Norris (2003, 3) argues that such ‘particularized contacting’ requires higher levels of information and initiative to generate particular benefits for the individual. On the other hand, there is little need for cooperation with other citizens. Here, the image of the ‘monitoring citizen’ (Schudson, 1998) also comes to mind. This concept of citizenship suggests that people will decreasingly be involved in politics as a day-to-day routine. Instead, they monitor the political system from a distance and only participate when (personal) needs arise. Stolle and Hooghe note that “conventional forms of political participation therefore lose
their routine character, but this does not imply that citizens lose their ability to influence political decision making” (Stolle and Hooghe, 2005: 164).

We already briefly touched upon the possibility of a retreat from politics within a self-monitoring frame (IT(2,2,2)). IT(1,2,2) could represent the same phenomenon at a collective level. It represents an objective disembedding and subjective disentchantment under the banner of collectively directed life. An example may be found in the phenomenon of ethnocentrism, since one is likely to adopt negative attitudes towards, and act prejudiced against ‘outgroups’ on the basis of a strong affiliation with the collective heritage of the own people or the ‘ingroup’ (Billiet, 1996). Or one could think of ethnic minorities whose members, because of an unsuccessful integration, withdraw into their own group and private interests. Another example might be found in antidemocratic movements. Wellhofer (2005) for instance suggests that fascism in Italy combined extreme nationalism (collective monitoring) with the use of violence and rejection of parliamentary democracy (destandardized practices) and recruitment through opportunities and incentives offered by the fascists (self-orientation).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper considers the debate on changing forms of participation. It advances a complex classification with eight analytical variants of the broad concepts ‘collective’ and ‘reflexive’ action repertoires. This scheme is illustrated with empirical examples. The proposed classification scheme could better inform research on the exact nature of the heralded transition from collective to reflexive modes of involvement, and could result in more complex analyses of the multiple forms and drivers of civic involvement. It has been argued
that some analytical variants are closely related. This implies that similar behavior may be rooted in fundamentally different sources of determination, and that one and the same source of determination could result in multiple orientations and practices. Scholars in the field therefore should be cautious about drawing unidirectional links between (standardized/de-standardized) forms of participation and their (collective/reflexive) foundations.

To conclude, Table 2 seeks to put the classification scheme developed in a more dynamic perspective. The upper triangle represents the area in which conventional collective action repertoires are most likely to occur (bearing in mind that we consider the ‘unconventional’ political participation of the 1960-1970s as meanwhile having become mainstream). The lower triangle, on the other hand, rather seems the privileged area of the critical citizen (Norris, 1999), which monitors the political system from a distance, or blurs the distinction between private and public issues through everyday political practices.

Table 2. Analytical variants of ‘collective’ and reflexive biographies in a dynamic perspective

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<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>SOURCE OF DETERMINATION</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective monitoring (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORIENTATION</td>
<td>Collective (1)</td>
</tr>
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<td>PRACTICE</td>
<td>Standardized (1)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(1,1,2)</td>
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