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**Making spaces, changing places: situating participation in development**

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## Summary

Around the world, there has been growing interest in ways to enhance public involvement in governance, and with it the quality and legitimacy of democratic decision-making. The intersection of growing demands to be included with the widening of political space, in some contexts through changes in laws and policies, complement conventional models of political participation with a new architecture of democratic practice. Whether in budgeting, policy dialogue, planning, project appraisal, poverty assessment, monitoring or evaluation, participatory alternatives to expert-driven processes have gained ground. At the same time, contextual variation in constitutional and legal frameworks, the forms and styles of political and civil activity, and histories of engagement with external actors, etch distinctive traces on the invited spaces – from Poverty Reduction Strategies to co-management committees – that have become the new development blueprints.

Using the concept of space as a lens through which to view practices of participation, this paper seeks to explore issues of power and difference in the making and shaping of spaces for participation in development. It examines the emergence of different kinds of spaces for participation in development, highlighting salient tracks and traces in previous times and their imprint on contemporary practice. It goes on to explore the dynamics and dimensions of participation in institutionalised and non-institutionalised spaces, both those of invited participation and more organically created spaces, made and shaped by people for themselves. The paper concludes that supporting the realisation of inclusive, active citizenship calls for a greater understanding of the micro-politics of participation as a situated practice. This, in turn, calls for approaches that locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur, framing their possibilities with reference to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities.



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## **Preface**

This paper was prepared for the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC), an international research partnership dedicated to exploring the new forms of citizenship which are needed to make rights real for poor people. The Citizenship DRC's programme emphasises collaborative work across national, institutional and disciplinary boundaries, adopting an approach that combines research, capacity building, dissemination and policy influence.

The Citizenship DRC brings together over 50 researchers from research institutions and civil society groups based in Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK. It is coordinated in the UK by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS); in Bangladesh by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS); in Brazil by the Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP); in India by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA); in Mexico by the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (IISUNAM); in Nigeria by the Theatre for Development Centre at Ahmadu Bello University (TFDC) and in South Africa by the Centre for Southern African Studies/School of Government of the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

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## 1 Introduction

Around the world, there has been growing interest in ways to enhance public involvement in governance, and with it the quality and legitimacy of democratic decision-making (Fung and Wright 2001; Goetz and Gaventa 2001; Gaventa 2002). The intersection of growing demands to be included with the creation of new political and policy spaces for citizen involvement in governance, in some contexts through changes in laws and policies, complements conventional models of political participation with a new architecture of democratic practice. Whether in budgeting, policy dialogue, planning, project appraisal, poverty assessment, monitoring or evaluation, participatory alternatives to expert-driven processes have gained ground (Holmes and Scoones 2000; Fischer 2000; Cornwall and Gaventa 2001).

Levering open spaces once closed off to citizen voice or public scrutiny and creating new interfaces and institutions, these moves are about *positioning* citizens in newly emergent political and policy arenas, and *repositioning* them with regard to older structures, of “traditional” governance as well as of the “modern” state. In the context of the globalisation of economies and governance, translocal identifications and transnational flows of ideas, people and resources, discourses of participation and the spaces that they give rise to involve ever more complex configurations of actors and political spaces within and beyond the nation-state. Participation thus comes to constitute a more radical reconfiguration of relationships and responsibilities in an expanded public arena in which a host of other actors – donor agencies, banks, corporations as well as new configurations of “local” and “global” citizens – are increasingly potent and visible (Edwards and Gaventa 2001; Tandon 2002). At the same time, contextual variation in constitutional and legal frameworks, the forms and styles of political and civil activity, and histories of engagement with external actors, etch distinctive traces on the invited spaces – from Poverty Reduction Strategies to co-management committees – that have become the new development blueprints (Brock *et al.* 2001).

It is with this diversity of spaces and with processes of space making, space shaping and space taking that this paper is concerned. My focus is at once on the lived spaces in which participation takes place and on the more metaphorical qualities of the concept of space, and their relevance to the challenge of making sense of the dynamics and dimensions of participation in development. I begin with a brief account of theoretical writings on space and power, which have particular relevance to an exploration of the micro-politics of participation. I go on to briefly examine the emergence of spaces for participation in development, highlighting some salient tracks and traces in previous times and their imprint on contemporary practice. Drawing on these sections, I develop distinctions between spaces for participation, which draw on two axes of difference: a temporal dimension that focuses on the durability of participatory initiatives in space and time, and the location of the impetus behind efforts to engage participation. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the analysis of the tendencies and trajectories of contemporary participation in development, as part of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability. It does not aim to be a comprehensive review, but rather to explore entry points for further enquiry.

## 2 Of spaces and places

The spatial metaphors that pepper contemporary development discourse speak to the growing interest in involving people more directly in processes of development. There is much talk, these days, about “opening up”, “widening”, “broadening” and “extending” opportunities for citizens to participate in development decision-making; and of “deepening” democratic practice. Talk of “arenas” of politics and of governance conveys spaces where voices and ideas jostle for attention. “Political space” is not only something taken up, assumed or filled, but something that can be created, opened, reshaped. The notion of “policy space” evokes sites shaped through the exercise of agency, in which different actors, knowledges and interests interact and in which room can be made for alternatives, but from which some people and ideas remain excluded (Grindle and Thomas 1981). “Room for manoeuvre” (Clay and Schaffer 1984) hints at the possibilities of reshaping existing spaces, renegotiating their boundaries (Brock *et al.* 2001). Less frequently heard, yet critically important, are other spatial terms that speak about and to issues of representation and power: “positioned”, “located”, “situated”; and “dislocated”, “dissociated”, “displaced”. And there are more.

The terms that have gained such currency in the rhetoric of development institutions in recent years also have distinct spatial dimensions. “Participation” evokes images of people coming together – in lines, to vote; in circles, to deliberate and to plan; in rows, to be consulted in public meetings and so on. On a more metaphorical level, much of what we think about when we think about participation is inherently spatial. Efforts to engage participation can be thought of as creating spaces where there were previously none, about making room for different opinions to be heard where previously there were very limited opportunities for public involvement, and about enabling people to occupy spaces that were previously denied to them. The act of participating can be seen as bringing spaces to life as well as carving out new spaces and creating new social forms with their own momentum and impetus. Spaces for participation can be thought, then, in abstract terms as the ways in which opportunities for engagement might be conceived or perceived, and more concretely, in terms of the actual sites that are entered and animated by citizens (cf. Lefebvre 1991).

Intimately related to participation is the term “empowerment”, a term that has gained considerable currency in recent mainstream development discourse (see, for example, World Bank 2001; 2002). The spatial dimensions of uses and definitions of empowerment, and the strategies that development organisations pursue to seek to realise it, raise a series of issues that are particularly pertinent to the analysis pursued here. In the writings of the radicals of the 1960s and 1970s, empowerment was closely bound up with processes that enabled oppressed people to recognise and exercise their agency (see, for example, Freire 1972). Empowerment was, in spatial terms, about expansion: about moving out of constrained places and isolated spaces, widening the scope for action and multiplying potential sites for engagement, and about growing in an organic, self-realising, way – in confidence, in capacity, in wellbeing.

Price-Chalita talks of the “*appropriation of the spatial*” in feminist accounts of empowerment, as ‘creating new spaces, occupying existing spaces, or revalorizing negatively-labelled spaces’ (1994: 239,

original emphasis). She cites bell hooks, who evokes marginality ‘as much more than a site of deprivation. It is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance . . . *It is a space I choose*’ (1990: 341, 343, my emphasis). In contemporary mainstream development appropriations of the term “empowerment” some of the developmental goals associated with self-actualisation remain. But the primary emphasis seems to be on *relocating* the poor within the prevailing order: bringing them in, finding them a place, lending them opportunities, *empowering* them, *inviting them to participate*. The World Bank’s (2001; 2002) recent enthusiasm for empowerment illustrates how a term once associated with a process through which people discovered their own potentialities has become an instrument for managed intervention.

These contrasting versions of empowerment highlight different kinds of spaces for participation; “sites of radical possibility” at the margins, those spaces that people make and shape for themselves, can be thus contrasted with the domesticated sites of invited, or indeed induced, participation. Similar contrasts can be drawn between accounts of participation that speak in terms of people recognising, claiming and expanding on their own spaces (Freire 1972; Chambers 1997), and mainstream versions, described by some as strategies of incorporation and means of maintaining hegemony (Rahman 1995; White 1996). Indeed, such contrasts are inherent in the many “ladders” of participation, in which collective action and delegated citizen control appear at one end (often as ideals) and forms of enlistment of various kinds, from passive participation to tokenism, at the other (Arnstein 1969; Pretty 1995). The fluidity and flux of participation in practice makes any attempt to characterise its dimensions problematic. The differences between impulses to open and take space that are initiated by particular groups or publics and opportunities extended by powerful agencies to take part in activities associated with governance are, however, a potentially useful entry point for exploring the dynamics of participation in practice.

Conceiving of participation in spatial terms is helpful precisely because it draws attention to some of the aspects of participatory initiatives and institutions that often tend to be overlooked. In the sections that follow, I draw on the work of a series of social theorists to explore some of the questions that might usefully be asked of contemporary practices of participation. I look at some of the issues of power at stake in the creation of sites for public engagement, emphasising the importance of situating participation in time as well as in space. I go on to highlight issues to be considered when exploring dynamics within and between any given space, and to explore issues of representation and agency. I then briefly touch on some of the assumptions that often underpin attempts to enhance participation, raising questions explored in more depth later in this review.

## **2.1 Conceptualising spaces for participation**

Conventional perspectives on social and political participation, Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) point out, circumscribe the possibilities for public engagement within a frame determined by external agencies: as the “beneficiaries” of the patronage of development projects or as sporadic – and increasingly apathetic – users of the ballot box. Shifting the frame to “citizenship participation”, they suggest, opens up a new vista on participation in development. With this, participation extends beyond making active use of invitations to participate, to autonomous forms of action through which citizens create their own

opportunities and terms for engagement. This not only bridges the gap between “social” and “political” participation, it offers new ways of configuring the space in between, and with it our sense of what it means to “participate”.

Many mechanisms aimed at enhancing participation create new kinds of spaces between, within and beyond the domains of “state” and “civil society”, reconfiguring their boundaries and intersections. These initiatives have come to be more about enhancing equity than the narrower efficiency goals that characterised “community participation” of the 1980s and 1990s. And their concern is often less directly with the lot of the poor than with creating more inclusive democratic institutions, which will provide the preconditions for inclusive and fair governance, from which the poor are presumed to benefit. While the majority of these interventions are cast firmly within the frame of liberal democracy, they contain elements of other visions of the democratic process. What they have in common is that they seek to restore the right of participation in shaping decisions that affect their lives to citizens who, in liberal democracy, are required to delegate this right to elected representatives. In some contexts, citizens become part of “the state”, such as initiatives in which citizens become part of deliberative institutions that make certain allocative decisions (see, for example, Coelho *et al.* 2002). In others, devolution of statutory service delivery functions to citizens has created new arenas outside the state for citizen engagement in provisioning. In others still, legislative reform coupled with activism by social movements has enabled citizens to more effectively demand their entitlements and press for accountability (Jenkins and Goetz 1999). What “participation” comes to mean in these kinds of settings goes beyond older practices of consultation to open up new possibilities for voice, influence and responsiveness (Fung and Wright 2001; Goetz and Gaventa 2001).

Habermas (1984; 1990) contends that developing an autonomous public sphere outside the domain of the state is a precondition for citizen engagement that does not simply serve to legitimate the existing political system. He conceives of the public sphere less as a designated site than a generalised and diffuse web of institutions that offer spaces for the public to voice, share and debate opinions, arriving at common positions through rational argumentation. Like other republican thinkers, from Rousseau to more contemporary writers on deliberative democracy (see Dryzek 1990; Bohman and Rehg 1997), Habermas holds that individuals become part of a wider political community through such processes of deliberation, which become in themselves a means of realising active citizenship. Habermas’ term for the public sphere, *Öffentlichkeit*, has resonant spatial connotations: it evokes an idealised quality of public spaces and institutions, their capacity for openness, as well as referring to the public-at-large.

Habermasian ideals pervade much of the space-making that has taken place to enhance participation in development, whether the use of participatory methodologies to engage users and beneficiaries in planning or the creation of committees and other organs of decentralised governance. Many of the institutional forms participation has come to take in development are premised on the possibility and desirability of consensus and on the prospect of free, fair and open deliberation and decision-making in public space. Bound up with Habermas’ evocation of spaces which are open to all and in which there is open debate is a normative conception of the conduct of politics. Habermas develops from his

conception of the public sphere his theory of communicative action, placing an emphasis on the possibilities of attaining consensus through the exercise of rationality in public deliberation. This, in turn, focuses attention on the rules of the game that can support such processes of consensus building; just as the emphasis of participatory methodologies has been on changing these rules by creating new kinds of spaces and seeking to bring about new forms of interaction within them.

Just as dealing with the challenge of pluralism has been a critical issue for theorists of democracy (see, for example, Phillips 1996; Bickford 1999), participatory development has grappled with similar concerns, principally around exclusions of gender and age (Mosse 1995; Guijt and Kaul Shah 1998). In both areas, attention is drawn to the extent to which “community” consensus or notions of “common” interest work to exclude dissenting perspectives of less powerful groups or individuals. Gould argues that

. . . downplaying the enhancing role of difference at the core of the public sphere . . . removes from the public sphere not only difference but also the creativity that issues forth in imaginative critique and rejection of existing argument and in the generation of new and unexpected frameworks for agreement.

(1996: 173)

While the issues raised here go again beyond the scope of this paper (see Benhabib 1996; Fraser 1992; Kohn 2000), it is worth noting that it is precisely these concerns that are so important to consider when examining the nature of the spaces that are created for participation. The principles of institutional design or intentions motivating the use of participatory approaches may seek to create open, free, equal spaces or indeed may equate the use of such mechanisms with such kinds of space. Yet issues of power and difference may not only undermine the very possibility of equitable, consensual decision-making, they may also restrict the possibility of “thinking outside the box”, reinforcing hegemonic perspectives and status-quo reinforcing solutions. I return to explore some of these issues further later in this paper. For now, I would like to draw attention to two emergent issues. First, Habermas makes explicit some of the assumptions that remain implicit in efforts to engage participation. This usefully highlights the need to look more closely at what is being assumed about spaces for participation in development and the extent to which these assumptions are actually borne out in practice. Second, Habermas’ account of the public sphere is useful for thinking more about the nature of public spaces as well as about interactions within these spaces, that is, what the public sphere comes to represent as well as how it is constituted.

Like Habermas’ *Öffentlichkeit*, Arendt’s (1958; 1965) notion of the public domain – what she terms the “space of appearance” – is not a particular place, nor is it restricted to a set of institutions. It is those arenas in which people and ideas come into public view, and from which people derive a sense of having a world in common. Impermanent and fleeting, it arises when people come together to pursue common goals, existing only through action and recreated anew through collective political activity, emerging slowly through long-standing efforts to change policies or suddenly in popular protest (Arendt 1965; Passarin d’Entrèves 1993). In contrast to the transience of these spaces, Arendt describes a second dimension of

the public realm that is its durability as the common space in which all humans exist, the space in between people that connects and separates them.

While, for Arendt, processes of deliberation are equally central to the practice of democracy, they serve a rather different purpose. In contrast to earlier republican thinkers, engagement in the public sphere is about encountering plural views and developing a multi-dimensional understanding rather than sublimating private interests to a singular “public good” (Canovan 1992). Arendt’s “space of appearance” is a space in which the sheer diversity of views, positions and interests would continually disrupt the possibility of consensus, one in which sufficient space exists between people for them to appraise and argue through different opinions (Passarin d’Entrèves 1993). These spatial qualities of public life become the means of expressing political freedom and of realising citizenship (Passarin d’Entrèves 1993). Exploring the transience and durability of political spaces offers, as I go on to discuss, a useful lens through which to view spaces for participation. And Arendt’s conception of the “active citizen” as one whose entitlements are contingent on the act of becoming part of a political community focuses our attention on questions about who participates in intermediary institutions bridging people and the institutions that affect their lives, on what basis and with what effects.

## **2.2 Making spaces**

Space is a social product . . . it is not simply “there”, a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence of domination, of power.

(Lefebvre 1991: 24)

The French social theorists Lefebvre, Foucault and Bourdieu offer a different perspective on the politics of participation, one that emphasises the interplay of power and difference in the making of spaces and the micro-politics of interactions within them. Lefebvre (1991) puts forward the notion of social space as a produced space, one that is both the outcome of past actions and that which permits new action to occur, enabling some and blocking others. His work draws attention to the significance of the interplay between how particular spaces come to be defined and perceived and the ways they come to be animated; in doing so, it underscores the importance of analysing the social and power relations that constitute spaces for participation. Social relations, Lefebvre (1991) contends, exist only in and through space; they have no reality outside the sites in which they are lived, experienced and practised.

Particular ways of thinking about society, Lefebvre argues are played out in the ways in which spaces are organised and occupied, as well as in how they are conceived and perceived. Assumptions about community cohesion, for example, may translate into an uncritical reliance on consensus; assumptions about homogeneity may muffle the possibility of dissent (cf. Mosse 1995; Guijt and Kaul Shah 1998). Categories such as “women” or “the poor” do not exist outside the spaces made for them by development agencies; engaging them in participatory initiatives works to create a collective entity (cf. Escobar 1995). Such groups may go on to become collective agents, or at least to identify with the identity

they are lent. This has, of course, long been the basis of social mobilisation. Yet participation in development interventions is often represented as a way of engaging or enlisting pre-existing collectivities or communities, rather than making and shaping them.

Lefebvre argues that etched into every space are the traces of its production, its “generative past” (1991: 110); no newly created space can be entirely cleared of these assumptions and meanings. Nor can they be emptied of expectations and experiences, of traces of social relations in other spaces (see also Long and Van der Ploeg 1989). Examining how spaces for participation are occupied, negotiated, subverted or mediated calls for a focus on dynamics within these spaces. It also calls for situating these dynamics with regard to patterns of interaction in other domains of association: the mosque or church, the clinic, the field, the home. Officialised spaces, such as public consultations or user groups, exist alongside unofficial spaces and the spaces of everyday life; invited spaces exist alongside those claimed and shaped by a range of other actors. Lefebvre’s work helps us to see that these spaces are not separable; what happens in one impinges on what happens in others, as relations of power within and across them are constantly reconfigured. People’s experiences with officials are not simply going to be wiped clean when they encounter them at a meeting rather than in a clinic or across a counter, just as prevailing attitudes towards excluded groups are not magicked away by the use of a participatory technique or two.

Bourdieu (1977) suggests that patterns of interaction in social space are so ingrained and so unquestioned that they become literally embodied in particular places; Foucault (1975) shows how architecture and the organisation of physical space can serve as a means of domination and control. Existing institutions and relations of power can be replicated within any newly created arena through the way in which spaces are managed – sitting in rows, for example, with the women at the back – as well as through the associations people may have with particular places. The same meeting held in different places might produce different dynamics; the introduction of certain forms into participatory events, a prayer or an address by a local leader for example, can influence what is sayable and do-able within them. It is all too easy for old rules of the game to be reproduced within spaces such as committees or consultations, limiting the agency and involvement of people without confidence, familiarity or status.

New ways in old spaces can transform their possibilities, just as old ways in new spaces can perpetuate the status quo. Asking whether the processes or institutions created to enhance participation challenge or reproduce existing structures and meanings is thus critically important. Some participatory approaches explicitly seek to disrupt the order of hierarchical institutions, creating new and different spaces in which different rules of the game offer otherwise silenced actors a chance to speak and be heard. Jones and SPEECH (2000) suggest that the production of unusual spaces with unfamiliar rules can create “heterotopias” (Foucault 1986), in which taken-for-granted rules of interaction are disrupted and replaced with new ways of behaving and being. These may then in turn begin to pattern behaviour in other spaces, as people draw on experiences within these unusual spaces as referents.

The literature on participation in development largely focuses on methodologies or mechanisms and how they are supposed to work. Less attention has been paid to what *actually* happens in practice, and to *who* takes part, on what basis, and with what resources – whether in terms of knowledge, material assets or

social and political connections. What Lefebvre's insights urge us to do is to *situate* instances of "participation" in the particular sites in which practices associated with them take place, the contexts of their production and with regard to the multiplicity of other spaces with which they are intertwined. Spaces in which citizens are invited to participate, as well as those they create for themselves, are never neutral. To make sense of participation in any given space, then, we need also to make sense of the power relations that permeate and produce these and other spaces.

### **2.3 Shaping spaces**

Who determines the form participation takes in any given space – who initiates, chooses methods or techniques, facilitates, takes part – is critical for assessing the contributions participatory initiatives can make to democratic practice and understanding their power dynamics. Foucault argues that 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (1984: 252). Analysing participation as a spatial practice helps draw attention to the productive possibilities of power as well as its negative effects, to the ways in which the production of space in itself creates – as well as circumscribes – possibilities for agency.

Foucault's work alerts us to the constantly shifting ground upon which struggles for control are waged. He highlights the ways in which power permeates and courses through spaces, sparking a multiplicity of points of resistance as well as producing and embedding particular institutional forms, patterns and practices. For Foucault, discourses have material as well as symbolic dimensions; they shape not only what is said and done, but what is sayable and do-able in any given social space, constituting what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts (see Foucault 1975; 1979). As such they define the very boundaries of action: "the conduct of conduct". Foucault's concept of discourse is useful to think with, as it can help provide insights into the ways in which particular meanings come to shape the activities associated with development. Discourses of participation and the mechanisms they give rise to might be seen, in this analysis, as a way of defining those boundaries. What "participation" is taken to mean makes available particular subject positions for participants to take up within particular spaces, bounding the possibilities for inclusion as well as agency. Being constructed as "beneficiaries", "clients", "users" or "citizens" influences what people are perceived to be able to contribute or entitled to know or decide, as well as the perceived obligations of those who seek to involve them. This frames the possibilities for engagement, circumscribing what can be said and what cannot by defining the contours of what is up for discussion or decision-making, and shunting other considerations out of the frame.

Power relations pervade any spaces for participation. Spaces made available by the powerful may be discursively bounded to permit only limited citizen influence, colonising interaction and stifling dissent. Spaces fostered as a way of amplifying marginalised voices may end up being filled by gatekeepers, who speak for but not with those they represent; attempts at the widest possible involvement can go awry when no-one can be bothered to take part. The intervention of powerful actors in creating an ever-expanding number of spaces into which citizens are invited to participate may have the effect of neutralising energy for engagement outside them and may render other spaces for voice illegitimate. And



participatory processes may serve simply to reproduce echoes of dominant knowledges rather than to amplify the alternative, “bottom-up” perspectives that are claimed for them.

Foucault’s work alerts us to the need to position those who instigate processes of space making, and those who define its contours. Exactly the same technologies of space making may be used by a social movement or consultants hired to inform the lending priorities of a supranational bank. The kinds of narratives, artefacts, analyses, and action-plans emerging out of these spaces may tell, and indeed be *made* to tell, very different kinds of stories. The *Voices of the Poor* study for the World Bank (Narayan *et al.* 2000) is a fascinating case in point, providing a rich tapestry of decontextualised voices that could be used to support any number of potential lines of argument. Every disembodied quote is carefully labelled, given a place from and about which it speaks; geographical referents and the “global” spread that the sum of these demonstrates are used to lend credibility and impact. As this example so vividly illustrates, dominant discourses may be refracted through artefacts such as these to substantiate and legitimise the interventions or policy prescriptions of the powerful, or construct such an all-encompassing mediating frame that alternative versions are barely possible to imagine, let alone articulate.

Yet the ‘strategic reversibility’ (Foucault 1991: 5) of power relations means that governmental practices such as invited participation are in themselves always already sites of resistance. As such, they are productive of possibilities for subversion, appropriation and reconstitution. Government is no monolith and the project of “governmentality” – the art of government, the production of governable subjects – is an ever partial, contingent and contested enterprise: a constantly moving dance of domination and resistance. Foucault argues:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.

(1979: 101–2)

Particular spaces may be *produced* by the powerful, but filled with those whose alternative visions transform their possibilities. Spaces may be created with one purpose in mind, but used by those who come to fill them for something quite different. The fluidity and ambiguity of efforts at enhancing participation means that spaces produced to lend legitimacy to powerful interests can become a site for expression and expansion of the agency of those who are invited to participate. Efforts to control outcomes can only be partial, and the impotence of initiating agencies to direct or close down emergent processes is part of their inherent dynamism. The most nominal efforts at involvement can be used as a lever to create more space; the most token invitations can be seized and deployed to widen spaces for others, or to gain opportunities for visibility and voice outside the strictures of consultative processes. Nothing can be prejudged.

The political ambiguities of participation make it important to explore in more depth how, by whom and why spaces for participation are being opened or filled. To do so calls for greater understanding of the

traces of previous ways of thinking or doing that remain salient in current development practice: the “generative past(s)” (Lefebvre 1991: 110) of today’s spaces for participation. It is to this that I now turn, before exploring in more depth differences between forms of participation and some of the issues arising from closer inspection of the dynamics of practice. In the following section, accordingly, I trace a brief, and partial, pathway through some of the discourses and practices that have come to shape contemporary arenas for citizen participation. My aim in so doing is less to provide a coherent or exhaustive account than to highlight tracks and traces that retain significance in shaping current development practices. I go on from this to explore further differences in degree and kind of participation, and their implications for reconfiguring political opportunities and relationships.

### **3 Tracks and traces of participation in development**

Today’s development landscapes are littered with the traces of different versions of participation and with artefacts produced by previous waves of enthusiasm for involving people in development in some way or other. These are landscapes that have their own contested histories, transfigured by new alliances that transcend older boundaries, stretching into new spaces within as well as beyond the nation-state. As demands from below for recognition and voice meet the proliferation of spaces into which publics of various kinds are invited, a host of questions arise about the nature of these spaces and the dynamics of participation within them. These questions range from who is inviting participation and who is taking part, and what they think participation is about or for, to how people in different spaces and places perceive and enact their sense of citizenship and entitlement.

In the discussion that follows, I locate some of the tracks and traces of contemporary sites for participation.<sup>1</sup> I turn first to the enthusiasm for decentralised institutions of various kinds, one that has become more fervent over the last decade but arises from a trajectory that extends back to the era of colonial rule. I then explore “civil society” participation, both as a space in itself and as productive of actors who create, fill and contribute to projects of space-making instigated by governments and supranational actors, as well as by “civil society organisations” themselves. I consider here the development and deployment of participatory strategies and mechanisms, some of which have their origins in non-governmental efforts to influence the practice of government and many of which have been taken up as part of the “art and activity” of rule. Lastly, I turn to explore the reconfiguring of the state and the implications that contemporary good governance discourses, and an increasing focus on rights in international development discourse, have for the ways in which participants in these spaces and in different places come to be constructed. I focus in particular on the opportunities that these new spaces and new configurations and intersections of global and local actors, discourses and institutions present for forms of citizen action that go beyond earlier, more instrumental, forms of participation.

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<sup>1</sup> This section makes substantial use of Cornwall (2000a). An earlier version of this section was published as a DRC IDS Bulletin article (Cornwall 2002).

### **3.1 Imagining communities**

Participation first caught the attention of mainstream development agencies, grappling with how to make their interventions more effective, in the mid-1970s (Cohen and Uphoff 1980). By the early 1980s, “community participation” had come to be associated with the sharing of benefits by the poor, project efficiency and effectiveness, and cost sharing (Bamberger 1986),<sup>2</sup> with scant attention to the empowerment or capacity building goals that were on the 1970s self-reliance agenda (Paul 1987). Beneficiary participation was a matter of pragmatism rather than principle: to achieve cost-effectiveness and compliance. And one of the best ways to do this was by getting local people organised, either in self-help groups or in committees of various kinds, through which they could have some input into project implementation – if not identification and design. The creation of communities of interest and assumptions about communities of place underpinned the spaces that were created through “community participation”; ideas about “community” came to fashion the spaces made available for participation (cf. Lefebvre 1991).

The “projects with people” (Oakley *et al.* 1991) era of the 1980s gave rise to the establishment of new local level institutions that continued to multiply over the following decade, crowding the local institutional landscape. These ranged from sectoral committees for joint forest or community health service management to village and district development committees (Oakley 1991; Leach *et al.* 1997). No longer simply the passive recipients of the benefits of development assistance, “beneficiaries” were increasingly seen as more active participants in implementation, and in meeting the costs of development.<sup>3</sup> This was to give rise, over the course of the following decade, to the growth of cost recovery, co-financing and co-management schemes. As I go on to note, each wave of space making was informed by multiple understandings of participation: significant here are continuities of *form* and in the assumptions that underpinned the promotion of community-level and other local institutions. In many ex-colonies, the template for these kinds of institutions and their use in development administration was already in place.

Colonial authorities had established forms of decentralised governance to administer indirect rule that bear noteworthy similarities to the governance structures advocated today. Local committees with similar form and function to the “community-based” committees of more recent times (Ribot 1996) served as vehicles for the colonial administration. Functional participation and participation for incentives (cf. Pretty 1995), alongside forced labour, were used for public works. When people engaged in other forms of popular participation – such as in the demonstrations and strikes that grew in intensity as colonial subjects demanded political space and citizenship rights, and protested exclusions, taxes and laws – colonial regimes made use of participatory strategies to quiet them. In 1950s Kenya, for example, insurgent nationalist women were “rehabilitated” through community development activities, designed to turn them into “proper” women and give them a sense of responsibility (see Presley 1988). Another

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<sup>2</sup> The US Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 was the first foreign government statement on the benefits to development of participation, and was in this vein (Cohen and Uphoff 1980).

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank Health Sector Policy Paper of 1980, to give an example, casts “community participation” as a means of eliciting self-help in the construction of facilities, contribution of material inputs, co-operative mechanisms to finance drug purchase and unpaid volunteer workers.

colonial strategy was the fostering of participation in self-help initiatives as a way to save government money, stave off demands for services and counter opposition to the regime. Coating the bitter pill of another round of structural adjustment with a sweet-tasting layer of “civil society participation” in PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers; McGee *et al.* 2002) is the latest example of this well-worn strategy.

These tracks and traces continue to run through post-colonial development. As colonial history shows, there is nothing inherently democratic about these kinds of spaces. They can be put to many different purposes, extending existing relations of rule as well as providing new opportunities for citizen voice. Competing currents continue to course through efforts to promote and extend local institutions, for self-help or self-governance (Oakley 1995; Uphoff 1992; Blair 2000). In the non-governmental sector these have a primarily communitarian bent, often inspired by the ideas of self-reliance that animated alternative participation discourses of the 1970s. Such institutions have also, increasingly, become part of projects of development administration that have become entirely consistent with neo-liberal reforms. Associating participation with social forms like committees, instigated through the application of development blueprints, might be viewed as a way of domesticating popular organisation. This emphasis on collectivities is in some respects ironic, given the neo-liberal emphasis on the individual as “user and chooser” (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001) and the effects economic and governance reforms have had on traditional forms of popular organisation, such as labour unions. The effect, in many places, has been to create institutions that are almost entirely neutralised of political agency.

Questions about representation and accountability highlight some of paradoxes of this variant of participatory development, traces of which remain evident in interventions such as social investment funds and “community-driven development” (Abbott and Covey 1996; World Bank 2002). As a Mexican participation practitioner commented:

Giving (the community) responsibility without training or consciousness-raising is very dangerous. The government has an idea of participation, but most programmes limit this to the formation of committees. They give money to a community, but only to do what the government already had in mind. They don't really listen to the community, though they call it participation.

(Cited in Moya and Way, forthcoming: 18)

Just as governments can use community-based institutions to shunt provisioning burdens onto local people, for legitimisation or for political capital, so too can dominant interests within communities use them to reinforce, rather than transform, existing power relations. Cases exist where devolving control to “the community” has undermined existing rights of more marginal actors (Agarwal 1997).

As similar kinds of institutions continue to be created, the connections between newly created structures and existing institutions, either “traditional” governance structures and local associations, or those produced by previous waves of enthusiasm for community participation, becoming increasingly important to understand (Tandon 2002). The ambiguities of these institutionalised spaces raise a number of questions. Where local planning or service user committees spring up overnight through donor whim

or local government fiat, those who fill the space may be gatekeepers of power in their communities and may reproduce existing relations of exclusion. Community organising may facilitate excluded minorities to mobilise around their rights, yet in the process may rely on creating social forms – women’s groups are a good example – that have little connection with how people organise or even perceive themselves and their common interests (Cohen and Uphoff 1980; Cornwall 2000b).

### **3.2 New spaces, new actors: from "civil society" to citizen**

The turn to participation in the 1990s may have largely involved the multiplication of existing spaces (although on a much grander scale), but those who came to make and shape these spaces were rather different kinds of actors to those in previous decades. In the marriage of liberal democratic theory and neo-liberal economic policy, “civil society organisations” – at best a residual category into which disparate actors were to be lumped together – were presumed closer to “the people”, both a check on the state and an extension of it. NGOs played an increasingly significant role in the delivery of development, absorbing a growing proportion of aid budgets (Hulme and Edwards 1997). “Civil society organisations”, in some contexts, took over social sector activities to such an extent that they not only supplanted the state, but became part of a reconfigured public sector whose accountability, as Tvedt (1998) notes, often left something to be desired.

This “associational revolution” (Salamon 1993: 1) fostered the proliferation of “civil society organisations” representing and servicing the needs of marginalised groups. These in themselves constituted new spaces for participation. In some of these spaces, excluded individuals could find a collective presence and voice. Disability rights and AIDS treatment activism are powerful examples of organising from the margins to affect mainstream policies and institutions (Barnes 1999; Geffen 2001). In other spaces, marginalised groups were spoken about and for by a new breed of public servant, the “civil society” professional. And it was largely “civil society” actors – independent consultants as well as NGOs – who were so critical to the development and spread of participatory approaches, carrying them into government and using them in parallel institutions for needs assessment and planning (Singh 2001; Blackburn with Holland 1998).

Mainstream support was won for the contributions the use of participatory approaches made to efficiency (see, for example, Tandon and Cordeiro 1998). Yet at the same time, many of the NGOs involved with the development and use of participatory approaches talked about rights, recognition and redistribution: about “people’s self-development” (Rahman 1995) which, rather than inserting “the people” or “the poor” into development, sought to develop their capabilities to negotiate on new terms with the powerful (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994). More malleable than other methodologies on offer, an approach that came without ideological baggage and could suit any agenda, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) soared in popularity during this period. It provided both a way to make communities and local knowledge legible (Scott 1998) to development agencies, and held the potential of democratising decisions and discussions that tended to be dominated by those who were older, male and better-off. Most importantly, it created new *kinds* of spaces: not simply more institutionalised bodies, such as user groups

and sectoral committees, but temporally bounded opportunities for dialogue. International agencies began to make more and more use of it in their projects and programmes (Pratt 2001; Cornwall, Musyoki and Pratt 2001; Moya and Way, forthcoming).

The consumer ethos that became so prominent over the 1990s worked by recasting beneficiaries and “communities” as consumers of services – “users and choosers” (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001) whose contributions became the basis for a more active engagement in securing effective outcomes – the emphasis came to be placed on the individual. Induced participation had, it was argued, not given people enough responsibility for the success of development projects; after all, it was argued, people value things more if they pay for them. For many development agencies, “stakeholder” and “ownership” became the watchwords; participation and empowerment were progressively recast within the market idiom (see, for example, UNDP 1993; WDR 2000/1). Embrace of the consumer ethos reached its apogee in USAID’s “customer” approach, in which participation was proclaimed the lynchpin (Attwood 1993; LaVoy 1998). Interesting contradictions emerge in this period between the growth of popular organisations *of* and *for* particular groups fostered by donor funding and policies, and the use by development agencies of approaches like PRA to reach out more directly to ordinary people, and especially to the poor.

Participatory development came to be remodelled and redefined over the course of the 1990s in the service of an ever-widening range of political and economic objectives, amenable to being cast as an entirely functional, rather than an inherently political, activity. Within the mainstream, it became what Foucault (1991) terms a “political technology”: used to manage and control projects and processes, bounding the possibilities of popular engagement and disciplining subjects. Yet at the same time, countervailing discourses continued to fuel more radical forms of empowerment and social action, largely at a remove from the “officialising strategies” (Bourdieu 1977) used to domesticate participation and deflect attention away from other forms of political action.

### **3.3 Reconfiguring public involvement**

The recuperation of the state and its role in public policy in development discourse of the later 1990s generated new spaces for public involvement as citizens, rather than simply as consumers or beneficiaries (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). From across political and ideological divides, participation gained a place over the course of the 1990s as a significant feature in narratives about the enhanced equity and efficiency of decentralised governance (Blair 2000; Gaventa 2002). Good governance reforms promoting decentralisation added another layer of local institutions to an ever more complex local institutional landscape, giving rise to a range of new officialised spaces for citizen participation, accompanied in some contexts by a transfer of resources and decision-making powers (Crook and Manor 1989). Some countries went so far as to pass national legislation requiring citizen participation in local governance, as in the case of Bolivia’s Law of Popular Participation (Blackburn and de Toma 1998). In others, such as India, progressive decentralisation policies sought to ensure representation of minorities and promote more inclusive local level decision-making.

The extent to which decentralised local governance actually enables the poorer and more marginalised to participate is often rather less of a success story than the much-touted tales of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre or participatory planning in Kerala (Heller 2001), as Manor (1999) suggests. Here Lefebvre's (1991) insights are useful in understanding why simply creating new spaces might not be enough to bring about greater popular participation or equity in resource distribution or decision-making. Situating the creation of myriad new spaces at local government level within existing relations of patronage and power is critical, as is a closer understanding of how people perceive these spaces and how rules of the game within these spaces circumscribe the boundaries of public involvement in deliberation and decision-making.

Communitarian currents run deep in discourses of community participation, from the ethic of self-reliance that animates the promotion of self-help, to ideals of active citizenship deriving from and embedding people within communities of interest or place, built around the enhancement of a sense of responsibility and belonging. These currents shade into others, whether neo-liberal attempts to foster service provision outside the state and engage service users in contributing in cash or kind, or more anarchic visions of stateless self-organising communities. Discourses of *citizen* participation, however, are often premised on a rather different perspective on citizenship, and a different vision for the relationship between "the people" and "the state". As such, they offer a way of thinking about participation as a form of agency that is by its nature political, and *politicised*. Such a vision of a citizenry enabled through the development of political capabilities to engage in shaping the practice of governance resonates with the kinds of participatory practices that are beginning to emerge with the shift towards engagement in local governance and policy (Gaventa 2002).

Fung and Wright's (2001) account of "empowered deliberative democracy" provides examples of these new forms of practice. The institutions of "empowered deliberative democracy" consist of intermediate spaces that reconfigure the boundary between citizen and state, creating spaces for participation in which agents of the state and citizens interact in new ways. As such they offer an alternative perspective that Fung and Wright argue may not be as "radical" as activist self-help, but is more radical in its scope for the reconfiguration of formal governance institutions. In it, the (reconstituted) state is positioned at the centre rather than rolled back to the margins. New deliberative institutions, they contend, can colonise state power and use it to transform interfaces at local government level, creating spaces in which citizens can meaningfully engage in shaping decisions together with state actors and through this durable forms of practice that bring about more responsive governance. Fung and Wright contrast continuous participation in intermediate institutions with the fleeting democratic moments of elections and social movements that mobilise citizens for a particular purpose and then fade away. This distinction between durable institutions and fleeting moments for citizen engagement has echoes of Arendt; it is of critical importance, and I will return to it later in this paper.

### **3.4 From needs to rights**

On a terrain littered with the traces of older meanings and practices of participation, talk about rights and social justice has recently regained currency amongst development agencies. In statements that echo those of the 1970s, a number of international organisations have begun to frame their work in terms of a rights-based approach, and to advocate participation as a basic right, a starting point for realising other rights (Ferguson 1999; DFID 2000).

This turn to rights recasts “the people” or “the poor” as neither passive beneficiaries nor consumers empowered to make choices, but as agents: the “makers and shapers” of their own development (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). In doing so, it refocuses attention on the politics of participation; rights-based approaches represent a definitive move away from the feel-good language of “primary stakeholder participation” which so evaded any questions of power. Kabeer’s (2002) evocative account of the Bangladeshi NGO Njera Kori so vividly exemplifies the recasting of arenas of action with a shift towards enabling people to recognise and realise their rights. Njera Kori’s slogan “we don’t do credit” comes to symbolise a shift from self-provisioning as needs satisfaction to a more directly political rights-based approach.

In emphasising obligation and responsibility, the rights-based approach opens up the possibilities of a renewed focus on the root causes of poverty and exclusion, and on the relations of power that sustain inequity. Bringing governance squarely into the frame, exclusion becomes in itself a denial of rights and the basis for active citizens to make demands, backed by legal instruments. This shifts the focus from invited participation in the planning and implementation of service delivery to the enhancement of people’s capabilities to advocate for their entitlements from those who are charged with service provision, and the right to participate more actively in determining the shape of those services. As such, it transforms the idea of “demand-driven development” that was popularised in the 1990s into a process that involves the creation of new compacts and new relationships between citizens and service providers.

With these shifts, spaces for participation become ever more diffuse and ever less localised. While earlier currents in participation tended to focus on the places where poor people live, in which spaces for their involvement were created, citizen participation begins to steal into other spaces – swish conference halls in which international treaties are negotiated, court rooms, the opulent corridors of power in Washington. DFID’s strategy paper *Human Rights for Poor People* contends:

Development involves a process of political struggle over priorities and access to resources . . . The human rights approach to development reveals these competing claims and legitimises excluded peoples’ efforts to strengthen their voice in the political process.

(DFID 2000: 13)

This is of course the expression of one view from one part of a government department whose other policies are not entirely congruent with so radical a vision. But its very articulation is in itself important and interesting. It lends legitimacy not only to the struggles of the excluded (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994), but



to spaces and processes that efforts to mainstream approaches to participation in the 1990s shied away from. As such, it offers entry points for forms of assistance that enable people to build and speak from spaces of their own choosing, as well as those that give them a place within invited spaces. It also opens up new arenas for participation beyond the boundaries of the nation-state: from local contests over the interpretation of human rights legislation, to the refraction of local struggles in international arenas, to the formation of new alliances and new configurations of power and resistance at the global level.

#### **4 Making spaces, changing places: the spatial practices of participation**

The multiplication of spaces for participation over the course of the last thirty years and their uses for a range of contradictory agendas and purposes has given rise to a complex mesh of institutions and interests. Looking back over this period, a series of “family resemblances” can be identified between the kinds of spaces that have been created for participation in development.<sup>4</sup> One such cluster of spaces are those into which people (as users, as citizens, as beneficiaries) are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities, be they government, supranational agencies or non-governmental organisations. The key characteristic of these spaces is that external resource-bearing agents bring them into being and provide a frame for participation within them. In contrast are spaces that emerge more organically out of sets of common concerns or identifications; they may come into being as a result of popular mobilisation, such as around identity or issue-based concerns, or may consist of spaces in which like-minded people join together in common pursuits. These may be “sites of radical possibility” where those who are excluded find a place and a voice; they may also be spaces created and peopled by the affluent, to defend their interests. What distinguishes them is that they are constituted by participants *themselves* rather than created for the participation of *others*.

Across this line of distinction cuts another, highlighted earlier in discussions of the work of Arendt and Fung and Wright: the relative durability of spaces for participation. Transient spaces such as a one-off encounter with a PPA team or an anti-war demonstration imply different kinds of dynamics and intended effects of participation, as well as different kinds of participants, from regularised institutions such as a neighbourhood forum or council meeting. One way of looking at this is to distinguish public institutions, patterned through regularised interactions over time, and initiatives, as time-bound events in public space. In the following sections, I explore four clusters of spaces arising out of these distinctions, as a heuristic rather than exhaustive frame through which to approach an understanding of the dynamics of participation in different kinds of spaces.

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<sup>4</sup> The classification developed here draws on Cornwall and Gaventa (2001), and Brock, Cornwall and Gaventa (2001).

#### **4.1 Regularised relations**

The first category consists of regularised institutions which serve as an interface between people and authorities of various kinds, generally those of the state. In these spaces, citizens become part of the machinery of governance. These institutions may be created by the state, or by actors assuming some of the functions of the state. They generally assume some kind of intermediary function, representing a nexus for relationships between people and the institutions that affect their lives that rework ever more contingent boundaries of agency and responsibility. If not *of* the state, they are often *for* the state: aimed at enhancing the state's performance, whether in terms of accountability and responsiveness, or equity and democracy.

Some of the spaces in this cluster are bodies are conferred with statutory powers to allocate resources and exist through statutory provision, created through administrative or constitutional reforms of which democratic decentralisation processes are perhaps the most significant (Blair 2000; Fung and Wright 2001). Into this cluster would fall some of the experiments celebrated by Fung and Wright (2001) as examples of “empowered deliberative democracy”, such as Brazil’s deliberative health councils (Coelho *et al.* 2002). It would also include user groups set up to enable services to be more responsive and accountable (Barnes 1999). More commonly found, however, are the kinds of local level institutions created as consultative or co-management committees to assist implementation and administration that have been discussed earlier in this paper.

All of these spaces are bounded: only certain members of the public are able to participate within them. Their purposes, mandate and remit tend to be circumscribed by the agendas of implementing agencies and are rarely, if ever, open to negotiation by citizens who are invited to take part in them. The role of such institutions and initiatives in securing legitimacy for intended policy directions rests on forms of discursive closure that bound what can be discussed and frame the versions that emerge. These framings affect how issues are debated within them, how the perspectives of different kinds of participants are viewed, whose participation and contributions are regarded as legitimate, and indeed who gets to participate at all. The extent to which participation in these kinds of spaces has “teeth”, as Zillur Rahman (pers. comm.) put it, may also turn on the status of these bodies, whether they hold statutory responsibilities or whether they are more voluntaristic. At worst, the role of such bodies in determining policy may be limited to tinkering at the margins of already-decided solutions. Yet even where prospects for influence on official policy may be limited, these spaces provide some opportunities for users or members of the public to shape *de facto* policy-in-practice through relationships that are established with statutory workers, whether bureaucrats or providers, that continue outside these spaces. They also offer other opportunities. Holmes and Scoones suggest:

While the outputs of deliberations may be ignored, there may be potentials for creating new ways of talking about an issue and, through the process, the creation of new networks of actors, linked to

different policy communities. In the longer term, this may result in the emergence of new policy discourses, around new coalitions or communities.

(Holmes and Scoones 2000: 44)

Presented as an extension of, a complement to, even sometimes as an alternative to, representative democracy, the institutions in this cluster replicate one of its most salient characteristics. They might offer a few more of the mass of ordinary citizens to get involved in deliberation and decision-making, but these opportunities remain restricted to representatives, whether nominated, self-selected, co-opted or elected. The democratic potential of these institutions is seen as residing in the processes of deliberation that take place within them, whether serving to produce consensus or to enable people to assimilate the plurality of opinions and perspectives of those present (cf. Habermas 1984; Arendt 1958). As such, they provide a vehicle for expanding more restricted notions of participation. Their potential for engaging wider, more directly democratic, processes of debate and decision-making may, however, be more limited simply because selectivity in determining who takes part within them makes them subject to some of the shortcomings of representative democracy.

#### **4.2 *Fleeting formations***

The second cluster is of more transient institutions: one-off meetings, events or exercises aimed at opening up deliberation over policies or service delivery priorities, rather than making decisions. In some cases, they may give rise to more lasting institutionalised structures in which there is regularised, repeated use of participatory processes; this has been an important challenge for participatory development (Blackburn with Holland 1998). The events that produce these spaces are in themselves, however, fleeting time-spaces, opened up at particular moments for particular purposes, then closed again. And they may exist simply as ephemeral events that dazzle with promise, then fade away. The very performative nature of some of these events in itself lends them the potential for creating more room for the articulation of possibilities and alternatives than regularised spaces. Expansive uses of public space capture attention, publicising gestures that turn utterances in these spaces into commitments for action. Yet despite their mercurial possibilities, these are liminal spaces; it is their very conditional, transitional, fleeting nature that makes them “sites of radical possibility” as well as for the maintenance of the status quo.

Such spaces may include participatory appraisals of various kinds (PRAs, PPAs, participatory needs assessments, see Chambers 1997), the use of innovative deliberative technologies such as citizens’ juries or deliberative polling (IPPR 1999; Fishkin and Luskin 1998), or more conventional events like public consultation meetings, workshops or other such gatherings. Their very lack of durability marks them as different in kind from other institutions of governance. In some respects, they have more in common with voting than with the ongoing work of public administration: something citizens do every now and again, delegating power to others to see through. From how discursive space is bounded and how issues are framed, to questions of representation and representativity, understanding how these spaces come to be claimed and used, and by whom, is becoming increasingly important as these approaches have come to

be more widely deployed in development. Despite the hype, there remains a dearth of serious empirical research on their dynamics and outcomes in developing country contexts.

Some of these spaces are instigated, mediated and supported by agencies external to the state; some take place completely outside the ambit of the state, used at another level to inform policies and enhance leverage elsewhere. Others may be initiated from within government, backed by visionary bureaucrats or progressive political parties, assisted by NGOs, supported and advocated by foreign government donors and supranational banks (Fung and Wright 2001; Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). Resonant with the ideals of direct democracy as some versions of these kinds of spaces might be, it is hard to find any examples in which citizens are being invited to do anything more than give their views or any guarantees that these views will actually be taken into account. Only weak forms of accountability obtain for most, if not all, of these kinds of institutions.

Publics may be invited to participate in these fora as actual or potential users, consumers, beneficiaries, representatives of particular interest groups or as concerned citizens (Prior *et al.* 1995). Some seek and often succeed in reaching a broader spectrum of “ordinary citizens” than other fora for consultation. In some of these spaces, selective invitations may seek to ensure the participation of a cross-section of the public or the presence of particular kinds of people (“women”, for example); in others, the public-at-large may consist of dominant majorities, reproducing existing relations of exclusion. Who is invited to participate depends, of course, on the purpose (Barnes 1999; Holmes and Scoones 2000); it also depends on the technique used to engage people, and the kind of space that is thereby created. Citizens’ juries, for example, need their dozen or so jurors to resemble the electorate-in-general for their judgement to have credibility and political utility. PRAs, on the other hand, might seek the broadest possible involvement in order to galvanise energy for action, rather than simply seek representative views in consultation.

Taking place in public space, these kinds of spaces can provide those usually excluded from public policy processes with opportunities to lever open policy and political space, and to forge links with other spaces through which networks and alliances can form around particular options or positions. It is important to take into account, however, the place these kinds of processes occupy in the policy process, one that is often relatively insignificant (Holmes and Scoones 2000). What might appear to be transformatory participatory processes may simply serve as an elaborated form of market research, testing out and assessing potential reactions to new policy products, and informing ways of marketing them better, but not fundamentally changing anything much at all. Much may come to depend on the leverage they offer other kinds of actors, in other spaces; and on the opportunities they afford for people to gain voices that they can go on to use in other arenas.

### **4.3 Acting as, acting on, acting up: alternative interfaces**

If the first two clusters blur the citizen/state distinction, the second two come to depend upon and qualify it. Rather than arenas for citizen participation *with/in* the state, these are spaces in which citizens act *without* (both outside, and in the absence of) and *on* it. These are spaces that are more often chosen than

offered. They can be “sites of radical possibility” but may also be deeply conservative, maintaining dominant exclusions, norms and values. Of these, the first consists of relatively durable, institutionalised spaces from which citizens engage in governance either by seeking to influence public policy through advocacy and the mobilisation of dissent, indirectly by modelling alternatives, or through providing for the needs of other citizens as an alternative to statutory provision. As such, it would contain sites in which citizens and their intermediary organisations come to assume some of the functions of government.

The primary family resemblance that binds this category together is relative autonomy from the state. Like “civil society”, this cluster is a residual one in which a spectrum of organisations and associations might be located, radical and reactionary, established and emerging. It captures as many ambiguities of decentralisation as that of officialised invited spaces, consisting of many of the new institutional forms that have grown out of policies to devolve statutory provision to NGOs, parastatals and private providers. In this cluster would also fall associations of various kinds through which individuals gain a collective presence and a collective voice, producing the “civil society representatives” that speak on behalf of particular interest groups.

Situated in the public sphere, institutions in this cluster have been the subject of powerful social imaginaries in development discourse in recent times (Hulme and Edwards 1997; Robinson and White 1997; Edwards and Gaventa 2001). Seen as providing a check on the excesses of government, a more effective route to needs satisfaction of poor people, or as constituent of that vibrant public sphere from which democracy derives its sustenance, such spaces tend to be treated as unequivocally positive. Yet this tends to rest on a problematic causal relationship and a number of rather shaky assumptions about the relationship between participation and the production of more equitable, pro-poor outcomes (see Robinson and White 1997; Rutherford 1997). Questions with relevance beyond these spaces, but of vital importance to making sense of their democratic potential are who speaks for whom, and on what basis; and what presuppositions about representativity underlie fashionable advocacy of “civil society participation”?

What spaces in this cluster have in common is that they tend to exist precisely because people have themselves *chosen* to be part of them. This is precisely what makes some of these spaces sites for self-actualisation and gives them a durability that is contingent on people *wanting* to participate in them. Becoming part of an organised group, association or organisation often involves an act of identification, of placing oneself; it is quite different, in this respect, from being given a place on the basis of assumptions about interests associated with ascribed identities, for example, as “women”. As such, spaces in this cluster can be more exclusionary than spaces in any other. This may be because they are only open to those who share a particular identity, excluding others by implication; or because they are more actively exclusive, open only to members of a particular religious or ethnic group, for example. Such spaces can provide the terrain at the margins from which marginalised people can organise. They can also work to deepen the exclusion of minorities, by representing the voice of the majority or occupying space by asserting the right to speak about and for “the people”.

#### **4.4 Movements and moments**

While such institutions can provide a constant, needling, presence, the kind of opportunities they offer for the participation of the bulk of citizens is necessarily limited. Just as some of the transient invited spaces throw open participation to a wider spectrum of actors, ephemeral spaces that are constituted outside the interface between people and authorities provide a way of generating critical mass – and again, a potentially important route to citizen involvement in governance. Of all four, this is the most difficult cluster to define: it consists in the main of actions, movements and moments that produce and rely for their potency on a stark divide between “citizens” and “the state”.

The impermanence of these spaces lends them flexibility and spontaneity, but makes them almost impossible to institutionalise – if not also difficult to co-opt. Such spaces exist as a locus of identification, fading away without the issues around which these identifications are shaped. They lack the durability to be considered public institutions. Yet they steal into and from public spaces and provide arenas for popular protest and resistance, as well as for forms of leverage. They may include instances of popular protest, the use of popular and conventional communications such as theatre, radio and the print media to mount campaigns or voice complaints: any expression of voice outside the structured spaces of invited participation or the regularised institutions of “civil society”. It is in these spaces that s/he who constitutes for some the idealised free and equal citizen may find expression, unfettered by the institutions that would make places for them. And, as “spaces of appearance”, they work to give people a sense that they have a world in common – albeit a partial world that is often framed in opposition to existing institutions. Berberton, Blake and Kotze’s (1998) work on South Africa, for example, uses the notion of “action spaces” to describe the space for poor people to resist, to challenge their conditions and create alternatives. One of the paradoxes of these kinds of spaces is that they are rarely inclusive, often relying on oppositional processes of identity formation to build a sense of common purpose (Fraser 1992).

As “space(s) of appearance” they lend temporary visibility to identities, issues and interests, which are literally brought into view and given shape through collective political action (cf. Arendt 1958). And as such they are a critical space for the exercise of citizenship and the realisation of rights. Yet there is growing concern that these spaces are becoming de-legitimised by governments and development organisations, whose expansive consultative gestures come to constitute preferred channels for citizen voice. Despite its lack of coherence, this cluster is far from residual to the other three. Its distinctness lies in the very polarity of the activities associated with it, with the necessarily impromptu nature of the forays into public space that arise from it and from which oppositional voices speak and gain resonance.

#### **4.5 Spaces for change?**

Differentiated in this way, these four kinds of spaces for participation might be seen to embody different perspectives on participation and citizenship, as well as on the nature of public involvement in governance. As such, there are interesting intersections between them. The first kind of space, that of regularised intermediate institutions in which citizens participate in priority setting and policy formation is closest to the kind of ideals of popular participation that republicans like Arendt would hold dear. By

taking part, citizens *become* part of processes of governance. Yet they do so, necessarily, on terms set by others. While many non-institutionalised invited spaces may seem more directly democratic – either because of the possibilities for extending processes of deliberation beyond representatives or because they appear more inclusionary – it is important to delve into the kinds of assumptions that are made about them.

At the local level, a series of questions arise about the interface between new structures of decentralised governance, institutions put in place by participatory programmes of various kinds – from sectoral to village development committees – and the institutional landscape onto which these new forms of governance have been transposed. To what extent can institutions modelled on social forms traditionally dominated by male, more literate, older elites be expected to work for people whose poverty and marginalisation may be as much to do with relations within households or communities within which they live, as with their positions within wider society? In institutions such as committees there may be none of the efforts made in initiatives such as PRA to instil democratic norms and give voice to the otherwise silenced or excluded. Indeed, it may be expected that these institutional forms would tend to reproduce hegemonic patterns of social interaction and power relations that obtain in contiguous spaces, and with it, as Esteva complained in the mid-1980s, ‘democracy turns into bureaucracy’ (1985: 79). What do projects of space-making that simply create more and more committees or other local level institutions take for granted – and what kinds of institutional design, or interventions that restructure and reconstitute discursive space within these institutions, do to promote greater equity?

Have new spaces been opened for previously excluded voices to now be heard? Or do existing institutions continue to animate these new spaces, reproducing and further entrenching the relations of power that maintain an inequitable status quo? To what extent are there new rules of the game within these new spaces that might render them “heterotopian” (see Foucault 1986, Jones and SPEECH 2001): sites from which new ways of relating spill over into other social spaces, transforming them? Have new forms of accountability emerged in these settings? Do people hold unelected officials, whether committee members or local bureaucrats, to account – and how? Who are excluded and who exclude themselves from engagement with these institutions – and why? What tactics do those with little voice and power use to gain access to resources or influence – and to what extent do participatory mechanisms or processes enhance or constrain their agency?

A series of questions about legitimacy and legitimation arise in respect of invitations to participate – from institutionalising “civil society” consultation to soliciting the “voices of the poor” through Participatory Poverty Assessments and the like. To what degree is there genuine agreement with emergent consensus, and to what extent is consensus simply a “cover-up” that further marginalises dissenting perspectives (Pottier and Orone 1995; Mouffe 1992)? In which spaces, and through what strategies, is the kind of deliberation envisaged by writers such as Habermas and Arendt taking place – if at all? Asking questions about *how* and *on what basis* people participate not only helps move us beyond the vagaries of categories such as the familiar World Bank refrain of ‘the poor and marginalised, including women’ (cf. Cohen and Uphoff 1980). It helps to highlight the different subject positions that particular ways of

framing participation make available to participants; and the ways in which these framings might come to be established and contested. Asking “who speaks for and about whom?” would entail looking more closely at issues of identity, difference and power, as well as broader issues of accountability and legitimacy.

With this come broader political questions. Is the expansion of spaces for invited participation crowding out other kinds of spaces for spontaneous popular participation, redirecting people’s energy into collaborating with projects of rule in which their “ownership” secures them a stake in maintaining the status quo? Or might these spaces be regarded as broadening opportunities for engagement, as spaces in which people realise their rights and learn and practice skills that can be transferred to other arenas? What new forms of accountability are needed to ensure that these processes do not simply become forms of legitimation for policy agendas from elsewhere, closing off the possibilities for dissent by recourse to populist rhetoric about participation? And how can the rhetoric of participation be used by and with marginal or excluded groups as a lever, shaping strategies and tactics to turn spaces for consultation into opportunities for deliberation, inclusion and accountability?

#### **4.6 Of other spaces**

The idea of “non-state” spaces (Scott 1998) may serve more as a social imaginary than a completely separate domain: such spaces, after all, only come to exist as residual to those of the state and are framed by the state’s very existence. Yet counterposing “state” and “non-state” in this way may usefully work to frame oppositional discourses and practices, and the establishment of parallel organisations that mimic, replace or even displace statutory bodies. DRC work in Mexico (Pare *et al.* 2002), for example, situates the creation of such spaces by the Zapatista social movement as forms of strategic participation, exploring their potential for modelling alternative forms of governance. In other contexts, associational spaces outside the formalised intermediary institutions of governance offer sites in which those who participate in invited spaces may be active and in which members of particular interest groups may gain knowledge, experience and legitimacy (see Evans and Boyte 1986).

Asking questions about who participates and who is excluded, as well as how and by whom different kinds of actors are represented, is critically important in assessing the democratic potential of these new institutionalised spaces. Much is assumed of those who become representatives in these kinds of bodies, yet comparatively little work has been done in development studies on understanding who they are, on what basis they come to represent others, what motivates them and the implications of their participation.<sup>5</sup> Active engagement and links into other spaces – to social movements, associations, interest groups – bolsters citizen voice, strengthening the preconditions for being able to speak out as well as to be heard in intermediary spaces in which statutory or supra-state actors are involved. Montoya’s study of participation in health councils in Brazil, conducted as part of DRC research (see Coelho *et al.* 2002), for

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<sup>5</sup> Holmes and Scoones (2000) explore some of these issues in their excellent comparative review of environmental Deliberative and Inclusionary Processes (DIPS) in the North and South.



example, showed the degree to which citizen representatives in the health councils were also members of other associations, particularly social movements, and had previous experience in health-related issues. Engagement in other spaces, then, can enable lay participants to gain access, through such networks, to technical knowledge with which to argue more effectively in invited spaces – although as Holmes and Scoones (2000) point out, this may come at the cost of reinforcing notions of expertise and hegemonic knowledge claims.

Locating those occupying invited spaces in the other domains of association that are part of their lives also helps draw attention to who might be missing from these spaces. These may include people who lack associations and who may lack a sense of themselves as any kind of collective entity; those who rarely represent themselves directly but are instead spoken about and for by others. These “missing persons” may be the very people that development agencies most want to extend their support towards. Poor people often lack an organised base from which to make demands and the kind of collective presence that demand-making relies upon, they also tend to be poorly served by those organisations that claim to speak for them (Moore and Putzel 1999). Simply plucking out “poor people” and asking them what they would like, want or need risks producing echoes of the very discourses that disempower, as well as legitimacy for solutions that may further deepen their misery.<sup>6</sup> Marginalised minorities may, as Mansbridge (1999) points out, be more active and may have more of a voice through casting their votes in elections than in deliberative spaces colonised by the (relatively) more powerful and articulate.

Spaces arising more organically rather than by invitation may offer complementary ways of ensuring citizens’ influence in governance. Indeed, in some contexts they may well be judged more effective than engagement in intermediary institutions. Where relationships with the state are marked more by exit than by loyalty or voice (Osaghae 1998), non-state institutions may come to shape public policy-as-practice by assuming the space that is the “public sector”, one vacated by government. Efforts to influence policy “from below”, through changes in practice that go on to be taken up by the state administration and diffused to other organisations (Gaventa and Robinson 1998; Houtzager and Pattenden 1999) provide another route that may carry more influence than entering consultative spaces.

Citizen groups, equally, may represent the interests of the public more effectively by remaining outside attempts to include them and using public space – radio, the press, public hearings – to air grievances and seek accountability. They may engage in efforts to improve accountability by acting on the state, such as in the case of the observatory set up to monitor public expenditure in one municipality in Brazil (ABM/FASE, pers. comm.). Or, like MKSS in India, they may choose to act up and take a more actively oppositional stance, drawing down on rights to information to expose corruption (Jenkins and Goetz 1999). By so doing, they are able to exert pressure in ways that collaboration with state or supra-state authorities might preclude, as the dance of diplomacy and the dangers of losing opportunities to

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the very category “the poor” is an artefact of development discourse, one that has been constituted in a variety of ways historically. It is one that may bear little resemblance with the identifications people placed within it might choose for themselves (Cohen and Uphoff 1980; Brock *et al.* 2001; Escobar 1995).

influence put out of reach more active tactics to hold powerful institutions to account. Taking to the streets is a critical strategy in attempts to change policies in countries with democratic governance – and can, as South Africa’s HIV/AIDS treatment campaigners have shown, pay dividends when combined with other interventions in officialised policy space (Geffen 2001).

#### **4.7 The challenges of inclusive participation**

As Habermas (1996) has more recently conceded, the conditions that constitute the “ideal speech situation” of the deliberative public sphere rarely obtains in reality. In a brilliant critique of the assumptions underpinning deliberative democracy, Kohn (2000) argues that inequalities of status, class and social position are reproduced in the ways in which people communicate with each other in any social space, including those created with ideals of free and equal deliberation in mind. She contends:

Realizing abstractions such as reciprocity, equality and opportunity is usually a process of historical struggle rather than theoretical consensus. This struggle does not take place primarily on the abstract terrain of language, but at the concrete sites of resistance, the literal, the symbolic, and imaginary barricades, forums and fortresses where the people mount challenges to currently hegemonic visions of collective life.

(Kohn 2000: 424)

These “sites of resistance” may be those spaces that people fashion for themselves, those in which they come together in forms of collective action. They may be spaces in which they gain a sense of the legitimacy of their concerns and a sense of their own power, sites from which they enter invited spaces equipped with the tools of productive engagement. They may also, however, be spaces that they create *within* invited spaces through forms of resistance to hegemonic norms or the ‘communicative strategies of elites’ which deliberative democracy privileges (Kohn 2000: 424).

Scott’s (1986) work on everyday forms of resistance highlights instances in which what people *appear* to be doing masks subtle tactics that subvert the strategies of the powerful. Exploring the extent to which such “weapons of the weak” are deployed in spaces for participation may be instructive: agendas can be shaped as much through pretending not to understand, remaining silent, staging an argument, talking all at once, as by articulating positions openly. In later work, Scott focuses on the disparities between what is said in public space – ‘public transcripts’ – and the ‘hidden transcripts’ that are speech acts and practices that are kept ‘off stage’ (1990: 14). It is precisely artefacts such as “hidden transcripts” that some variants of participatory development, notably the more radical streams informed by Participatory Action Research, seek to work with and transform into versions that can be articulated more publicly as countervailing representations of actual and possible realities. Sharing the construction of alternative versions of the world can work to fashion networks of solidarity and build people’s confidence in their own knowledge and capabilities, and with it a sense of entitlement shaped by recognition of one’s agency (cf. Freire 1972). To do so relies on creating spaces that are at a remove from spaces inhabited by the

powerful, even if – as Lefebvre convincingly argues – such spaces are never completely insulated from the effects of power.

One of the ironies of the efforts of development agencies to foster autonomous spaces for popular organisation and self-reliance is that their very presence and agency as instigator may come to affect, rather fundamentally, what these spaces might come to represent to those who participate in them. Officialising spaces that were once animated by “hidden transcripts” by opening them to the gaze of the powerful can serve to produce mediated “public transcripts” rather than the authentic “voices” of the disenfranchised. These may provide subaltern actors with opportunities for negotiating preferences and demands with development agencies. But these “public transcripts” are often already colonised by the prerogatives of external agencies, which imbue them with the anticipated reactions of the powerful. If the spaces in which “hidden transcripts” are voiced are the “sites of radical possibility” in which the powerless can empower and express themselves, what prospects are there for an open and honest expression of views and perspectives in invited spaces made available by the powerful? And if “hidden transcripts” are precisely the voices and versions that are silenced in public spaces, what are the implications for the conduct of deliberation and for inclusive participation?

Pragmatic opportunism may enable less powerful actors to seize opportunities to push the boundaries, stealing the chance to transgress. While such “weapons of the weak” may offer short-term gains, effective participation in a deliberative process may come to depend on being able to play by the rules: being able to articulate a position, mount an argument, define a view. And this in turn depends on having the prospect of being listened to and taken seriously. In deliberative spaces in which “experts” are present, even the most well-equipped middle-class lay person may end up feeling cowed. More so those who have spent their lives being on the receiving end of prejudice, and may, as Freire (1972) argued, have so internalised discourses of discrimination that they are barely able to imagine themselves as actors, let alone agents.

Tactics are needed to transform the very nature of discourse within spaces for participation if the concerns animating the backstage whispers of the powerless are to be voiced and heard. For this, more is required than the multiplication of spaces or the insertion of particular kinds of people within existing spaces. Even where new rules of the game are established, making the most of these rules may require tactical engagement in other spaces to enable weaker participants to enter the public arena armed with the means to assert themselves. These tactics may include popular education, assertiveness training, building skills of argumentation or simply providing people with information about their rights and about the policies that they are being consulted about.<sup>7</sup> They may also draw on unfamiliar means of communication such as visualisation (Chambers 1997) and popular theatre (Abah and Okwori 2002), using unusual spaces

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<sup>7</sup> It is striking how little attention has been paid by proponents of new-style participatory research to some of the basic tenets of the participatory research movement of the 1970s and 1980s – which included a focus on precisely these political capabilities. Indeed, closer inspection of the kind of processes that are labelled “participatory research” may lead to the conclusion that the term “participatory” simply describes the Emperor’s New Clothes – dressing up old development and research practice in the finery of new language.

for gatherings or disrupting old rules by establishing new terms for engagement (Jones and SPEECH 2001).

Addressing the exclusionary dimensions of participatory processes, however, requires not just interventions *within* deliberative arenas – changing the rules of the game, levering open space for voice – important as more reflexive institutional forms and processes remain (Ellison 1999; Holmes and Scoones 2000). As Mouffe (1992) reminds us, the identities people assume or are accorded in any given social or political space are not so much fixed as constituted and enacted differently in different domains of discourse. The very contingency of these relational identities offers scope for redefinition; and it is precisely with this that more transformative modes of participatory work are concerned. Taking account of identity and agency calls for greater attention to be paid to the significance of *other* spaces and other processes in building capabilities for voice, and creating the conditions under which more marginal actors can participate more effectively in public space events (Agarwal 1997; Kohn 2000; Cornwall 2000b).

## 5 Conclusion

Enhancing citizenship participation requires more than inviting or inducing people to participate. And it calls for more than simply making spaces available for people to express their needs and exercises in gathering “voices”. Effective participation requires giving people access to information on which to base deliberation or to mobilise to assert their rights and demand accountability. To do so requires active engagement in nurturing voice, building critical consciousness, advocating for the inclusion of women, children, illiterate, poor and excluded people, levering open chinks to widen spaces for involvement in decision-making, and building the political capabilities for democratic engagement. It calls for processes that strengthen the possibilities of active citizen engagement with all four of the institutional forms identified here; both those extended by the powerful, and those through which citizens make and shape their own conditions of engagement and find and use their own voice. And it rests on strategies to enhance citizens’ political capabilities in the public policy domain, from the ability to make sense of complex budgetary or expenditure information, to having the language with which to argue with technical specialists: on equipping ordinary people with the “weapons of the powerful”.

Being given information, being invited to offer opinions, being asked to take part in setting priorities, being involved in decision-making are all kinds of participation that would seem a prerequisite for talking about “citizenship participation” as a right (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999; Gaventa 2002). All these forms of invited participation remain contingent on being offered a chance to participate. Yet much comes to depend on who takes up these offers of involvement and how the boundaries of their engagement are defined. Strikingly few accounts of participatory mechanisms in practice give us any idea about who actually participates; we get little sense of who exactly is speaking for or about whom, and how they themselves would regard their own entitlements and identities as participants. More micro-level research is required if we are to understand which forms of participation work in which kinds of spaces to provide people with opportunities to realise inclusive, active citizenship. More understanding is also

needed of the preconditions for engagement in particular *places*, moving away from the one-size-fits-all best practices paradigm towards strategies that take account of cultural, political and historical contexts.

Addressing these questions requires that we broaden the scope of enquiry beyond what has conventionally dominated research and writing on participatory *development* to explore wider questions about governance, identity, agency and power. It is with these questions that the work of the DRC is concerned, with opening up new perspectives and making new connections. Treating participation as situated practice calls for approaches that locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur, framing their possibilities with reference to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities, rather than idealised notions of democratic practice. This, in turn, would provide opportunities to interrogate some of the frames through which we currently make sense of participation and for a more in depth philosophical treatment of key concepts and their implications for participation as a political practice. It is hoped that the work of the DRC can contribute to these agendas.

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