Southeast European Studies

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

HOW TO ENGAGE IN FLAWED DEMOCRACIES

Edited by
Irena Fiket, Čedomir Markov, Vujo Ilić
and Gazela Pudar Draško

In the ever-evolving global landscape, where traditional forms of participation no longer suffice to meet the demands of complex democratic processes, this edited volume serves as an invaluable resource. Its insightful exploration of the challenges faced by democracies, particularly in regions like Southeast Europe grappling with autocratization, resonates deeply with our mission to foster democratic development worldwide. By delving into the potential of civil society and social movements as agents of democratic innovation, this volume not only sheds light on the complexities of modern democracy but also offers practical insights for navigating and rejuvenating it in challenging environments. The case studies focus on Southeast Europe, including Hungary, providing real-world examples that provoke essential discussions and inspire innovative approaches. For anyone seeking to understand the dynamics of democratic innovation and its critical role in sustaining and renewing democracies, this book is an indispensable resource.

Tiago C. Peixoto, Senior Public Sector Specialist, Chair of the World Bank's Community of Practice for Citizen Engagement

This timely edited volume sheds light on the emergent landscape of participatory and deliberative democracy in Southeast Europe. By focusing on a region where such democratic tendencies have been sparse, this volume pioneers an exploration of Southeast Europe's democratic awakening. In an environment where citizen mobilization has gained momentum, seen through the rise of social movements and grassroots civic initiatives, the book highlights the symbiotic relationship between the citizens' dissatisfaction with unresponsive institutions and the potential for democratization. The book tackles the rarity of efforts to institutionalize deliberative institutions in Southeast European countries, where such democratic innovations remain largely uncharted territory. Building on the practices observed within the vibrant social movements scene, the book explores the potential transformation of these practices into institutionalized mechanisms for voicing citizen needs. In an era marked by the ominous spread of autocracy, this book offers a ray of hope and insight into the power of democratic innovation as a potent antidote to crisis.

Vedran Džihić, Senior Research Fellow at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip) and Executive Board Member of the Institute for Democratic Engagement Southeast Europe

This book delves into the challenges facing democracy in challenging contexts with autocratizing tendencies and explores the potential for democratic innovation and renewal. In particular, it discusses the limitations of traditional forms of participation and examines how civil society

and social movements can play a pivotal role in revitalizing democracy. The case studies included in this book offer valuable insights into the complexities of democratic processes, making it relevant to your interest in Southeast European contexts and the potential for civic engagement in hybrid regimes. The book provides a comprehensive overview of Southeast European context and offers a scholarly perspective on the dynamics of democracy and its challenges, making it a valuable read for political scientists exploring the intersection of democracy, social movements and political innovation.

Stefania Ravazzi, Associate Professor in Political Science,
Department of Culture, Politics and Society, University of Turin

Participatory Democratic Innovations in Southeast Europe

This volume strengthens the dialogue between conceptual perspectives, approaches and fields on deliberative and participatory forms of democratic innovation and offers novel insights, focusing on the Southeast European space. Traditional forms of participation seem insufficient in satisfying the growing complexity of the democratic processes, especially in the context of autocratizing societies. It is crucial to examine the possibilities of democratic innovation in political research and practice, trying to establish a connection between the possibilities and limits of representative democracy and social movements as possible carriers of the process of democratic innovation. This book offers novel insights into practices of civil society and social movements and their pathways carved to initiate a deep change in political thinking and practice and compelling insights for scholars and students of Southeast Europe, social movements and democracy.

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The Balkans are a region of Europe widely associated over the past decades with violence and war. Beyond this violence, the region has experienced rapid change in recent times though, including democratization, economic and social transformation. New scholarship is emerging which seeks to move away from the focus on violence alone to an understanding of the region in a broader context drawing on new empirical research.

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Participatory Democratic Innovations in Southeast Europe

How to Engage in Flawed Democracies

Edited by Irena Fiket, Čedomir Markov, Vujo Ilić and Gazela Pudar Draško

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1 Why Do We Need Participatory Democratic Innovations in Southeast Europe?

Irena Fiket, Vujo Ilić, Čedomir Markov and Gazela Pudar Draško

People born and raised in former Yugoslavia still remember that the official narrative of that country was centered around working people and their participation in local communities and companies. The *differentia specifica* of the Yugoslav socialist model was self-management, the right (and duty) of each citizen to have an equal voice in all matters. This normative framework offered a solid base for economic and political participatory democracy. Of course, practice did not meet such standards, and decisions were mostly made in the narrow circles of power elites, whether in companies or local communities. The moment for this model was not right.

When we started the project "Active Citizenship: Promoting and Advancing Innovative Democratic Practices in the Western Balkans" in 2018, our conception of democratic innovations originated from several sources – our lived experience of the social movements that urged for more participation of the citizens, the rising debate in Europe and the world on the possible cures for the crisis of liberal democracy and, finally, our own specific (Yugoslav) memories about the political system that placed participation at the very core but failed to live up to its own principles. After the end of socialist Yugoslavia, the memory of this historical experimentation – which was truly remarkable for its age – could be considered a burden. Sole relics of that participatory element of the political system – local communities or *mesne zajednice* – were made so obsolete that very few today dare to advocate for bringing back power to the local communities.

However, the global turn to more inclusive governance models has enabled us to rethink the concepts of 'participatory governance' and 'democratic innovations' (Fung and Wright 2001; Ravazzi 2006; Smith 2009). We could go back to the historical experiences that might inform policymaking in Southeast Europe and use them to benefit the region at present. These types of innovations evolved around issues like low trust, low political participation and low political efficiency, which made them truly important and relevant for societies of Southeast Europe, which all suffer from these problems. It was clear that the traditional forms of participation have become insufficient to satisfy the growing complexity of the democratic processes, especially in autocratizing societies such as ones in Southeast Europe. Democracy was historically equated

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with freedom of speech and free and fair elections in the region. At a time when even these basic principles are being challenged in parts of the region, our effort is to understand what can be gained for democracy from the practices of participation and deliberation. Deliberation, especially, enhances political participation and strengthens the legitimacy of the given policy- or decision-making process. Deliberation envisages debate, discussion, rational consideration and revisiting key problems – all of which we find lacking in our polarized societies.

The importance of examining the possibilities of democratic innovations in political theory and practice lies in establishing a connection between the possibilities and limits of representative democracy and new social actors, such as social movements, as possible carriers of the process of democratic innovation. We departed from the assumption that the new arenas and modes of engagement pioneered by social movements can be an important part of the answer to the participation crisis. Considering the context of growing autocratization that has been spreading globally in recent years, we engaged with the newest wave of appeals for participatory and deliberative democracy as a remedy for the crisis. The public and political representation in Southeast European countries has been growing in the last couple of years: there has been a trend of citizen mobilization in the form of social movements and local civic initiatives, which are both a symptom of unresponsive and more openly authoritarian institutions, as well as a potential pathway to democratization (Delibašićet al. 2019; Fiket and Pudar Draško 2021; Pudar Draško et al. 2019). Some of the ways in which the new social movements in Southeast Europe try to engage in participatory democratic innovations is through their internal organization, building potential for its spillover to the institutional political arena. As self-reflexive actors, they experiment with new ideas of democracy that can become the basis for proposed changes in democratic governance, especially relevant in autocratizing societies. Their struggle to initiate debate on transforming conventional politics is one of the themes underlying this edited volume.

On the other hand, we followed the growing interest of the European Union (EU) and its member states in promoting and encouraging active citizenship through various participatory tools and methods. Mindful of the lack of interest of the European societies' citizens in participating in political life through traditional instruments of representative democracy, the European Commission initiated a large-scale innovation: the Conference of the Future of Europe, launched in 2021 in Strasbourg and directed toward renewing the commitment of all political actors and citizens toward a joint democratic future. The renewed interest in the challenges directed toward democracy has resulted in a process of engineering inspired by participatory and deliberative principles. The rise of democratic innovations observed in many EU member states has led to their further promotion and institutionalization.

A series of different models have emerged over time that attempted to improve democratic processes by increasing citizen participation. Across Europe, we have seen the rise of deliberative arenas, such as Citizen Assemblies,

Citizens' Juries/Panels, Planning Cells, G1000, Citizens' Councils, Citizens' Dialogues, Deliberative Polls and World Wide Views. Some of these models were even institutionalized, such as the Ostbelgien Model. Some focus on achieving informed citizen recommendations on policy questions, others on citizen opinion on policy questions and others still on citizen evaluation of ballot measures and permanent deliberative bodies. All these models have similarities and differences and are complex to varying degrees. Furthermore, their application has to be carefully designed, as not all models are appropriate for every country.

While the crisis of representative democracy in the EU resulted in a call for more democracy and tangible efforts to institutionalize different democratic innovations aiming to foster the effective inclusion of citizens, similar actions are almost entirely absent in Southeast Europe. Efforts to institutionalize deliberative institutions are very rare in these countries. In large parts of Southeast Europe, local self-governments do not encourage citizens to access relevant information and participate in the decision-making process. As the most common tool in Europe (Allegretti 2010), participatory budgeting was introduced into the region, but mostly through various international cooperation projects. In a telling fact, the penetration rate of this concept of budgeting in Serbia remains relatively modest; participatory budgeting is used in only 10% of cities and municipalities (Milosavljević et al. 2020).

Since deliberative institutions and other participatory democratic innovations are generally not well-known in the region, aside from the historical experiences of self-management in Yugoslavia (Pateman 1970; Unkovski-Korica 2014), we aimed to build on tested and researched practices within the social movements scene that have the potential to become institutionalized and provide space for voicing citizens' needs. Captured political institutions require the opening of new non-institutional arenas of politics, and all these initiatives demonstrate the citizens' willingness to participate and democratize societies. Through such demands for inclusion and participation, citizens look back and search for inspirational traditions. Still, they also look for other forms of participatory strategies for inspiration and democratic innovations – for example, plenums in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This volume aims to contribute to the debate on the internal dynamics of bottom-up and top-down democratic innovation and their social and political impact, both as single case studies and as parts of a greater cycle of social movement mobilizations and *de facto* civil society experimentation in Southeast European countries. Contributions in this volume approach social movement mobilization and deliberative experimentation from different angles. Is civic engagement possible when new forms of autocracies, hybrid regimes, are advancing? Can we expect deliberative tools to become tools of citizen empowerment that could strike back and renew democracies? We are immensely grateful to the anonymous reviewers who saw the value in this endeavor to present research originating in Southeast Europe, including Hungary, and offer the first compelling insights seeking to provoke debate.

The structure of this volume facilitates a progression from broad conceptual and contextual discussions on deliberative and participatory innovations to a nuanced exploration of bottom-up struggles for active citizenship and more participatory democratic frameworks in Southeast Europe. In Part I, we establish the context by delving into contemporary debates about the role of participation in democracy. We also explore the circumstances that have pushed democratic innovations to the forefront of discussions on reinvigorating democracy in the region. We start with a contribution from Nenad Markovikj, Ivan Damjanovski and Zoran Ilievski (Chapter 2), who present an overview of the connection between social movements, active citizenship and democratic innovation – the three key concepts of this volume. Noting that both social movements and democratic innovations emerged as responses to the democratic malaise, the authors underscore their distinct approaches. While social movements lean into protest strategies to voice discontent and challenge exclusion, democratic innovations seek institutional channels to foster more inclusive democratic practices. However, instead of underscoring differences, the authors invite scholars and practitioners to pay more attention to synergies of social movements and democratic innovation in bolstering active citizenship. This perspective is empirically explored through contributions in Parts II and III.

Building on this theme, Andrija Šoć (Chapter 3) posits that combating the rising tide of autocratization in the region is possible only through citizen participation. His analysis starts with dissecting the criticisms levied at traditional participatory models, including the complexity and capacity for participation, and the potential for manipulation and coercion. He proposes an extended participation model that prioritizes responsiveness and interactions between citizens and decision-makers. The goal is to establish a system of checks and balances that is both institutional and epistemic as a prerequisite for a vital democratic system.

The final contribution in this part (Chapter 4) shifts the discourse to empirical grounds by asking: What do we know about the current state of political participation in the region? Vujo Ilić and Čedomir Markov present the findings of a scoping review of academic research on political participation in the region since 2010. They observe a gradual increase in academic attention to this topic over the years, particularly in unconventional (e.g., protests and boycotts) and innovative (e.g., citizens' assemblies and participatory decision-making) modes of participation. While the analyzed literature heavily emphasizes single-country studies – Romania, Serbia and Hungary being the focal points – there is a marked absence of research concerning countries like North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro. In addition to the general population, most studies looked into the participation of youth and active citizens, primarily focusing on what drives participation in the context marked by deep-rooted institutional distrust and political disillusionment. Ilić and Markov identify areas ripe for investigation, such as cross-generational differences in participation dynamics, the relationship between extremely polarized information

landscapes and participation repertoires, the nexus between informal institutions and political engagement and the backfire and spillover effects of innovative participatory practices.

In Part II, attention is shifted to the specific cases throughout Southeast Europe where social movements, civil society organizations and citizens join efforts to create and offer different, participatory models for the functioning of institutions. In Chapter 5, Jovana Timotijević and Iva Čukić present the challenging case of Belgrade's development, showing that the Serbian urban planning practice implies a significant lack of democratic capacity and is often performed at the level of or even below the formal minimum. They present one model currently being developed – participatory forums, analyzing the case of the Ministry of Space Collective. This civil society organization has attempted to translate this format, specifically to serve the process of creating and adopting urban plans in such a way as to reflect the public interest.

Nathan Siegrist continues with urban issues in Chapter 6, drawing on the literature on heterotopia, a conceptual framework for studying subversive urbanisms present on cities' margins and how it is shaped by urban governance and development. He draws the analysis of the Metelkova Mesto, a squatted autonomous cultural center in Ljubljana, showcasing the potentials and challenges of heterotopic collective action within the regional context.

Bojan Baća then presents the process of *political subjectification* of society's apolitical segments through contentious practices in what he names post-democratic Montenegro in Chapter 7. By dwelling on three specific social movements, he demonstrates how citizens constituted themselves as collective political subjects by performatively enacting their citizenship through resistance. The importance of being a political subject is especially relevant in Southeast Europe. Baća poignantly defends the idea of the civic autonomy crucial for citizens to challenge dominant power relations and attain political legitimacy to think, speak and act as relevant political actors on the public stage.

This section is closed with an agonistic reading of the pragmatic symbiosis of movements and political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Chapter 8. Jasmin Hasanović, Valida Repovac Nikšić and Emina Adilović analyze the recent case of the pragmatic symbiosis of the "Justice for Dženan" social movement and one political party in the local legislature of Sarajevo Canton. They present the opportunity to perceive the conflict between the nonaccountable institutions and the accountability-seeking citizens as a productive force that can unite citizens through engagement in a shared process.

Finally, Part III is dedicated to the innovations that led to the institutionalization of participatory practices. Mladen Ostojić opens the section with a historical theme in Chapter 9, presenting Yugoslav self-management as instructive for contemporary initiatives aiming to establish direct forms of governance in municipalities and cities. His chapter offers a detailed overview of the functions and modes of operation of local communities and their relations with the community at large, urban municipalities, and the city government deriving from the Yugoslav constitution from 1974.

After this historical case, Irena Fiket, Gazela Pudar Draško and Jelena Vasiljević return to the present with a comparative analysis of the two ideologically similar movement parties that operate in two different sociopolitical contexts – MOŽEMO! (We Can) in Croatia and the Zeleno-levi front (Green-Left Front) in Serbia. Their focus in Chapter 10 is on the normative framework of both parties to show how they articulate intraparty democracy in decision-making and program development.

Finally, closing the volume, Chapter 11 deals with Hungary. Eszter Kovács Szitkay, Dániel Oross and Boldizsár Szentgáli-Tóth present a contextualized report of three initiatives at the local and national levels. Their study discusses the key issue of democratic innovations in flawed democracies, concluding that even though these initiatives sound promising for revitalizing and strengthening democracy, they seem to get stuck at the level of 'being innovative processes,' as they could not yet bring forth the expected breakthrough results.

What can we conclude about the need for participatory democratic innovations in Southeast Europe? In the last two sections, this volume presents eight cases that argue that there is no good governance and true democracy without citizens' inclusion and participation. Common to all of them is seeking sustainable participatory democracy that would be inclusive and produce good decisions for all. Hasanović et al., Fiket et al. and Szitkay et al. firmly state that what we ultimately need to have a true participatory turn in politics are strong political actors who will be genuinely committed to citizen participation. We hope this book serves as a guide and testimony for those who engage in democratic innovations, even in very unfavorable circumstances, and that it may inspire steps toward institutionalization of innovative practices.

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Part I

Context of the Participatory Democratic Innovations in Southeast Europe

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2 Social Movements, Active Citizenship and Democratic Innovation

An Overview

Nenad Markovikj, Ivan Damjanovski and Zoran Ilievski

Introduction

One of the defining qualities of democracy since its appearance until today has been participation. In this regard, “citizen participation is usually considered a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision making” (Michels 2011: 276). ‘Participatory democracy’ is one of the operative terms in the modern debate on the outreach and the limits of participation, whether the more cooperative manner of dialogue between the state and civil society or the more conflictual modalities of political participation characteristic of social movements.

Speaking of the contemporary state of democracy worldwide, it seems that it is exactly its participatory aspect that is undergoing a fundamental crisis on a global scale. The crisis of participatory democracy is reflected in two ways: as a fundamental attitudinal disillusionment in democracy as a political order and as a troublesome behavioral relation between the citizens and institutions that should both represent them and be a locus for their political participation. This crisis manifests in a “decline in electoral turnout, low levels of trust in politicians and political institutions and decline in membership of traditional mobilizing organizations such as political parties and trade unions,” i.e., a “growing disconnection between citizens and decision-makers – the difference and distance between the subjectivity, motives and intentions of citizens and those who make decisions in their name” (see in Smith 2009: 4–5). One of the critiques of democracy, introduced in the theoretical discourse by radical democrats, lies exactly in its representative aspect that can often suffocate its participatory potential. In other words, radical democrats claim that representative democracy has a fundamental flaw in its design because it “alienates political will at the cost of genuine self-government, impairs the community’s ability to function as a regulating instrument of justice, and precludes the evolution of a participating public in which the idea of justice might take root” (Barber 1984: 145–146).

Another important point of origin of the dissatisfaction with the participatory aspect of democracy is the lack of innovation in the different modalities

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of participation in democratic processes. The traditional forms of participation seem insufficient to satisfy the growing complexity of the democratic processes. As Dalton (2004: 204) points out, "[S]tronger parties, fairer elections, more representative electoral systems will improve the democratic process, but these reforms do not address expectations that the democratic process will expand to provide new opportunities for citizen input and control." This means that it is crucial to examine the possibilities of democratic innovation in political theory and practice, trying to establish a connection between the possibilities and limits of representative democracy and social movements as possible carriers in the process of democratic innovation. New arenas and modes of engagement, pioneered by social movements, can be a substantive, if partial, answer to the crisis of participatory democracy.

This chapter examines the connection between social movements, active citizenship and democratic innovation. First, the chapter defines the terms 'social movements' and 'active citizenship' in order to establish the categorial apparatus with which it operates. The following part briefly analyzes social movements as democratizing agents, as well as the reasons for the reemergence of social movements in Southeast Europe. In the last part, the chapter analyzes the concept of democratic innovation, its definition, theoretical and methodological approaches and empirical findings in this field.

Social Movements and the Concept of Active Citizenship – Defining Terms

Renewed interest in social movements after the Second World War triggered a growing literature and with it a plethora of definitions and academic approaches. Attempts were made to define what social movements are but also distinguish between social movements and similar categories such as participatory democracy, active citizenship, protests, societal scenes and opportunity structures. Identified as a key element of civil society, academic interest in social movements intensified when "new social movements theory started to appear in the late 1960s and 1970s to explain new waves of political activism – student protests, feminism, peace and environmentalism" (Purdue 2007: 6). The increased attention to social movements globally, but also in the Western Balkans in the last three decades, requires one to define the term but also to locate it precisely within the academic debate, which seems a sensible starting point when discussing social movements and their current role in democratic innovations in the Western Balkans.

To this end, academic literature on social movements defines the term as "informal networks, linking individual and organizational actors engaged in conflictual relations to other actors, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (della Porta and Diani 2006: 30). This starting definition focuses on informality, solidarity, conflict and protest as fundamental defining categories, without saying much about the ultimate notions of solidarity, conflict and protest as categories on which social movements are based. Blumer (1969: 99, as cited in

Crossley 2002: 3) partly answers the questions of the ends of social movements by defining them as "collective enterprises seeking to establish a new order of life (…) derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life (…) from wishes and hopes for a new system of living" where "the career of a social movement depicts the emergence of a new order of life." Aiming to create new realities and change social dynamics is central to defining social movements but blurs the line between social movements and other social structures that cooperate with the government on political and social issues via modalities offered by participatory and deliberative democracy.

One of the key attributes of social movements is their propensity for contention. In this sense, contentious politics relates to the performative aspects of the dynamics of social protest as a means to disrupt the status quo and increase the potential for mobilization of ordinary people in their confrontation with the authorities (Tarrow 2011). Or as Mew (2013: 104) puts it, "[C]onceptually, contentious politics acknowledges that popular struggles take various forms and express themselves in different ways – for example, in terms of organization and mobilization – and occur outside the realms of mainstream politics."

However, the conflictual dimension of social movements within an established social order to which social movements relate and are in conflict with does not limit them to only challenging the state apparatus and practices. In this sense, "social movements do not limit themselves to presenting demands to decision makers; they also more or less explicitly express a fundamental critique of conventional politics, thus shifting their endeavors from politics itself to meta-politics" (Offe 1985, cited in della Porta 2009: 1). Additionally, as Reiter (2009: 44) specifies, "social movements express a fundamental critique of conventional politics, affirming the legitimacy (if not the primacy) of alternatives to representative models of democracy." Such an approach to social movements identifies their broader social role as agents of change, challenging not just the given social order but representative democracy as such. In between the lines, defining social movements as carriers of social alternatives stresses the need for innovation and creation in the social domain, meaning that the ultimate end of social movements is not mere protest or challenging the state or representative democracy only but also social invention and innovation in the political domain, usually occupied by state actors.

Regardless of the definitions taken into account, social movements need to be distinguished from other modalities/actors of the political arena and from other civil society actors, with which social movements often get conflated. The first line of division in social movements is their difference from other political actors in the political arena. Academic literature points out the modalities of action that social movements rely on as the main difference between political actors and social movements. Della Porta and Diani (2006: 28) argue,

> Until the early 1970s debates on social movements emphasized their non-institutionalized nature (…) Even now, the idea is still very popular that

> social movements may be distinguished from other political actors because of their adoption of "unusual" patterns of political behavior. Several scholars maintain that the fundamental distinction between movements and other social and political actors is to be found in the contrast between conventional styles of political participation (such as voting or lobbying political representatives) and public protest.

The dichotomy of conventional/unconventional styles of political participation, once again, directs the debate toward the conflicting capacity of social movements within a framework of action tools, often inaccessible to political actors, or, to say the least, less frequently chosen as a first option in politics (protests or rallies for example). However, it is the opposite approach that really distinguishes social movements from political actors (as well as other civil society actors). Another difference between political actors and social movements also lies in the fact that social movements rarely engage in lobbying activities or policy change via negotiations with the state. Lobbying or negotiating are political instruments that lack direct friction and conflict in their essence and are mostly utilized by other civil society actors such as pressure groups, lobbies, interest groups or advocacy think tanks. In this sense,

> social movements do challenge the power of the state (…) relying mainly on protest as a means to put pressure upon decision makers, they challenge the power of the state to impose its monopoly on the use of legitimate force.
>
> (della Porta 2013: 152)

While lobbyists, think tanks or interest groups negotiate or pressure the state through non-conflictual or less conflictual modalities, social movements rely on protest and direct clash with its repressive apparatus.

Another important characteristic of social movements is the level of adaptation to social circumstances and optimization of resources when opportunities for social action occur. The political process literature has extensively explored resource mobilization (Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 2002) and political opportunity structure (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 2011) as key determinants for the formation, ascendancy, durability and success of social movements. Thus, although different individuals and spontaneous groups might use similar modes of action to social movements, they cannot, therefore, be defined as such. As Meyer (2002: 13) points out, "[M]ovements are bound neither by narrow issues nor by particular tactics," and

> although some individuals or groups habitually use the same years to pursue their goals, for example, firebombing, demonstrations, boycotts, or electioneering, most choose strategies they think most likely to be effective, given their perceptions of resources, opportunities, and constraints, including organizational limits and self-imposed moral commitments.

This also speaks to internal traits of social movements which relate to at least minimal organizational structure (unlike ad hoc movements) and an internal moral code, always centered around common grievances and dissatisfactions (Laclau 2005). This last aspect also separates social movements from massive outbursts of popular dissatisfaction, which could originate in different sources and are not by necessity centered around a single topic or even a set of related issues.

Social movements are civil society actors. But, as was already mentioned, they are a specific type of civil society actor that usually engages in activities that include some level of resentment toward the state. Individuals or other organized actors of civil society also participate in resolving public issues, but their participation is fundamentally different from that of social movements. Font and associates (2014: 1) point to this important distinction:

> The first characteristic that differentiates this kind of participation from that related to social movements or voluntary associations of various types is precisely the central role played by a government in organizing or providing legitimacy to these processes. This characteristic is important because it provides a direct link between participation and governmental decision-making processes.

Participatory democracy, in this sense, is a concept more often associated with civil society actors that interact with the state in a more cooperative manner rather than through friction and protest, the latter modalities being reserved for social movements. Social movements engage in bottom-up pressure, but so do other actors, although not with the same intensity, purpose or approach. When policy processes are in question, the state often tries to co-opt civil society actors in an effort to increase the legitimacy of specific policy solutions. In the case of social movements, legitimacy is exactly what is being challenged in the process of organized action, usually through modalities far more drastic compared to other civil society actors.

One concept that commonly accompanies social movements is that of active citizenship. Although its meaning has changed over time and includes a number of qualities that supersede 'citizenship' in both the classical sense and the minimal conception of activism, equal to forms of general social engagement in matters of public interest. In the latter sense, the term goes back to the 1980s, with its original meaning the exact opposite of what the term later evolved into. Thus, as Kearns explains, the term was coined during Thatcherian neoliberal governance and initially designated an individualistic, anti-collectivist notion of shifting responsibility for welfare from the state to citizens. Their "compulsion to get active is to derive from their personal morality and the prospect of the approbation of others, rather than from feelings of community belonging and communal endeavor" (1995: 157). Defined in this manner, the concept of active citizenship was originally a product of the political times of the 1980s. It was oriented toward individualism, a quest for freedom

(again individual rather than collective), as well as an effort to limit the welfare state by relying on individual moral reform, followed by the pursuit of personal economic progress and neglect for community and society.

As the debate on active citizenship developed, and the concept of the welfare state regained political ground, active citizenship was no longer related to its original meaning. The term came to be defined through a more practical, activist, and a more philosophical aspect, both intersecting at certain common values (justice, inclusion, activeness, etc.). Practical, activist-oriented literature approached active citizenship more from the perspective of an acquired skill of the democratic citizen, seen as a prerequisite for participatory and deliberative democracy. In its new meaning, it acquired an equilibrium between rights and responsibilities of the democratic citizen, as well as a "form of literacy (…) acquiring knowledge and understanding so as to make informed judgements and having the skill and courage to respond in the appropriate way, individually or collectively" (European Economic and Social Committee 2012: 7). Additionally, it is a concept that cannot be limited to participating in institutions of the system, i.e., it is "more than participating in representative democratic structures (…) or involvement in formal volunteering (…) active citizenship also means involvement in participative democracy, namely that people are involved in developing policies that directly affect them" (Irish Traveler Movement 2006: 3). This concept of active citizenship is furthermore "underpinned by a set of fundamental values that includes respect for the rule of law, democracy, justice, tolerance and open-mindedness, and regard for the rights and freedoms of others" (European Economic and Social Committee 2012: 7). The concept of active citizenship goes beyond a formal engagement of citizens in democratic institutions, allowing them to proactively shape policy based on acquired information and knowledge and giving them the readiness to engage in matters related to the common good of society. This definition, however, lacks the element of friction between social movements and the state, focusing on civil society actors prone to co-optation and cooperation. Thus, the concept of active citizenship needs a broader elaboration, which would include a connection between active citizenship and social movements.

Larsen (2001: 81) goes a step further by giving active citizenship the quality of a redistributive mechanism of social welfare. This understanding sees active citizenship as "the relocating of obligations and responsibilities to the community level," built on a refreshed communitarian approach (in opposition to the increasing individualization of society), as well as "co-operation and a division of labor between private, public and volunteer actors and organizations regarding the production and delivery of welfare services." In this case, active citizenship is defined in terms directly opposite from its original meaning. However, it is still insufficient to establish a direct relation between social movements and active citizenship unless social redistribution is achieved by means other than dialogue and cooperation between civil society actors and the state.

One of the most prominent authors in the field of active citizenship, Engin F. Isin, approaches the problematics of active citizenship from a broader, more philosophical perspective. His definition of the concept of active citizenship distances the term from its formal aspects of citizenship as a legal status or a relation between the state and the individual. In this sense, Isin and Nielsen (2008: 2) stress that

> what is important about citizenship is not only that it is a legal status but that it involves practices – social, political, cultural and symbolic (…) formal citizenship is differentiated from substantive citizenship and the latter is seen as the condition of the possibility of the former.

The accent here is not on the individual's formal belonging to a community defined by an act of legal regulation but rather on a proactive and activist community of citizens, which by no means limit themselves in their "repertoires of contention" (Haunns 2007: 157). This underlying logic, according to Isin, establishes two types of citizenship: 'active' and 'activist.' While the former relates to the mainstream connotation of citizenship as expressed through the legal forms of participation, such as voting rights and tax obligations, the latter is defined by activities that may lay outside established legal practices to the extent that in their pursuit of justice, they are justified to disrupt the established status quo (Isin 2009: 382–384).

Moreover, Isin (2009: 381–382) proposes, in essence, three prerequisites when researching acts of citizenship, meaning the following:

1 The first principle of investigating acts of citizenship is to interpret them through their grounds and consequences, which includes subjects becoming activist citizens through scenes created.[1]
2 The second principle of theorizing acts of citizenship recognizes that acts produce actors that become answerable to justice against injustice.
3 The third principle of theorizing acts is to recognize that acts of citizenship do not need to be founded in law or enacted in the name of the law.

These three fundamental principles of active citizenship proposed by Isin[2] completely change the understanding of the term in a direction that has far more social outreach and expands the possibilities for social action in times when injustice cannot be resolved through legal means or when there is no political will for such a resolution. Legal regulation in many spheres of society is either insufficient or even biased in favor of specific social groups. Thus, the need for broader social action is implied as a necessity. This specifically means that "active citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved" (Scheithauer 2016: 19), which speaks to an ideological and proactive carrier of such social action and involvement. This is the link between active citizenship and social movements: it is exactly the role of social movements to promote and strive for social

change based on their understanding of what is just and what is not, very often disregarding legal limits. Being organized and having a common internal denominator in the face of specific social challenges, social movements are the fundamental *modus operandi* in the efforts of achieving change in times when societies might experience idiosyncratic democratic deficits or plain authoritarianism. In such cases, social movements can be a powerful democratizing agent, a possibility often neglected on account of political elites.

Social Movements and Democratization

Both strands of literature focusing on democratization and social movements have surprisingly neglected the link between the activism of societal actors and democratic change. Most of the seminal literature on democratization has emphasized the role of elites in the processes of democratic transition (O'Donnel and Schmitte 1986; Przeworski 1991), paying little attention to the role of popular organizations (Bermeo 1997). In a similar vein, the literature on social movements for a long time has been predominantly tied to inquiries within the realm of the well-established democratic regimes in Western Europe and North America (Rossi and della Porta 2009). However, the processes of postcommunist transition that emerged at the end of the twentieth century and the rise of pro-democracy protests globally have triggered a growing academic interest in the role of civil society actors and social movements in toppling authoritarian regimes and assisting the processes of democratic consolidation (Brancati 2016). Pushing for change is considered to be of major importance for a successful democratic transition, as "both civil society organizations and social movement organizations possess agency that is important for advancing democracy in a country," the former providing a channel for participation and monitoring of policies, while the latter is crucial for confronting authoritarian rule (Noutcheva 2016: 695). In this sense, Linz and Alfred (1996) have pinpointed civil society as one of the five arenas necessary for a successful democratic transition and consolidation. The emerging global civil society has also been advocated as a powerful democratizing agent (Kaldor 2003; Kaldor, Moore and Selchow 2012; Keane 2003).

On the other hand, it has been argued that the mobilizing force of social movements has played an important role in the outcomes of the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 (della Porta 2014a). Similar examples can be found in the postcommunist contexts of the Western Balkans and the former Soviet space, from the Serbian revolution in 2000, through the various 'color revolutions,' such as the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2005 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, up to the 2014 Euromaidan in Ukraine and the Colorful Revolution in North Macedonia in 2016. In this sense, the social movements literature has also emphasized two contributing factors for the emergence and relative success of these movements: the cross-national aspects of diffusion of pro-democracy societal mobilization and spillovers of protest

experiences across countries (della Porta and Mattoni 2014; Stewart 2009) and the financial and political assistance of external actors (such as the European Union (EU) or the United States) for resource mobilization of pro-democracy movements (Beichelt et al. 2014; Noutcheva 2016; Stewart 2009).

Finally, Tilly provides an important argument on the correlation between social movements and democratization. His historical account of social movements detects a strong correspondence between democratization and social movements, which is based on three causal factors: first, "the same processes that cause democratization also independently promote social movements"; second, "democratization as such further encourages people to form social movements"; and "third, under some conditions and in a more limited way social movements themselves promote democratization" (Tilly 2004: 131). Therefore, social movements provide agency for democratization when they are able to broaden and equalize the range of participants in public politics, limit the proliferation of categorical inequalities in public politics and provide integration of previously divided networks into public politics (Tilly 2004: 143). Similarly, Rossi and della Porta (2009: 182) observe six enabling factors for democratization: a non-syndical strike wave and/or a pro-democracy cycle of protest, increased political organization in urban areas, an actively engaged church (in Catholic countries), external pressure from human rights networks, division among the authoritarian elites on whether to continue to sustain the nondemocratic regime and existence of pro-democratic elites that can absorb the demands for democracy coming from below.

However, there are important limitations to the effectiveness of these bottom-up approaches to democratization. Politicization and inconsistency of civil society actors and social movements, limited capacities for representation, accountability deficits and profound mismatches between grassroot and elite conceptions of the role of civil society in the political system have been pinpointed as significant barriers to the effectiveness of popular agency in democratic change (della Porta 2014a, 2014b). In this sense, while pro-democracy mobilization has been able to influence authoritarian elite change, in many cases of postcommunist transition, the long-term democratization effects have been underwhelmed by stagnation or even regression of the processes of regime transformation. It is precisely this oscillating quality of democracy that brought about the revival of social movements in Southeast Europe.

The Revival of Social Movements in Southeast Europe

The debate on social movements in the last decade has been enriched with voluminous contributions from Southeast Europe, both in practice and theory. The political and social conditions in the countries of the Western Balkans, and more specifically in former Yugoslavia, have given birth to a plethora of social movements that seem to mushroom in the volatile political ambient of the countries in the region. Some reasons for the proliferation of social movements

are more obvious and stem from deeply rooted democratic deficits of the societies in the region, while other social movements address more particular and specific grievances of individual societies.

The constant backsliding of democratic standards in the region (Nations in Transit 2018; Wunsch 2016), as well as the constant threat of state capture in almost all countries of former Yugoslavia (see Bieber 2018; Džankić 2018; Pešić 2007) seem to be the fundamental provocation for the appearance of social movements. Another reason that closely accompanies democratic backsliding is that "the crisis of traditional instruments of representative democracy has renewed awareness for the necessity of encouraging active citizenship" (Džihić and Pudar Draško 2019). The failure or, better yet, the abuse of representative democracy has, in essence, increased the need for social and political action in Southeast European countries. The end goal is often to initiate "(re) democratization" through "modular repertoires of contention" (Stefanovski 2019: 8).

However, it is almost a rule that social movements in the region do not at first present as massive nor develop an umbrella under which different dissatisfied groups might unite against a common adversary, usually the local authoritarian regime. As Džuverović et al. (2020: 184) note, "[W]hat was most surprising about the recent protests in southeast Europe was not mass mobilization per se but rather why it took so long for citizens in these countries to mobilize." As much as answers to this question may vary, it becomes obvious that most of the social movements find their origin in very particular issues and gradually 'snowball' toward massiveness as popular dissatisfaction grows, albeit their potency varies greatly and depends on context and political opportunity structures (Fiket and Đorđević 2022). Nevertheless, the whole region has gradually developed from traditionally low levels of massive participation to "new waves of protests (…) ranging from mass demonstrations to organized strikes and riots" (Tatar 2013: 131) aiming at elite-changing activities, which indicates a shift of the social paradigm toward increased massive mobilization and protest.

The initial moment for organized social actions and the initial appearance of social movements varies. In some cases, such as Serbia, Croatia or North Macedonia, the motivating agent can be the commodification of public spaces ('Ne da(vi)mo Beograd' in Belgrade, 'Pravo na grad' in Zagreb or 'Prva Arhibrigada' in Skopje). The protests are aimed at specific state/city projects in urban parts of the city (predominantly city centers) that the social movements consider highly inappropriate aesthetically, economically or even in terms of a symbolic or historical content (Vangeli 2011). Dolenec and associates call this rapid transformation of urban areas "neoliberal urbanism"; they also indicate that the struggle for the city surpasses the framework of the urban locus in which social conflict occurs – that is to say, "it encapsulates larger processes of economic and political change" (2017: 1). The manner of urban commodification can have exclusively economic origins but can also originate in "hegemonic representations" (Muhić and Takovski 2014) of national myths and

historic content, and has a deeply divisive political potential. In all mentioned cases, organized dissatisfaction occurs in what Matković and Ivković (2018: 2) call an "anti-instrumentalist" approach that opposes the neoliberal logic of urbanization. These movements reveal themselves as the embryo of the chains of equivalence of unfulfilled demands (Laclau 2005: 74), which later form new chains just to grow to full-scale anti-authoritarian revolutions, such as the Colorful Revolution in North Macedonia or the One in Five Million movement in Serbia.

In other cases, societal grievances have a completely different origin. Failed (or better failing) states in the region frequently fail to satisfy sometimes even the basic needs of their citizens. The dissatisfaction this creates can be a combination of social disenfranchisement and constant ethnic capture, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Mujkić (2016) argues, ethno-nationalist elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina in both 2013 and 2014 were not just forced to combat social dissatisfaction with problems, such as social identification numbers or corrupt privatization, but were also forced to reclaim their position of ethnic entrepreneurs challenging their class position, as well as "the rarely questioned ethno-nationalist ideological hegemony" (Mujkić 2016: 1) they benefit from. The protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2013 (problems with social identification numbers) and 2014 (false privatization of companies in Tuzla resulting in firing workers), as well as the newest set of protests in Banja Luka directed against the unsolved murder of David Dragičević (Justice for David), cut across ethnic lines to seriously endanger the deeply rooted positions of ethnic elites in Bosnian society. At one point, seemingly on the verge of a general social but also anti-ethnic revolution, they were nevertheless successfully kept under control by ethnic entrepreneurs on all three sides.

In a similar fashion, but devoid of any ethnic burden, the protests in Slovenia in 2012–2013 had an exclusively social component having "an anti-establishment orientation, with the movements made up of diverse groups of individuals, indignant that the political and economic elites have been unable to provide decent living standards following the 2008 financial crisis" (Toplišek and Thomassen 2017: 1384). These protests resemble the movement of the Indignados in Spain and the anti-austerity movement in Greece, addressing exclusively social dissatisfaction but causing visible ruptures in the political tissue of the specific states where such movements appeared.

Regardless of the reasons for their revival in the region, social movements use a more or less predictable set of instruments in their actions. Protests, blockades, public events and live performances, even throwing paint at state institutions are the methods generally used throughout the region. The questions that present themselves are: can social movements innovate? Is democratic innovation compatible with social movements? What does the concept mean in its essence? What modalities of democratic innovation have proven successful? Can democratic innovation be reconciled with the concept of social movements?

Theoretical Approaches to Democratic Innovation

In contrast to the elitist theories of democracy (Schumpeter 1976) that have dominated the academic debate in the second half of the twentieth century, theories of participatory democracy (Pateman 1970) that have started to develop since the 1970s have stressed the importance of wider citizen participation in modern democracies. These theories on participatory and deliberative democracy, including ones on social capital, claim that participation gives citizens a more direct 'say,' individuals and minorities a voice and encourages civic skills and civic virtues, which leads to rational decisions based on public reasoning, increasing support for the process and the outcomes (Michels 2011: 276). They advocate an inclusive approach that seeks mechanisms that will provide platforms for representation of diverse and often marginalized groups (Young 1990, 2000). Authors have even argued for empowerment of excluded groups to challenge the existing institutions (Blaug 2002: 107).

Citizen participation can take many different forms that often go beyond the mainstream institutional setups common in democratic polities. The emergence of a plethora of divergent and creative participative mechanisms around the world has been termed 'democratic innovations' in the literature, denoting "institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process" (Smith 2009: 1).

Citizen involvement outside the electoral process may take various forms depending on whether citizens are approached as individuals and asked for opinions or votes, or collectively as a group. By combining these two criteria, four types of democratic innovation can be distinguished: referenda, participatory policymaking, deliberative surveys and deliberative forums (Michels 2011: 279–280).

Similar types of participation are often described with different concepts. For example, what is considered participatory policymaking can also be referred to as interactive policymaking or governance, citizen governance or citizen participation in decision-making. Deliberative surveys are also referred to as deliberative polls. Deliberative forums can include citizens' juries, citizens' conferences and dialogues, consensus conferences and planning cells. Comparative research has shown that referenda and participatory policymaking have more impact on decisions compared to deliberative surveys and forums (Michels 2011: 281). The former provides instant results and engages more people, while the latter increases the share of opinions and exchange of arguments but takes longer and includes fewer people. The argument of 'participatory democrats' that participation gives citizens a say in decision-making appears to be accurate in the case of referenda and participatory policymaking. Likewise, the emphasis on public reasoning by 'deliberative democrats' applies more frequently to deliberative surveys and forums (Michels 2011: 290).

Constitutional deliberative democracy is a term very often referred to in all cases that aim to involve the general public in the deliberation. It is based on the principle of inclusion, which is meant to motivate the presence and voice of

marginalized social groups, helping to create a mechanism for their effective recognition and representation. In addition, Fung and Wright (2001) have introduced the concept of Empowered Deliberative Democracy, which favors democratic experiments of participation based on "(1) a focus on specific, tangible problems, (2) involvement of ordinary people affected by these problems and officials close to them, and (3) the deliberative development of solutions to these problems" (Fung and Wright 2001: 17). According to these authors, such types of deliberative democracy enhance the practice of practical orientation, bottom-up participation and deliberative solution generation.

The actual involvement of citizens, how they transform public service and how they are themselves transformed by the service are additional aspects that affect democratic innovations. Such involvement of citizens allows the public sector to deliver services differently while at the same time incorporating them into the institutionalized system. This also draws attention to differences between co-production, co-management and co-governance regarding citizen participation (Pestoff and Brandsen 2008: 496).

Bovaird defines the process of co-production (also see Alford 1998; Needham 2006, 2008; Percy 1984; Whitaker 1980) as a "provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers and service users or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions" (Bovaird 2007: 5). This is also highlighted by Pestoff and Brandsen (2008), who emphasize the spirit of reciprocity between the service and the citizen. The process of co-production, in Bovaird's words, not only involves the connection between a provider and a set of users, but it specifically appears when this relationship is supported by community activists and professional staff (Bovaird 2007: 5). Bovairds gives the example of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, a project widely used in the literature as a model of engaging citizens in the policymaking process. For Alford, clients, volunteers and citizens are the three main actors participating in this co-production process, together with government organizations. The relationship of each one of these actors with the public institutions differs. Thus, Alford considers "exchange" a phenomenon deeper than just changing money for a received service: it is an exchange that calls "for new capacities and skills on the part of public organizations and their staff, but it also holds out the promise of better government" (Alford 2002: 51). To develop his argument, Alford explores the academic legacy of Elinor Ostrom (see Ostrom 1996; Ostrom et al. 1978; Parks et al. 1981), who developed the concept of co-production at the end of the 1970s. Her work, in Alford's words, "offered a new way of understanding the roles of citizens and clients in the political economy, which bridged the gap between the market and the state" (Alford 2014: 313).

Exploring further the concept of co-production, Bovaird identifies the main benefits and limitations of the process. In his opinion, one of the main pillars of the co-production process is the relationship developed by both parties, professionals and users, where the two inevitably take risks and are somehow

forced to trust each other. Another benefit is the role played by leaders of community groups, who often mediate between public organizations and individual co-producers, using this position to amplify the views of the latter. On the other hand, however, Bovaird considers that the relationship created among these actors could reduce public accountability by "blurring boundaries between the roles of public, private and voluntary sectors" (Bovaird 2007: 17).

Another extensively explored concept in the literature is that of deliberation in the decision-making process. For authors like Bobbio, deliberation changes depending on the several entry positions of the participants in the process. He highlights different features "depending on whether the dialogue comes about among insiders (experts, politicians, bureaucrats, stakeholders, representatives of interest groups) or among lay citizens" (Bobbio 2010: 3). He concludes that although politicians, militants and activists are not so willing to be helped, the support for the decision-making process is "absolutely necessary." The author recognizes that "not all deliberative processes are equally capable of guiding participants towards a constructive and not manipulated dialogue" and that the best configuration "is that in which participants have a good understanding of the issue but are willing to suspend their judgment" (Bobbio 2010: 7). He summarizes his arguments by underlining the inevitability of negotiation and cooperation processes between citizens and administrations.

Reuchamps and Suiter used the phenomenon of 'mini-publics' (Elstub 2014; Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Smith and Setälä 2018), i.e., small groups of citizens carefully chosen according to different criteria to represent several viewpoints in order to deliberate on a given topic, to explore the changes in deliberative democracy that have made countries such as Iceland and Ireland reform their constitutions toward a more deliberative democracy. The authors take many other empirical cases to draw a broader tendency of a 'constitutional turn' in deliberative democracy in Europe. The scholars agree on several features shared among all the deliberative democracy experiments conducted in Europe:

> [T]hey are based on some form of deliberation among samples of citizens; they aim to foster positive and constructive thinking about solutions (they are not simply protesting movements); they seek genuine debate about policy content; they seek solutions beyond adversarial politics, and they seek to identify common ground.
>
> (Reuchamps and Suiter 2016: 2)

Some other authors, like Michels and De Graaf (2010, 2017), insist specifically on the role of citizens in participatory processes. The authors defend the idea of integrating the citizens in the process at an early stage to increase the support and legitimacy of the policies. As an example of an instrument of citizen participation, Michels and De Graaf take the digipanel held in the Dutch city of Eindhoven: "a citizens' panel on the internet, which allows a permanent group of citizens to be regularly consulted on different policy issues" (Michels and De Graaf 2010: 481–482).

Admitting the pressures that public administrations face from a more demanding public, Bradwell and Marr take a look at the tensions created among the different actors of the new trends in the policymaking process (administrations and citizens, mostly): "between top-down strategy and bottom-up aspirations; between the demands of large-scale services and smaller, localized solutions; and between the new ideas and problems posed by users and the legacy of traditional service delivery" (Bradwell and Marr 2008: 45). Through a survey, the scholars come to the conclusion that we should go beyond "the language and constraints" of the process but also recognize the variation by sectors and territories of the deliberative processes (Bradwell and Marr 2008: 45).

Methodological Considerations

Two issues relating to the design of stakeholder dialogue need elaboration, as they are critical for the methodological implications of constructive conflict. The first issue concerns learning as the aim of stakeholder dialogue; the second issue concerns procedures for stakeholder selection that are congruent with the nature of sustainability issues (Cuppen 2012: 25). Stakeholder dialogue aims to learn through constructive conflict about the properties of the concept of 'diversity' in order to identify it. 'Variety' refers to the number of categories into which the elements can be divided. 'Balance' refers to how the elements are distributed among the categories. 'Disparity' refers to the "degree and nature to which the categories themselves are different from each other" (Cuppen 2012: 28). To portray this puzzle, Cuppen (2012: 33) uses the example of the Biomass Dialogue intended to develop ideas about sustainable biomass chains for the Netherlands and to identify what is needed in order to realize these chains. As he puts it,

> [E]laborating on constructive conflict as a central design issue for stakeholder dialogue on wicked problems, we observe a need for (both theoretical and empirical) research on methods to support the design of stakeholder dialogue. Especially stakeholder selection procedures that are based on the empirical identification of diversity of perspectives require more attention.
>
> (Cuppen 2012: 40)

Although the importance of the first phases of a dialogue (identification of perspectives and stakeholder selection) are vital, they hardly touch on the phase of synthesis of a dialogue. Sometimes, it is relevant (or tempting) to evaluate the quality of dialogue by its outcomes (such as the usefulness of results, the agreement on courses of action and the uptake in actual policymaking). However, significant errors can ensue from a strong focus on outcomes, as this may mean neglect of input to the dialogue. The 'wicked' character of the problems under consideration and the subsequent aim of problem-structuring

warrants a strong focus on input to the dialogue, i.e., bottom-up identification of perspectives and stakeholder selection. Obviously, as a next step, synthesis is an integral part of a dialogue that needs attention as well. Further empirical research can shed light on how synthesis can be attained in a dialogue where diversity is at the core (Cuppen 2012: 41).

The intense focus on the outcome might neglect input or *vice versa*, leading to the question of whether it takes "two to tango" (Osborne and Strokosch 2013). Understanding the principles of co-production of public services can be done by integrating the services management and public administration perspectives. Co-production of public services is the opposite of producing an actual good that is the final product of a process. Production and consumption in such a case are two separate processes, but when it comes to the production of public service, both occur at the same time. Democratic innovations are influenced by co-production based on the input and output game. It is not the provision of a standardized and prepackaged product but rather a value-based interaction. In reality, such elements are more of a continuum than a steady state. Services such as residential care and education are instances where co-production is high because consumption and production take place both at the same point in time and in the same place, with direct face-to-face contact (Osborne and Strokosch 2013: 11).

Implementation of democratic innovations is highly determined by an actual understanding of the process of introducing new habits. The main intentions of co-production are user empowerment and participation. Both are long-term goals of public services, though with only limited achievement. User empowerment is challenged by the abilities of individuals to influence the outcome of public service experience. As such, it is best approached through the mode of consumer co-production (Osborne and Strokosch 2013: 38). Participation by users, on the other hand, is concerned with the role of the service user in taking part in the public service planning process so that the public service system can address their needs more effectively in the future.

Participants in the execution or delivery of public service are as important as the policymaking that leads to solutions. How can deliberative mini-publics as innovation affect policies on controversial issues?

Structured deliberation "takes place in ad hoc mini-publics involving lay citizens in structured discussions on a particular public decision, with the support of professional facilitators who design the processes and lead the discussions" (Ravazzi and Pomatto 2014: 1). The Genoa mini-public arena is one of the examples where the first meetings were open to all the residents, and the participants in the planning workshops were recruited through the 'outreach' method. To be sure, the arena had its flaws, but it produced three key mechanisms:

1 Giving space for expression to committees and associations, it gave legitimation to the process for activists usually hostile to the deliberative approach.

2 Using the outreach method to include citizens during the process, it allowed access to innovative ideas and the emergence of useful 'bridge proposals' to redefine the stakes and to stimulate the formulation of constructive solutions.
3 Making the potential for citizen mobilization visible to institutional authorities, it highlighted the costs (concerning the loss of consensus) of the missed consideration of the citizens' recommendations (Ravazzi and Pomatto 2014: 10).

Properly designing the deliberative mini-public is crucial in reducing the possibility of conflict in the course of sharing unpopular opinions with unknown people. However, when the issues are highly controversial, as in the case of land-use policies, the pressures of the deliberative setting can collide with common cognitive dynamics. "When a conflict is developing, the actors tend to accentuate the common mechanism of categorization, attributing negative prejudices, such as incompetence or opportunism to the people with opposed opinions" (Ravazzi and Pomatto 2014: 13).

Since these types of mini-publics do not usually have the power to make the final decisions by the political authorities binding, understanding how they could improve their capacity to influence policy decisions becomes a crucial matter. The empirical studies that have so far addressed this issue have shown that some factors are relevant in specific cases of participatory and deliberative processes: the existence of an active civil society interested in the topic, a clear commitment by the institutional authorities who are responsible for the final decisions and proper timing of the mini-public, when several options are still available in the decision process (Ravazzi and Pomatto 2014: 16).

Empirical Findings

The Belgian experience with a citizens' summit involving a large number of people inspired many groups of citizens and politicians in the Netherlands to organize a similar event. Although the designs of the G1000s differ, they do share a number of features with all mini-publics. Mini-publics are, first and foremost, characterized by structured deliberation enabled by independent facilitation (Reuchamps and Suiter 2016: 1–2). They are designed with the aim of being deliberative, which means that the focus is on following ideal deliberative procedures; opinion formation and the exchange of arguments are more critical than decision-making. A second key element is the participation of a broadly inclusive and representative subgroup of an affected population. Except for the G1000 in Uden, sortition was used as the selection mechanism to obtain a diverse body of participants.

Based on empirical results derived from different experiments, Alarcón and Font come up with different general conclusions on the deliberative and participative decision-making processes in Southern Europe. In this region, the authors argue, the bottom-up promotion of these institutional practices is not

typical since public institutions have directed most of these processes: "participatory experiences do not start from below: they are mostly commissioned by public authorities that maintain significant control over their development and that, in many cases, carry out these experiences by themselves, mostly using workers from the administrations" (Alarcón and Font 2014: 21). They also draw interesting conclusions regarding the sign of the political forces behind these processes, concluding that "the left is generating participatory mechanisms in municipalities where there is no prior institutionalization to a greater degree than the right, which has tended more to maintain already existing instruments" (Alarcón and Font 2014: 10). The scholars underline the weakness of civil society in the region, which, however, brings greater strength of the participatory over the deliberative tradition.

Brownhill also draws some thoughts on participation models based on his case study: Cowley Road Matters (CRM), a plan in the Oxfordshire County Council for the renovations of roads that included a local organization in the process of deliberation as consultant to the residents and a team of national consultants to design the road. The project shows that the initiative brings the results of "the uneasy coexistence of different modes of governance," highlighting the "tensions between the construction of categories of the public and the mobilization around the complexity of diversity within society" (Brownill 2009: 373). Brownhill concludes that although participatory planning "remains elusive, a focus on the dynamics of governance can contribute to opening up the possibilities for participation while being aware of the limitations" (Brownill 2009: 373).

Font and Blanco have researched the citizen juries in Spain, which consist "of a randomly selected group of people who decide on a given public policy after an exhaustive informative process" (Font and Blanco 2007: 561). After carrying out several interviews, both authors realized that most of the organizers and participants were satisfied with the results of the juries but also recognized that they had held excessively high expectations of them. Font and Blanco also highlight the need for promoting new mechanisms like this in order to create political trust but remark that in order to do so, "these mechanisms need first to gain a wide degree of public acceptance and eliminate some of the problems that still generate reluctance" (Font and Blanco 2007: 584). The authors underline the exceptional nature of these mechanisms, which are "an isolated experience in a context with very limited opportunities for participation" (Font and Blanco 2007: 585). However, despite all these mechanisms found and analyzed in many countries around the globe, we are still far from generalizing these deliberative and participating processes in the EU. According to the 2013 Eurobarometer on the degree of engagement of European citizens in participatory democracy, only 18% of respondents had taken part in a public debate at a local or regional level, a figure which dropped to 4% and 1% in the cases of the national or EU level, respectively. On the other hand, some 34% of the respondents signed online petitions, and 28% shared their concerns on public issues on social media (Eurobarometer 2013: 27).

Finally, recent research in Southeast Europe has shed light on the impact of mini-publics in hybrid regimes (Fiket and Đorđević 2022). In what constitutes a pioneering effort for the Western Balkan region, in 2021, two citizens assemblies were organized in Serbia, tackling the issues of traffic and pedestrian zones in Belgrade and air pollution in the city of Valjevo. The findings of the corresponding analysis of these examples of mini-publics indicate that while such venues of participatory democracy have been able to empower ordinary citizen participation, raise awareness and increase their knowledge and understanding of the discussed problems (Đorđević and Vasiljević 2022; Janković 2022), their impact on citizens' democratic commitments, political capacities and political participation has been limited (Fiket, Ilić and Pudar Draško 2022).

In sum, research has pointed toward several factors that can limit the success of democratic innovations. Most of the barriers are related to the design of the instruments for deliberation. In many cases, there are structural problems with the representation of citizens, as most forums of citizen participation tend to be overrepresented by people who are wealthy, well-educated and already civically and politically engaged (Michels and de Graaf 2017). In this sense, the question that arises is of citizens' competences, skills and political judgment (Smith 2009), as well as the dilemma concerning resource deficits that often severely limit the range and the quality of the respective democratic innovations (Smith 2005). Finally, by definition, external factors play a crucial role since, in many cases, the variation in the effectiveness of democratic innovations is dependent on political commitment by state public authorities (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005; Beierle and Konisky 2000).

Conclusion

Both social movements and democratic innovations in modern societies emerge as a reaction to the deficits of representative democracy to provide a wider platform for the inclusion of a diversity of interests and values of common people. However, the two phenomena also operate along two divergent paths. While the *modus operandi* of social movements has been the accumulation and expression of protest energy in reference to failing institutional designs of democracy, innovative democratic practices seek (*quasi-*) institutional mechanisms to fill the gap in democratic participation by promoting democratization from below. This tension has also been evident in scholarly research where the two disciplines have been reluctant to engage in interdisciplinary endeavors. The lack of interaction is a reflection of a wider separation in the literature on social movements and civil society in general (della Porta 2014b), which emphasizes the contrast between a social movement research agenda focusing on the role of conflict, grassroots contention and extra-institutional deliberation on the one hand, and civil society research agenda, on the other, which favors a more structured, moderated and peaceful platform for democratic participation based on co-optation and cooperation.

However, empirical examples demonstrate that innovative democratic practices can be utilized by social movements as a platform for the realization of their policy demands. The much-discussed case of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre is often used as a reference point (della Porta 2013: 182) for a democratic innovation that successfully established participatory bodies that are "both effect and cause of a wider political mobilization that enabled groups to participate who had not participated before, and, importantly, those bodies have much wider powers than the more policy-specific bodies considered in the US cases" (Cohen and Rogers 2003: 251). In this sense, more emphasis should be put on notions of complementarity between the functions of social movements and democratic innovations. While social movements serve as platforms for raising voices against the exclusion of divergent and discontent social groups from the political processes, innovative democratic practices can serve as bottom-up platforms for channeling those voices into the policymaking institutional arenas.

The analysis of the literature presented in this chapter raises several questions of interest for a wider research agenda of the linkage between social movements and democratic innovation: are there connecting points between social movements, active citizenship and democratic innovation? How can democratic innovation contribute to participatory democracy? Are social movements compatible with the concept of democratic innovation? Further comparative research should aim to provide comprehensive answers to some of these questions.

Notes

1 Isin (2009: 381) even proposes replacing the term 'active citizens' with 'activist citizens' since "activist citizens engage in writing scripts and creating the scene, active citizens follow scripts and participate in scenes that are already created. While activist citizens are creative, active citizens are not."

2 Glover proposes three dimensions of active citizenship (see in Scheithauer 2016: 19):

> ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship, and educative citizenship. Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship. The personal sacrifices that are made aid some public benefit and are hence ultimately also enjoyed by the person who sacrifices. Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices and institutions. The concept involves the belief that every individual plays an assortment of roles, and that this form of citizenship enables the individual to integrate their various roles, and to immerse themselves into the community, hence causing them to have a greater appreciation of the collective. In addition, this stance holds that one needs an understanding of the personal interests of members of the wider community as well if they are to truly act as members of the public, and hence, the democratic activity that is associated with citizenship aids such an understanding as well. However, educative citizenship (Dagger 1997) refers to the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship.

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3 Participation, Responsiveness, Interaction

The Importance of Epistemic Checks and Balances for the Revitalization of Democratic Institutions

Andrija Šoć

The Need for Participation

The current state of democracy on both the local and global levels reflects deep polarization,[1] a lack of fundamental political trust in the government (McCoy, Rahman and Somer 2018)[2] and political apathy (Gray 2021), which threatens to destabilize strong democracies and push weak democracies toward autocracy (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019).[3] As V-Dem's recent *Democracy Report* states,

> The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 is down to a low point not registered since 1989. From this perspective, the last ten years set the world back 32 years. The far-reaching expansion of rights and freedoms around the world over that period has been eradicated.
>
> (Boese et al. 2022: 12)

The number of liberal democracies has fallen, and the number of both electoral and closed autocracies is on the rise.[4] As the authors of the report note, "the last 30 years of democratic advances are now eradicated" (Boese et al. 2022: 6). This democratic backslide correlates to a large increase of people living in autocratizing societies – from 5% in 2011 to 36% in 2021 (Boese et al. 2022: 9). Southeast Europe has followed that trend, and Serbia, in particular, has had a sharp decline in that period, as measured by V-Dem's 'Liberal Democracy Index' (LDI). Namely, in 2011, LDI in Serbia was slightly above 0.50 and fell below 0.25 in 2021 (Boese et al. 2022: 14).

The V-Dem researchers analyze the level of democratic governance by looking at six key parameters. The parameters whose decline the report measures are rule of law, judicial constraints, legislative constraints, clean elections, freedom of association and freedom of expression. Going slightly beyond the report itself, we could further classify these parameters into two different groups. The first three regard the division of power between different branches of

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government: the rule of law relates to how the executive and judicial branches interact, while judicial constraints pertain to how the legislative and judicial branches interact. The legislative constraints commonly refer to how the legislative and executive branches affect each other's work. A typical democratic government upholds mutual independence between three branches. In autocratic countries, or in countries that are moving toward autocracy, the clear lines between the respective domains of each branch begin to blur (Boese et al. 2022: 21, fig. 12).[5]

The second group of parameters is even more pertinent to the topic of this chapter, as they concern citizen participation. Now, whether elections are clean is not entirely up to the citizens who vote (Bjornlund 2004; Bunce and Wolchik 2010), but the decline in that regard is something that effectively limits the impact of participatory mechanisms. An even broader set of negative consequences for citizen participation comes from the decline of the final two parameters – freedom of expression and freedom of association. Beyond voting every few years, there are a number of different participative strategies citizens can employ in order to influence public policy or shed light on different societal challenges.[6] If association and expression are endangered, then these strategies become either far less effective or impossible to practice altogether.

As we can see from the previous discussion and the V-Dem report, citizen participation is in direct relation to the state of democracy in a country. As autocracies strengthen and democracies weaken, ordinary citizens tend to become disillusioned, discouraged or even completely neglected (either legislatively or by force). Norris (2022: 873), for instance, suggests that "levels of participation generally tend to be lower in authoritarian than in democratic states, with the disparities weaker in electoral turnout, moderate in civic and online activism, and strongest in protest activism." From this, one might be inclined to conclude that only if the autocratization trend is reversed and democracy strengthened can the participative elements start to feature more prominently in relations between citizens and their government.[7] In this chapter, however, I explore how, quite the contrary, democracy cannot be strengthened without participative elements first becoming a more prominent element in every facet of political life. I will first discuss how the need for participation arises from such data, followed by a discussion of the problems generally posed before different models of participation. Then, I would like to propose an extended model that features not just the participation of citizens as a prominent parameter but also tracks responsiveness (both civic and governmental) and interaction between citizens and their elected representatives.[8] Since participation is especially important in the face of significant societal challenges, in the final section, I will apply this model of participation to particular challenges that have recently arisen in Serbia. I will then try to show how such a model of participation can function in two senses. First, we can use it as a diagnostic tool in determining the locus of democratic backsliding within a particular domain where the issue appears. Second, it can function as the operational tool that helps us set up different participatory innovations within a political

system, with the realistic goal of helping different political stakeholders overcome the challenges at hand.

I argue that without a strong participative element, there cannot be a strong democracy, nor can the trend of autocratization be stopped other than from within – that is, by participating citizens themselves. This immediately raises two questions: the first concerns the efficacy of participation, while the second concerns the forms of participation. These issues are addressed in turn in the following sections of the chapter.

Challenges to Participation

There are different ways in which participation is discussed in the literature. It is mentioned in relation to deliberative models, either in convergence or in opposition to them.[9] It is also contrasted with the Schumpeterian empirical views of democracy.[10] A discussion on civic participation involves the topics of democratic elitism, public policy influence, the Downsian economic model of democracy, voting, mini-publics and more.[11] In what follows, I will try to illustrate how one particular approach may help us get to the core of what civic participation means, how it is related to the vitality of democracies and how it can serve as one possible indicator of the democratic health of a country – Isaiah Berlin's account of positive and negative liberty.

In his famous paper "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin (1969) outlines the negative concept, understood as 'non-interference' or 'freedom from,' and the positive concept or 'freedom to':

> The desire to be governed by myself, or at any rate to participate in the process by which my life is to be controlled, may be as deep a wish as that of a free area for action, and perhaps historically older. But it is not a desire for the same thing. So different it is, indeed, as to have led in the end to the great clash of ideologies that dominates our world. For it is this – the "positive" conception of liberty: not freedom from, but freedom to – to lead one prescribed form of life – which the adherents of the "negative" notion represent as being, at times, no better than a specious disguise for brutal tyranny.
>
> (Berlin 1969: 22)

Leaving aside the implications of connecting positive freedom to tyranny or autocracy, we can derive from Berlin's discussion a conceptual framework useful for a closer look at the notion of participation. Let us begin with the axiom that the crucial characteristics of democracy are freedom and equality. We might term this 'the evaluative minimum.' In a negative sense, a citizen is free from negative interference by either members of its elective government or by other citizens. Likewise, equality entails the treatment of a citizen in a way that is not inconsistent with how any other citizen is treated before the law or with regard to different rights and obligations. Adhering to the evaluative minimum

is necessary in a genuinely democratic system; it is, however, far from sufficient. Something over and above this minimum is needed, and it is captured by the need for participation. When citizens reflect on whether to participate, they, in effect, express their preference for acting in a way that goes beyond these negative precepts. Even an act of voting – certainly a minimal form of participation – is a conscious expression of a preference that goes beyond the evaluative minimum. That is, most elections in democratic countries do not require citizens to choose between freedom and oppression or between equality and inequality. Electoral participation thus aims to accomplish something more than the upholding of negative freedom – it aims at something positive. In a Berlinian sense, participation in the form of voting revolves around a citizen's 'freedom to' – freedom to vote for a certain set of policies, for instance.

Viewed from this perspective, participative elements of a democratic country can be further understood in terms of civic motivation for acquiring certain positive freedoms that complement their democratically given negative freedoms. Among different motivational components of citizens' participation, we can emphasize two important aims: first, achieving a specific goal, and second, expressing the capacity to effect at least some change on any political level within a democratic state (Hooghe 2022: 218).[12] We mentioned voting as a minimal form of participation, but the Berlinian framework helps us understand why it is that citizens do feel the need to act beyond the confines of a voting booth. Namely, it is not enough to simply affect policy in an indirect sense by electing representatives who may or may not work toward goals we find important. Ekman and Amnå (2012: 285), for example, suggest that "for a long time, voting was perceived as the primary way for a citizen to make his or her voice heard in the political system." Rather, citizens want to be free to directly voice their suggestions, demands and concerns in a forum that ensures that they are heard. As Giugni and Grasso (2022a: 4) note,

> Initial definitions emphasizing – and often limited to – the more institutionalized kinds of behaviors – have progressively left space to broader views encompassing extra-institutional forms as well as, more recently, participation that takes place in one's everyday life, reflecting a shift from "dutiful citizens" mostly acting through voting to "engaged citizens" more directly involved in politics.

In this broader sense, the positive expression of freedom through participation may be divided into two groups: constructive participation, which involves mini-publics, citizen budgets, assemblies, community work and the like, and reactive participation, which includes labor struggles, strikes and protests (we will return to this form of participation in the fourth section of this chapter). Reactive participation is akin to Ekman and Amnå's (2012: 295) classification of activism.[13] It also falls under the same category as 'protest participation,' discussed by Giugni and Grasso (2022b: 396). Constructive participation would

encompass different subcategories, as provided by Ekman and Amnå in their comprehensive typology, some of which I mentioned earlier. However, for the purposes of this text, dividing forms of participation into the two broad categories I term 'constructive' and 'reactive' is particularly useful because it helps us position civic participation in relation to the degree of government responsiveness. Thus, constructive participation would occur when citizens expect the government to engage in positive action with respect to the topic of participation. On the other hand, reactive participation occurs once citizens perceive that other, constructive modes of participation have been exhausted or are for some reason impossible to use. Before we get to that more concrete issue, let us deal with several criticisms of participative models. These criticisms are based on two issues: the complexity of participation and the capacity for participation.

The claim in the first criticism is that the number of people and the complexity of democratic systems related to decision-making render effective participation almost impossible.[14] One of the examples of this issue can be found in the contrast between Fishkin's and Lafont's views of deliberative mini-publics.[15] While Fishkin says that his solution – 'microcosmic deliberation' (Fishkin 2009: 81; Lafont 2019: 106) – would be 'elaborate and expensive' (Fishkin 2020: 56), but not impossible, for Lafont, leaving a majority of the public out, is the problem rather than the solution. It is a 'shortcut' based on 'blind deference' (Lafont 2019: 111). On the other hand, Lafont's own proposal is that instead of empowering mini-public's participants, the citizenry could use mini-publics to empower themselves[16] (Lafont 2019: 111). However, for Fishkin, there is still a lack of a viable model that could elaborate on how such a proposal would be even theoretically possible (Fishkin 2020: 62).

The second criticism, closely related to the first, is that the knowledge required for making the right decisions in complex systems requires not only political acumen but also expertise and training.[17] It is, according to this objection, unlikely that citizens can provide meaningful contributions on a regular basis or that they would even be interested in doing so consistently. As Elstub (2018: 196) illustrates, both Warren (1996) and Cohen (2009) take note of different issues with civic participation, which include the likely withdrawal of citizens into 'cynical apathy' due to the "burdensome and inefficient" decision-making (Warren 1996: 243), as well as the problem of "social complexity and scale" (Cohen 2009: 257). As Elstub adds, the latter issue suggests that "improving deliberative quality requires reducing political participation to ensure that those who are deliberating are insulated from public pressures and demands" (2018: 196).[18]

There is also a third issue, which pertains not to the viability of implementing participative models but to the dangers of manipulative implementation. Namely, there is a danger that governments in countries that are autocratic or only weakly democratic may provide an illusion of citizen participation while really removing decision-making from the hands of citizens. Thus, Arnstein (1969) discusses the problem of citizens being asked to express their policy preferences, but the process leads to no tangible effects. This may lead to

disillusionment, but an even more pernicious form of manipulation occurs when citizens are asked to decide on some particular issue that they may find at least mildly consequential (say, to name a street or a bridge), but the issue itself being of such little actual consequence that the participative energy is in effect not being used effectively and initial motivation for participating in truly significant decision-making starts to erode.[19]

Even though these issues are serious enough, a Berlinian framework allows us to mention one more danger, as it stems from an analogy with Berlin's view of a positive conception of freedom. Let us first take a look at his position:

> But the "positive" conception of freedom as self-mastery, with its suggestion of a man divided against himself, has, in fact, and as a matter of history, of doctrine and of practice, lent itself more easily to this splitting of personality into two: the transcendent, dominant controller, and the empirical bundle of desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel. It is this historical fact that has been influential. This demonstrates (if demonstration of so obvious a truth is needed) that conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes a self, a person, a man. Enough manipulation with the definition of man, and freedom can be made to mean whatever the manipulator wishes. Recent history has made it only too clear that the issue is not merely academic.
>
> (Berlin 1969: 25)

As we can see, his main worry is the diminished autonomy of the civic subject. When one chooses something freely in order to achieve a particular purpose, there is a danger of a split occurring, in which something good for that subject is also good for other subjects but is not chosen by them (Berlin 1969). The gap arises between what a subject actually chooses and what is good for it, which leaves it open for someone else to choose that supposedly good thing in the name of the subject. Thus, a positive conception of freedom may easily lead to coercion,[20] oppression or interference, all for the sake of some supposed good. Berlin does emphasize that even negative freedom is vulnerable in this sense, albeit not as overtly or as frequently as positive freedom.

The four problems we mentioned earlier (we can term them, respectively, complexity, capacity, manipulation and coercion) might seem to suggest that it is overly ambitious to expect participative democracy to be viable and efficacious. Contrary to this, I will claim that to be successful, an operational model of participative democracy needs to be comprehensive and robust. Precisely because civic participation is closely tied to how citizens perceive their freedom within a democratic society, living in a genuine democracy means having the ability and opportunity to effectively participate in it. Failure in any of the four aspects is a democratic failure not just of citizens themselves but of the state in which they live. It is not surprising, then, that it is the autocratic and the weakly democratic states in which participation tends to be less prominent and citizens less empowered to become equal political stakeholders. Moreover, in such cases, what we term 'reactive' participation becomes more prominent than in democratic states.[21]

Thus, the measure of democratic vitality will need to be closely tracked by effective participation. But more than achieving this goal, the system of governance must be composed of additional features: government responsiveness and mutual interaction between the representative government and the citizens represented. In the next section, I discuss these features in turn.

Beyond Participation: Responsiveness and Interaction

When citizens participate, they fulfill their civic capacities within the democratic framework they inhabit. For citizens to participate effectively, several conditions need to be met. First, the methods of participation need to be well-defined. Second, the substance of participation needs to contain both democratic competence and relevant expertise. Third, the government needs to be receptive to the outcomes of such participation. If any of these conditions are not satisfied, the democratic potential for participation will be diminished. But, a critic will now ask, if a society is highly complex, if the relevant issues have become so multifaceted that they require a variety of experts, then how can participation aim at anything other than the forums of experts discussing policy issues outside of the view and input of the general public?[22]

That there are numerous difficulties in implementing broad and effective participation is clear enough. But it is at least equally clear that a democracy cannot properly function without efficient civic participation. Part of the reason has to do precisely with how citizens' influence represents the demand for freedom (both positive and negative). Equally importantly, participation enables citizens to exert pressure on governments to respect democratic ideals. We can expound upon that point by drawing attention to the famous Hamiltonian and Madisonian concept of a system of institutional checks and balances (Hamilton, Madison and Jay 1961 [1788]: 323).[23]

James Madison's and Alexander Hamilton's notion of checks and balances is primarily aimed at preventing usurpation of power and encroachment between different branches of government. Moreover, it serves as a protection of both the majority opinion from the dangers of autocratic imposition (something reviled by the revolutionary United States) and the minority view from majoritarian tyranny. The simple idea behind this system of institutional separation between different branches of government is that no single branch, no more than any single individual, ought to simultaneously have too much power and be without any external limitations to it. How does this idea translate into our account of the requirements for participation?

By way of an analogy, we can say that just as institutional power must be kept in check, epistemic capacity for understanding relevant societal issues and for judging the right course of political action must be kept in check, as well as strike a balance between citizens and their elected government. Contrary to the intuition behind the idea of expert rule, epistemic lopsidedness may tend to promote unchecked expression of cognitive fallibility, and experts are by no means immune to it. If, on the other hand, the public expresses its familiarity with key policy issues, then the elected officials or their appointed experts will

need to respect and respond to it in kind. For instance, when the issue of climate change arises, experts naturally have the upper hand compared to both the government and the public, but the government is sometimes keen to stifle a particular climate policy if it turns out to be overly expensive. In another case, it might promote a green policy due to extra-scientific reasons (say, because it is popular among the uninformed electorate).

Such a basis for decision-making pushes a democratic state toward populism and prevents an autocratic populist state from becoming democratic. Come election time, who will the voters vote for – those who wanted to institute expensive policies or those who were 'merely listening to the people'? As we can see, this is exactly why democratic participation that is reduced to periodical voting is not genuinely conducive to democratic vitality, even though voting is a prerequisite for democracy.

The way to amend such a cluster of scenarios is, as suggested, analogous to the system of checks and balances. Since societal issues tend to increase in complexity, and there is ever more data to be gathered, citizens themselves must make inroads toward familiarizing themselves with key issues. This is where civic participation comes into play. By entering the political arena via mini-publics, citizen assemblies, juries, local council meetings, etc., citizens can start to learn about key aspects of different problems their society faces to a greater degree and more actively than if they engage in following various news outlets.[24] Whether the topic at hand is the economy, climate change, health, agriculture, civil rights or some other prominent sphere of life, the overt and sufficiently frequent participation would demonstrate to the elected government that the electorate is fundamentally interested in helping to resolve key challenges and at least somewhat informed as to how this can and cannot be done.[25]

Moreover, by demonstrating that they are basically informed, the participating citizens are effectively demanding that the government and its appointed experts heed the public interest and limit their own tendencies to impose epistemically unjustified policies. Thus, if a climate policy is genuinely bad for society because it is both expensive and ineffective, no government would risk imposing it, lest they lose the next election due to the knowing public seeing through any populist messaging. If this is the case, we can simultaneously resolve two of the four objections to participatory models of democracy – the complexity and the capacity objections. Namely, such models correctly capture the need for citizens to both be able to and want to participate effectively and consistently. The empirical observation that this is something that is all too scarce across democratic societies need not preclude attempts to improve such a state of affairs. Conceptually, if participation is the prerequisite for a vital democratic society, then the empirical issue at hand is what to do to create more favorable conditions for participation (from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives).

The answer to this question lies in going beyond the demand for mere participation since the key complement to civic participation is government

responsiveness. Without it, participation would perhaps reflect public interest but would not be genuinely effective. And without government responsiveness, a country is far from democratically vital – indeed, it is in grave danger of sliding toward autocracy.

As is usually discussed in the literature, both the epistemic capacity and government responsiveness strongly correlate, among other variables, with higher income and lower income inequality.[26] As Erikson notes,

> An important puzzle is why the poor are so ineffectual politically. The poor dilute their political influence by patterns of nonvoting and political inattention. As we have seen, some studies that attempt to measure the relative influence of income groups go further and claim that the influence of the poor is about zero.
>
> (Erikson 2015: 27)

If the poor are genuinely unwilling to politically participate, then government responsiveness will be low. That does not bode well for the democratic capacities of a poor country, which is what we also seem to observe empirically when correlating the wealth of countries with their levels of democratization. Simply put, rich countries tend to be more democratic; poor countries tend to be more autocratic.

However, there is a curious simplification at the root of this view. Namely, the states in which the poor represent a significant part of the population are also the states in which they constitute most of the electorate. If a government wants to stay in power, it has to exert some sort of power against its constituents. However, this can lead, and has led, to overt and violent political struggle. Revolutions across Eastern Europe in the 1980s and after were motivated at least to some degree by the precarious economic situation. Learning from this experience, current autocratic (or weakly democratic) governments have increased their support for the poor while at the same time doing fairly little to genuinely bring them out of poverty. However, in this scenario, the poor do, at least ostensibly, have some political leverage and may even feel that they are being 'taken care of.'[27] On the other hand, if a country is very rich and only a minority is poor, then the government may seem to have little motivation to do too much about it, as the poor do not represent a significant part of the electorate. The government's responsiveness to the needs of the poor, then, might be completely reversed: a populist autocratic government may appear to listen to the people, while a democratic government may seem insufficiently interested in bringing a vast minority out of poverty.[28] This is only one possibility, and we can immediately see how there can be different ways in which poverty and responsiveness correlate. Regardless of those correlations, it seems that the economic status is not sufficiently reliable nor robust to explain government responsiveness.

In fact, the discussion of government responsiveness in connection to its democratic vitality must be brought to the normative level. Just as citizen

participation reflects the interests of the public for decision- and policymaking, so too does government responsiveness need to track the participative performance of citizens. This is what ought to be the case if democracy is to be genuinely vital.[29] But this is still not enough. Responsiveness needs to be present in both directions: governments (or majority political stakeholders in general) need to be responsive to the views of citizens, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other relevant actors, and there also must exist responsiveness to the government's policy proposals. In the latter case, the measure of vitality is not merely whether official policy proposals are responded to positively but whether they are responded to at all – i.e., the key measurement of democratic vitality is civic political interest in what elected officials do and how they act. Thus, another key element emerges from combining participation and responsiveness: democratic interaction. In a sense that will soon be elaborated, a genuinely vital democracy is an interactive democracy. It is, in other words, a dynamic system of mutual actions and responses that reflects both the citizens' capacity for exerting informed pressure on governments and the government's recognition that such pressure leads to better policymaking. In this way, democracy becomes a partnership between the government and the people.

Moreover, this partnership is constantly reinforced by not relying only on the periodical examination of the public's political mood at the elections but on a continuous mutual engagement. Thus, genuine democratic interaction can help us resolve the other two objections to the participative model – manipulation and coercion – since the epistemically competent and participatively experienced electorate will see through and punish the populist moves by its government, as well as any attempt to institute spurious forms of participation. As suggested earlier, this may easily lead to reactive participation, reflected in strikes, protests and, in the last stages of a broken political system, revolutions. To give a perhaps overly crude but fundamentally plausible explanation, reactive, even forceful participation only happens in systems where governments are nonresponsive, manipulative, coercive and one-sided in their actions toward the electorate. Such a system, as is immediately clear, is the farthest from being democratically vital. To better illustrate this point, in the concluding section, I will explore one example of a demand for government responsiveness, which was, on the surface, successful but nevertheless reflected a deep disagreement between key political actors, thus revealing all the dangers of populism and unresponsiveness.[30]

Participation in Action: The Case of Proposed Lithium Mining in Serbia

In short, if we wish to successfully apply the participatory model of democracy, we need to extend it beyond demands for mere participation. The four objections against such a model (complexity, capacity, manipulation and coercion) can be successfully answered if the extended model includes responsiveness and interaction as its key components. In addition, we can successfully track

whether a system is democratically vital and robust or whether it is fragile and in danger of sliding toward autocracy. In this concluding section, I will sketch one example of how the three elements of the extended model – participation, responsiveness and interaction – can be used to diagnose the relationship between citizens and their representatives, setting it on the democracy–autocracy continuum. The example is that of the proposed lithium mining operation in Serbia.

On the surface, the proposal in question is the product of a fairly simple policy decision. On the one hand, a well-known international mining company, 'Rio Tinto,' wishes to exploit a newly discovered source of lithium in Serbia from a mineral named 'Jadarite' (after the Jadar River). The arrival of such a company in the fairly poor region of western Serbia seems to offer a prospect of an influx of resources, which would raise the region's and the country's gross domestic product (GDP).[31] In the 25 years since lithium deposits were first scouted, and especially since 2004 when Jadarite was discovered, there seemed to be no particular impediment to opening a mine in the region. However, the issue has been complicated by emphasis on potential environmental hazards posed by mining lithium in the area.[32]

The key environmental concern pertains to the way lithium is extracted from 'Jadarite.' One of the most problematic consequences of the process 'Rio Tinto' proposed would create, according to environmental experts and organizations, was a large amount of waste, which would end up in the Jadar River.[33] Aside from contaminating the water and endangering underground water supplies, flooding around the river basin would also contaminate fertile soil in the region, rendering it unarable and even potentially uninhabitable for generations. Once numerous analyses along these lines were published, people both in the Jadar River region but also throughout Serbia (most notably in Belgrade) began to protest, in an organized manner unseen in the previous ten years, against the government's decision to issue a mining license to Rio Tinto.[34] The government representatives seemed surprised by this development, first trying to dismiss or minimize the complaints and later even reacting aggressively to the escalating round of protests. However, as the demonstrations went on, the government seemed to soften its stance before finally rescinding Rio Tinto's mining permit in January of 2022.[35]

How might we analyze such a development in terms of the extended model of participation? For one thing, the diachronic component of the issue features both attempts by experts and environmental organizations to enter into discussion with the government and the subsequent escalation of resistance to the problematic policy proposal. In that regard, we can recognize both the phase of constructive and the phase of reactive participation taking turns being prominent in the public sphere. That the government initially reacted only to the latter shows a lack of genuine interaction with the rest of society. A more simplified model that looks only at the level of participation and tries to correlate a governmental response to it might find that democratic processes, at least on some level, worked to make society more, rather than less vital. After all,

conflicts of this nature are to be expected in democratic systems. However, how they are resolved is what marks the vitality of such a system, and to diagnose that, we need a more comprehensive model. Such a model of participation, with its focus on the epistemic component of participation, can provide an accurate and comprehensive assessment of this sort of contentious relationship between citizens and their representatives.

We can see that citizens were consistently motivated to participate in the struggle to stop the mining project. That the form of participation was mostly protesting suggests a lack of government responsiveness. Moreover, even months later, when the issue was only sporadically mentioned, there was confusion about whether the government's action in January meant a permanent ban on lithium mining or merely a temporary delay brought about primarily by the desire to placate the protests and reduce negative coverage before the upcoming elections.[36] The proposed model, applied to such a situation, would provide a comprehensive analysis of the events by tracking not just levels of civic participation but also responsiveness (both governmental and civic) and genuine interaction between conflicting sides. The democratic vitality of government institutions does not appear to be particularly high and suggests only a politically motivated reaction rather than democratically motivated action regarding issues that provoke public outcry and dissatisfaction.[37] While there was some form of government responsiveness in that there were talks between representatives of the state and protesters, another component of the extended model – the existence of epistemic checks and balances – reveals the depth of the problem.

The issue of lithium mining revealed that there are concerns regarding information sharing between the government and the public. The issue itself was initially presented in terms of a cost/benefit analysis: billions of Euros that 'Rio Tinto' would first invest in the mine and then pay in the form of mining rent to Serbia were portrayed as a significant windfall and a major factor in the growth of GDP and Serbia's economic development.[38] The true numbers were not made readily transparent, nor was there a comprehensive economic analysis of the project. On the other hand, the official environmental study has still not been conducted, and aside from negative prognoses of the environmental effects of such a mine on or adjacent arable land or comparative analysis of environmental effects of similar mines elsewhere in the world,[39] we still do not know the exact potential effects of setting up a lithium mining operation in this particular region. This means that what the government knows and what the citizens know or can justifiably believe is still limited.

Thus, as mentioned, without equal epistemic footing, there can be no genuine, productive information exchange between all parties involved. Accordingly, in its current state, the dilemma seems to be more related to the broader political climate in Serbia rather than to the complex interplay between economic and environmental aspects of the mining (which require independent expert analysis of agricultural, ecological, health and other factors). The diagnostic use of the extended model shows, thus, that democracy in Serbia lacks

genuine vitality and that superficial compromises belie fundamental policy divisions rooted in a lack of expert analysis and policy-based discussions. We can further see that this also correlates with the decrease of V-Dem's LDI, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. This leads us to two preliminary conclusions and points to further avenues of research.

First, the vitality of a democratic system is, like democracy itself, multidimensional. Any mismatch between the level of participation and the responsiveness or interaction at the civic or institutional levels is bound to produce political instability.[40] The true goal of participation and responsiveness is fruitful interaction between the citizens and the government. However, if the interaction is forced by protests, then one wonders to what degree it is genuine and how reliable it is. If a system only responds to overt political pressure, the responses are certainly less than genuine, and democracy is less than ideally positioned to fulfill its normative promise. To see exactly how these factors correspond with each other, more empirical research needs to be done – that is, further case studies and different complex political scenarios need examining in order to robustly correlate them to measurements pertaining to how a country is ranked on a democracy–autocracy spectrum.[41]

Second, in an optimal scenario, governments would not allow for societal issues to reach the level of protest or reactive participation but would nurture dialogue by encouraging what we called earlier 'constructive participation.' This pertains not just to the diagnostic but to the constructive dimension of the extended model of participation. In other words, the model can point not only to the depth of a problem but also to how one can begin to work toward a solution. Primarily, by calling for the establishment of mutual checks and balances between the civic sector and the government, it can help provide concrete reasoning for citizens themselves to become better informed and more robustly organized, starting at the local level.

Additionally, by emphasizing the dimensions of responsiveness and interaction, it can help us measure democratic processes and their vitality in terms of the levels of participation. The fact that citizens have shown willingness to learn about important societal problems and elicit favorable responses from the state presents one concrete reason for optimism regarding prospects of civic participation, even in autocratizing states or, more generally, states with low LDI.[42] It also helps resolve the four key objections against participation as a democratic mechanism (complexity, capacity, manipulation and coercion). Accordingly, one way to genuinely avoid any democratic mismatch between citizens and their representatives would be for major political stakeholders to promote a system of epistemic checks and balances, paving the way for fruitful interaction.

This makes different participatory innovations, such as mini-publics, local civic assemblies and citizen juries, paramount in countries that are in danger of a democratic backslide or are currently autocratizing and have low LDI. With the increased pro-democratic activity of different civic stakeholders, such as citizens themselves, experts, independent NGOs and others, as well as the

increased expertise in areas relevant to policy-based decisions, the government response (and responsiveness), as well as expertise, would also increase. This does not need to yield agreement in all cases, but, crucially, such a strong demand is not necessary. The key feature of a stable and vital democracy is not that everyone thinks the same. It is that everyone is the same in the opportunity to think, be heard and act.

Notes

1 See, e.g., Bosco and Verney (2023), or Somer, McCoy and Russell (2021).
2 I discuss the problem of trust (both in institutional and interpersonal contexts) in Šoć (2019).
3 The authors who perhaps most directly deal with these issues explore it in terms of 'democratic backsliding.' See, e.g., Bermeo (2016), Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg (2017), Skaaning (2020) and Waldner and Lust (2018).
4 As the report states, liberal democracies are home to merely 13% of the world population, whereas two forms of autocracy are home to the staggering 70% of the world population. The report can be accessed at https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf. See also Boese and Wilson (2022).
5 A useful overview of what the authors call 'the third wave of autocratization' can be found in Lührmann and Lindberg (2019).
6 A comprehensive overview of such strategies can be found in part IV of Giugni and Grasso (2022b).
7 See comparative analyses in, e.g., Norris (2022) and Dalton (2022).
8 In order to clarify the use of the term 'extended' in this chapter, I will note first that this model being extended in contrast to other models of participation is not to suggest that participation is not described in terms of mutual interaction between citizens and the government. Rather, it is to emphasize that on the surface, the fact that citizens do participate in different initiatives does not always include the interactive element and can even reflect the absence of genuine interaction, as I will discuss in the second part of the chapter. Second, we should bear in mind that this can be especially the case in countries where democratic systems are not strong or vital. Because of that, it is precisely in terms of restoring the vitality of democratic systems (or understanding how to reduce autocratization or transform autocratic societies into democratic societies) that it is important to first distinguish elements of participation, responsiveness and interaction, and then help make these elements part of an actionable model of democracy.
9 See, for instance, Floridia (2014) and Böker and Elstub (2015) for accounts that discuss the convergence affirmatively. Warren (1996) and Pateman (2012) are among the authors who discuss it negatively.
10 Among the classical sources are Schumpeter (1942) and Berelson (1952).
11 See, for instance, Elstub (2014).
12 For an extensive typology, see Ekman and Amnå (2012: 295). As Hooghe (2022: 218) notes, this type of analysis is commonly performed by rationalist views of motivation (see, e.g., Franzese 2013). As Hooghe (2022: 219–220) further elaborates, there are debates as to the extent of the applicability of rationalist view of motivation and the questions of how it pertains to different definitions of instrumental rationality. However, on a theoretical level, the first motive would have a cognitive dimension (as it involves rational analysis of what one's goal is and what are the ends to best achieve it), whereas the second would have an expressive dimension (because the very fact of participating in some discussion would go toward a citizen's desire to show that they are able or that they are not afraid to do so). For

an extensive discussion on different dimensions of motivational component of participation, see Ackermann (2022).

13 Ekman and Amnå further divide activism (which is one mode of what they call 'manifest political participation') into legal and illegal. For this chapter, however, this distinction is not of great significance.

14 For a more optimistic version of this objection see, for instance, Landa and Pevnick (2020). A classical version of this objection can be found in Plato's *Republic*. A modern version of this view can be found, most famously, in Schumpeter (1942) and Downs (1957). For a contrasting view, see Vitale (2006) and Pateman (2012).

15 See, esp., Fishkin (2009, 2018, 2020) and Lafont (2017, 2019).

16 Lafont lays out her case in detail in Chapter 5. See, esp., pp.139–159.

17 See, for instance, Brennan (2016). In recent years, a similar set of issues has been discussed in Schwenkenbecher (2019, 2022).

18 See, for example, Converse (1964). A useful overview of the issues is found in Elstub (2018). Of note is also the problem of willingness to participate, which Elstub mentions by contrasting the views of Sunstein (2007) and Neblo (2015).

19 Warren (1996) raises such an issue theoretically, while Webb (2013), for instance, explores the problem of motivation for participation in greater detail. For a more optimistic perspective, see, e.g., Goldberg et al. (2020).

20 On the connection between participation and coercion, see, e.g., Zakaras (2018).

21 See, for instance, V-Dem's *Democracy Report* (2022) for a full list of countries and their 'Participatory Component Index' (esp., pp. 46–47 and p. 54). For a recent discussion of how participation breaks down in autocracies, see Jiménez (2023), who analyzes the case of Venezuela.

22 The challenges faced by the general public with respect to effective participation are mentioned, for example, by Warren (1996) and Thompson (2008). I discuss some of the issues that pertain to voting in Šoć (2022).

23 Further elaborations of this idea can be found throughout *The Federalist Papers*. See, for example, Hamilton's essays no. 8 and no. 72.

24 The educational aspect of this process is not to be neglected, even though the primary goal of participatory and deliberative innovation is typically implemented in order to affect genuine change. As Peter (2016: 147) notes, "[I]t is possible to value the deliberative democratic procedure in non-instrumental fashion."

25 See Ibenskas and Polk (2022) for a recent analysis of party responsiveness in what they term 'young democracies.' See also Ezrow et al. (2011), who show that there is positive reaction to participation in terms of party responsiveness. On the other hand, Klüver and Spoon (2016) recognize that whether party responsiveness is feigned or substantive varies by party orientation and that substantive responsiveness can more often be oriented toward party supporters rather than to all citizens.

26 See Erikson (2015), especially figure 5 on page 21. See also Schlozman, Verba and Brady (2012, part II).

27 See, e.g., Kusin (1971) for a comprehensive analysis of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia and Karpinski (1982) for a thorough analysis of the uprisings in Poland. A broad treatment of different political revolutions can be found in Dunn (1972).

28 Whether there could be such a reversal might appear questionable in cases in which the poor are the minority in a populist state. However, even in such cases, it might so happen that winning the majority requires a populist government's demonstration of dedication to the poor. One could easily think of a scenario in which the populist claim that the state is prosperous requires the state to finance different programs to help the poor.

29 See, for instance, the discussion of responsiveness of political systems by Fiket and Pudar Draško (2021).

30 I discuss the way different authors treat the problem of deep disagreement and how it can be resolved in Šoć (2021). An insightful recent analysis shows that citizens' discomfort with democratic disagreement (or preference for 'stealth democracy') tends to pose the 'danger to democracy itself' (Bloeser et al. 2022).
31 The history of this issue is covered in Dragojlo (2022). Technical and economic details of the current market for lithium can be found in Zacune (2013).
32 The issue has been covered, e.g., by Georgievski and Stevanović (2022) [in Serbian]; see also a more comprehensive article covering lithium mining in general (Katwala 2018). For the environmental impact of lithium mining in other locations (notably Chile), see, for instance Liu, Agusdinata and Myint (2019), Additional concerns stem from the news that broke in 2020, when a 46,000-year-old Aboriginal site was destroyed during Rio Tinto's expansion. See Hall (2020).
33 One list of potential dangers the region faces is listed in Spasić (2020) [in Serbian]. See also Greenfield (2022) and Maxwell (2022).
34 Coverage of the protests can be found, e.g., in Vučković (2022), BBC News na srpskom (2021, 2022) [in Serbian].
35 The news was covered in Stevanović and Vujić (2022). The politicians who previously supported the mining project reacted negatively to the development, blaming not the government or the company but the protesters. See Vasovic (2022).
36 The speculation that the supposedly permanent ban was actually only a delay is based partly on the government's reluctance to legislate a permanent mining ban but also on the continued activities that suggest that mining plans have not been entirely abandoned. See Bogdanović (2022), Dragojlo (2022), Radio Slobodna Evropa (2022) [in Serbian], Đorđević and Sekulić (2021), Middleton (2021). As of 2023, this has remained an open issue.
37 The trend, which could be broken down in three phases – (1) controversial policy decision, (2) protests, (3) temporary compromise (which stops the protests rather than providing a comprehensive solution) – appear similar to several other recent developments, such as farmer's market retailers protests or freelance workers, to name but two instances. See, e.g., M. N. (2022), Euronews Srbija (2022) [in Serbian].
38 See, e.g., Rakić (2022).
39 See Campbell (2022).
40 See, e.g., McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001).
41 Indices of organizations like 'V-Dem Institute' or 'Freedom House' are regularly updated and track the worrying trend we described in the first and the fourth sections of this chapter. One may wonder, however, to what degree they are comprehensive or sufficiently precise on a per-country basis, but that is a discussion of a different scope and focus.
42 We may note that such developments are perhaps too few compared to more problematic outcomes of citizen–state interaction, but even limited success should be sufficient reason to think a broader success is viable, at least to motivate further research.

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4 Political Participation in Southeast Europe

A Scoping Review

Vujo Ilić and Čedomir Markov

Introduction

The quality of democratic governance has declined globally (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Unlike the democratic collapses of the past, the latest wave of autocratization is gradual instead of abrupt (Bermeo 2016). Countries experiencing autocratization have moved from liberal or electoral democracies to electoral autocracies (Lührmann et al. 2018), stable types of regimes with characteristics of both democracies and autocracies (Levitsky and Way 2002), which have proliferated since the early 2000s (Levitsky and Way 2020). In autocratizing countries, democratic institutions have become a facade, concealing entrenched power in the formal institutions, ensuring that while elections are held, power transfer has become unlikely (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). This wave of autocratization has severely hit the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Following the Great Recession of 2008–2009, Hungary and Serbia, as well as Poland and Turkey, were among the five countries that experienced the sharpest decline in Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)'s Liberal Democracy Index (Wiebrecht et al. 2023).

The democratic malaise in stable democracies has been developing through growing citizens' disillusionment with electoral politics, decreasing political participation and interest, declining trust in institutions and overall disengagement (Mansbridge 2020; Merkel 2014; Norris 1999; Rahman and Russon Gilman 2019; Scharpf 1999). In the process of autocratization in Central and Eastern Europe, the political competition becomes distorted (Hauser 2019; Helms 2021; Ilić 2022; Laštro and Bieber 2021), and other forms of informal political participation, such as protests, gain ground, which signal dissatisfaction with the regime or its policies (Borbáth and Gessler 2020; Brancati 2016; Ekiert and Kubik 2017). This shrinking of the democratic space for political opposition, civil society and other social and political actors intensified particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022 (Bethke and Wolff 2020; Edgell et al. 2021; Fiket, Pudar Draško and Ilić 2023).

Political participation has been one of the most central topics of contemporary research on political processes, and the research findings show different ways in which it has changed in the last decades. While conventional participation,

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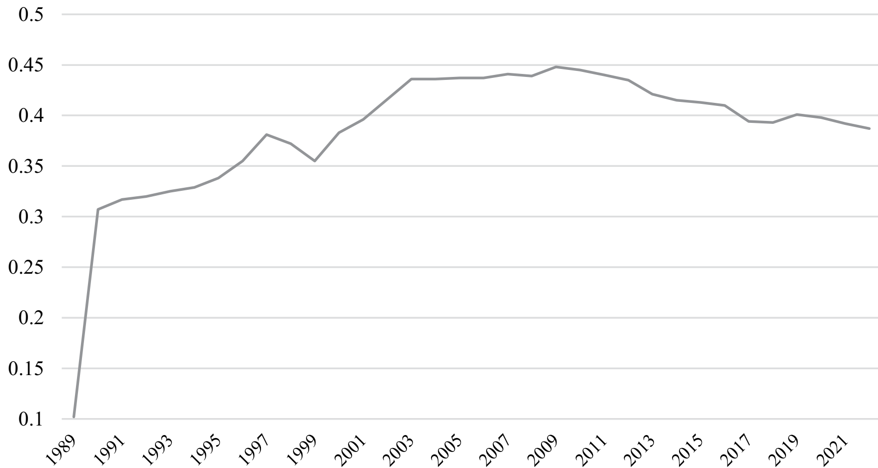

Figure 4.1 Mean SEE V-Dem Participatory Democracy Index 1989–2022, unweighted.

such as voting, has declined, unconventional forms, such as protests, have proliferated, and new modes of participatory innovations have been taking ground (Dalton 2008; Grasso 2016; Norris 2002; Van Deth 2014).[1] However, we are still determining what happened to participation in Southeast Europe (SEE) between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at the V-Dem Participatory Democracy Index from the end of the Cold War to 2022, for the 11 countries of the region, the average unweighted score rose until 2009 and has declined since then (Figure 4.1). However, how much do we know about this process? This chapter surveys the literature about broadly understood participation in broadly conceived SEE to address this question. How has the research agenda on political participation changed during this period, and what have we learned from it about participatory practices?

For our analysis, we employ a scoping review of academic literature on political participation published from 2010 to 2022 in the SEE region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia).[2] Even though SEE has different geographic and political definitions, we opted for a broader scope that would include neighboring countries, more often associated with Central Europe.

Our review identified several gaps in knowledge production and problematic silo effects in article publishing, limiting their scope and visibility. Based on these insights, we argue for studying participation outcomes more, using more complex methodologies, especially causal inference and comparative designs.

Among the main findings is that the scientific output regarding political participation has increased in this period, particularly articles focusing on unconventional and innovative modes of participation and those studying youth

participation. We relate these developments to the much-featured topic of disengagement from conventional institutions of participation, which could have deep roots in the influence of informal institutions and networks in the region. We also elaborate on a question from the literature about how much participation contributes to democratization, especially how participatory innovations fall along these lines.

In the following sections, we will first describe the method of our scoping review, the search strategy, the parameters of inclusion and exclusion of articles and the coding procedure. In the second part, we deal with the meta-findings about producing academic knowledge on participation. We examine the temporal and geographic variations of article publishing, the patterns of author affiliations, methods used in the articles, frequencies of different modes of participation investigated, and the types of populations under study. In the third part of the chapter, we review the main findings from the literature. We do this by dividing the literature based on two criteria: antecedents and outcome on one side and by mode of participation (conventional, unconventional and innovative). We also explore the subtopics that emerge in these six categories. We close the chapter by discussing the main findings and proposals for new research.

Methods

This chapter explores and describes key trends in the recent academic literature on political participation in SEE. Following Fink (2005: 3), we conducted a literature review as a form of a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded works produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners. We opted for a scoping review after considering different types of systematic literature reviews (Booth et al. 2016). A scoping review was well suited for exploring the literature of a broad topic, aiming to map the existing body of work and provide a descriptive summary covering a wide range of study designs (Pham et al. 2014). In contrast to systematic reviews, a scoping review does not attempt a quality assessment of the evidence but instead offers a snapshot of a topic (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). We aim to describe the patterns of knowledge production, highlight significant findings and organize this extensive body of knowledge into coherent categories. Compared to a typical scoping review, ours uses scientometric data to make meaningful insights and trace the structural relationships and changing foci of scientific knowledge (Sooryamoorthy 2021).

Search Strategy

We employed a keyword search in the Core Collection of the Web of Science (WoS) to identify pertinent articles for this review. While no single indexing database can provide an exhaustive list of relevant material, and all have

different biases, we chose the WoS database due to its wide use in research syntheses, comparatively extensive coverage and relative absence of non-journal sources (Denyer and Tranfield 2009; Jano 2022; Lutz, Hoffmann and Meckel 2014; Martín-Martín et al. 2018; Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016).

We applied the following keywords to the studies' titles, abstracts, and keywords: (political participation OR citizen participation OR civic participation OR political engagement OR citizen engagement OR civic engagement OR democratic innovation OR deliberation) AND (Southeast Europe OR Balkans OR Albania OR Bosnia OR Bulgaria OR Croatia OR Hungary OR Kosovo OR Macedonia OR Montenegro OR Romania OR Serbia OR Slovenia). The former eight keywords aimed to reflect the range of terms used to examine various forms of political participation. At the same time, the latter 12 focused the search on the region of interest.

To further refine our search, we included only (1) peer-reviewed articles (2) published in English (3) between 2010 and 2022. We formulated these additional inclusion criteria to focus our search on mainstream academic knowledge that had undergone the established peer-review process and to broader accessibility to a global research audience, as English is more universally understood and accessible compared to multiple local languages used in the region. We took 2010 as the starting year for our review, as it is commonly taken as the start of autocratization in the region following the global recession (Ágh 2022; Bochsler and Juon 2020). This narrowed our search to 368 entries. Both authors then independently screened all articles, excluding those deemed irrelevant, meaning those that only briefly mentioned political participation as contextual background, did not refer to the target countries or focused on broader, nonpolitical forms of prosocial behaviors, such as helping strangers. The authors initially disagreed on 19 articles but resolved the discrepancies through discussion. This process ultimately led to the inclusion of 149 articles for analysis.

Coding Procedure

To provide a concise overview of the selected research, we developed coding categories in line with the study objective. We began by recording each article's title, abstract, publishing journal, year of publication and authors' names and affiliations. We further determined whether the article employed a single-country or comparative perspective and identified which target countries were included in the analysis.

Next, we assessed the form(s) of political participation analyzed in the article. We understand political participation as any form of citizen engagement that aims to influence the authorities' decisions or policies. While there is no universally accepted classification of political participation (e.g., Ekman and Amnå 2012), following Kaim (2021), we maintained the division between the conventional and unconventional modes of participation. Still, we also introduced a third mode of innovative participation. While voting is considered a

cornerstone of conventional participation, protests are the most typical unconventional mode. Besides voting, conventional participation encompasses all forms of citizens' political activities that engage institutions of representative democracy, such as attending political meetings, donating to and participating in political parties and participating in formal policy- and decision-making processes. On the other hand, unconventional participation includes various legal and illegal extra-institutional political activities, including civic activism or any politically driven consumption (boycotts and buycotts). Still, there is no agreement in the literature on which forms of participation fall neatly into one of the two categories. Some forms, such as petitions, we understand as conventional or unconventional depending on the context of the article.

The third mode is innovative participation, which, following Geissel (2013: 10), includes "procedures consciously and purposefully introduced to mend current democratic malaises and improve the quality of democracy" in a country. As long as these procedures are introduced as novel in a country and aiming at improving participation, we call it innovation, irrespective of whether it has already been tried in some other country. Innovative participation, therefore, encompasses modes of political participation devised to address the crisis of representative democracy and empower citizens to take a more active role in political life. Examples include deliberative institutions, participatory budgeting and other participatory consultations and decision-making forms.

Finally, we sought to explore the diverse approaches to studying political participation. To do this, we examined how political participation was positioned within each study, i.e., whether the focus was on determinants, characteristics or consequences of participation. We also coded the research methods and the populations to which the analyzed participation pertained. We recorded the most notable findings of each study as reported by the authors in the abstract or concluding section.

Main Findings

Production of Academic Knowledge

Between 2010 and 2022, academic knowledge production on political participation in SEE has gradually increased. On average, 11.5 articles were published yearly, around one monthly article. The early half of this period saw relatively modest numbers, with the annual publications remaining in single digits and dropping to a low of just four articles in 2010 and 2013. However, subsequent years, particularly from 2020 to 2022, experienced a more pronounced increase, peaking at 24 published papers in 2022 (Figure 4.2). This increasing trend might signal growing academic interest, possibly spurred by declining regional political participation.

A total of 326 authors contributed to these articles. Most (178, 55%) had affiliations with institutions within SEE, while 148, or 45%, had affiliations outside the region. Within the region, authors affiliated with Romania (58

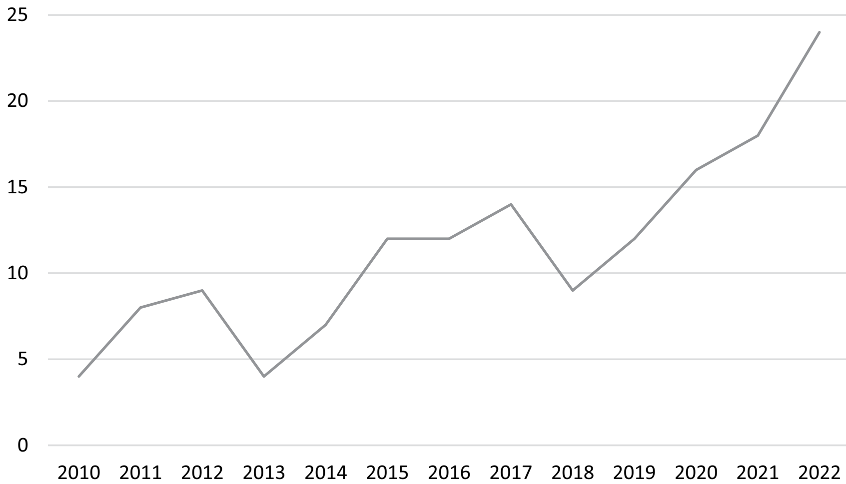

Figure 4.2 The number of articles about participation in SEE per year.

authors), Serbia (33), Croatia (24) and Hungary (24) were the most represented. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina (9 authors), Albania (6), North Macedonia (4), Kosovo (2) and particularly Bulgaria (1) had notably fewer contributors. No authors were affiliated with institutions from Montenegro. While there is an observable correlation between a country's population size and the number of contributing authors' affiliations, the disparity between Bulgaria and Serbia, with their similar population sizes, is intriguing.[3] Other factors, such as differing research priorities, might be at play.

Turning our attention beyond SEE, 29 authors had affiliations with the United Kingdom and 29 with US institutions. Germany and Italy were represented by 12 authors each. The remaining affiliations were spread across 22 other countries, highlighting the global academic interest in SEE's political participation and a clear dominance of the UK and US academic institutions in shaping the knowledge about the region.

We were also interested in patterns of cooperation in producing the articles. Most articles were written by multiple authors (94 or 63%), while a minority (55 or 37%) were single-authored. Of the articles with multiple affiliations, 49 were by authors affiliated with academic institutions within the region, 23 were affiliated with institutions out of the region, and 22 involved authors from the region and the outside. However, a striking picture emerges regarding articles authored by persons with affiliations in different countries. While cooperation of authors affiliated with institutions from different countries from outside the region is common and found in 16 articles, only 3 articles involved authors affiliated with institutions from more than one country in the region. This points to a pattern in the production of knowledge where researchers from within the

region only partially benefit from the insights and contextual knowledge made by their peers across the border.

We additionally analyzed the cooperation of authors within or between countries in the region and outside of the region. We found a significant effect on where the articles can be published and how visible these results can be. Articles from authors from outside the region are published in higher-ranking journals than those with affiliations from the region only. However, this effect is absent in the articles where authors with affiliations from the region and beyond the region cooperate. These articles are published in journals whose rankings are not significantly different from the highest-ranking ones.[4]

Geographical Focus

In the analyzed articles, 114 focused on political participation within a single country, while 35 undertook a multicountry approach. Consistent with the trend in authors' affiliations, Romania was the most frequently researched country, featuring in 38 articles[5]; it was followed by Serbia (28 articles), Hungary (25), Croatia (23), Bosnia and Herzegovina (22) and Slovenia (19). Interestingly, while Bulgaria had a sparse representation of authors' affiliations, it was the subject of 13 articles. On the other hand, Montenegro was the least studied, appearing in just five pieces (Table 4.1).

This distribution holds a similar pattern for single-country studies: Romania (30), Serbia (18) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (14) together account for almost half of these articles. When looking at studies that included multiple countries, Croatia and Hungary were the most commonly included countries in 12 articles in this subset. Serbia and Slovenia appeared in ten articles, while Montenegro and Albania were featured the least, each appearing in only four.

Table 4.1 The geographic focus of the articles about political participation in SEE 2010–2022

Geographic Focus	*Articles*		*Total*
	Single Country	*Multiple Countries*	
Romania	30	8	38
Serbia	18	10	28
Hungary	13	12	25
Croatia	11	12	23
Bosnia and Herzegovina	14	8	22
Slovenia	9	10	19
Bulgaria	5	8	13
Kosovo	7	5	12
North Macedonia	3	6	9
Albania	3	4	7
Montenegro	1	4	5
Total	114	87	201

Modes of Political Participation

We found a very balanced ratio of conventional (67 studies or 41%) and unconventional (64 studies or 39%) modes of political participation researched. Innovative modes garnered considerably less attention, represented in only 33 studies (20%). Although numerous studies examined multiple political activities, these typically fell within the same mode of participation. A mere 15 of the 149 studies spanned across different modes.

The most prevalent forms of conventional political participation studied were electoral actions, such as voting in elections and referenda, and partisan activities encompassing party membership, donations and attending rallies. Additionally, several studies examined citizens' interactions with politicians, predominantly at the local level, highlighting involvement in working groups and similar bodies in policymaking processes. Protests and broader civic activism took center stage in the literature for unconventional modes. When it came to innovative modes of participation, there was a distinct focus on deliberative mechanisms like citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting and similar forms of deliberative decision-making. Also noteworthy was the exploration of online innovations designed to enhance citizen participation in political consultations and decision-making processes.

Our analysis suggested another notable trend: the latter seven years of our sample period saw a tripling in articles focusing on unconventional (from 15 to 49) and innovative (from 8 to 25) modes of participation. While the attention to conventional involvement did increase, the growth – from 26 to 41 studies – was less pronounced. This evolving trend might reflect the growing academic interest in unconventional participation mechanisms, which the literature suggested have proliferated recently. In contrast to countries such as Slovenia, where only one in ten articles dealt with unconventional participation, this was the case with more than half of the articles about Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which points to a possible connection to the crises of representation that has occurred in these countries lately.

Methods Used

We also found a balance of methodologies used in the analyzed articles. Quantitative research methods accounted for 47% (n = 70) of the examined articles, while qualitative methods comprised 44% (n = 66). The remaining studies were either based on mixed methods, constituting 5% (n = 7) or lacked empirical examination or a specified research method at 4% (n = 6). Surveys emerged as the predominant research method, featured in 63 studies. They were succeeded by in-depth interviews, participant observations and document analyses, represented in 28, 19 and 19 studies, respectively.

Survey studies predominantly probed the determinants of conventional and unconventional participation forms. Many of these studies employed large-N datasets, such as those derived from the European Social Survey (for instance, see

Backović and Petrović 2021; Nistor, Tîrhaş and Ilut 2011; Pešić, Birešev and Trifunović 2021). Others utilized original instruments (e.g., Kostadinova and Kmetty 2019; Oana 2019; O'Brochta 2022). In contrast, employing qualitative methodologies was noted for altering prevailing perceptions of the region's ostensibly passive citizens. This change was attributed to the in-depth examinations that unveiled modes of participation commonly overlooked in survey analyses (e.g., Pickering 2022). Intriguingly, among the nations sampled, only Serbia (with 18 qualitative studies against 9 quantitative ones) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (12 vs. 8) had a higher representation of qualitative research over quantitative.

Populations Under Study

In examining the populations in our sample, we identified five primary target groups: the general population (represented in 45% of the articles), the youth (25%), active citizens (16%), women and vulnerable groups (6%) and elites (3%). Another 5% (or seven articles) focused on various other groups. Studies scrutinizing political participation within the general population proved the most varied in terms of research methods, countries of focus and modes of participation explored.

One-fourth of the studies delved into the participation habits of varying youth demographics, reflecting prevalent concerns about diminishing youth participation. This encompassed adolescents (e.g., Srbijanko, Avramovska and Maleska 2012; Milošević-Đorđević and Žeželj 2017), university students (Burean and Badescu 2014; Marciniak et al. 2022) and young adults (Feischmidt 2020; Lep and Zupančič 2022). Notably, there was a discernible uptrend in studying youth participation; only 6 articles were published in the initial six years of our sample, in contrast to 31 in the subsequent seven years. Also, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro are the only countries where more than half of all articles deal with youth.

Active citizens, including protesters and activists, were predominantly examined in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, each being the focus of seven studies. This emphasis is attributable to significant political events and movements in these countries that attracted the attention of scholars. Examples include the 2014 unrest in Bosnia (e.g., Lai 2016; Murtagh 2016) and the legacy of anti-war and anti-regime protests during Serbia's authoritarian era in the 1990s (e.g., Fridman 2011; Nikolayenko 2013).

Sparse attention was given to other distinct groups. This category featured a modest number of studies on women's political participation, primarily concerning anti-war activism (e.g., Bilić 2011; Chao 2020; Dimitrova 2017), and a few delving into the political participation of ethnic minorities (Bačlija and Haček 2012; Savić-Bojanić 2022). Finally, we found only five studies that investigated politicians, civil servants and experts (e.g., Mohmand and Mihajlovic 2014; Oross, Mátyáss and Gherghina 2021); this is a reminder that the supply side of political participation, alongside interactions between citizens and decision-makers, remains a comparatively uncharted domain.

Factors Influencing Political Participation

Most studies explored factors that promote or inhibit political participation (n = 119, 80%). These articles predominantly focused on how individual characteristics influence political involvement. Such features encompass sociodemographic traits, psychological attributes, political attitudes, perceptions, norms and values. Other articles investigated contextual determinants. The factors that influence political participation are organized following the explained classification into conventional, unconventional and innovative modes of participation.

Antecedents of Conventional Participation

Most articles dealing with conventional participation investigated electoral and non-electoral formal modes of participation, either nationally or locally. Others dealt with phenomena such as disengagement and the entrenched informal practices that inhibit participation. The remaining articles investigated participation in the context of post-conflict societies or dealt with the participation of minorities.

A large portion of the articles were dedicated to studying voter behavior. Deimel et al. (2022) found that political knowledge and trust in political institutions explained variations in adolescents' electoral participation. The effect of political knowledge was partly mediated by trust, which was negatively associated with political knowledge in Bulgaria and Croatia. Robert, Oross and Szabó (2020) delved into the relationship between employment status and political participation in Hungary. Their results indicated that the unemployed were less likely to vote. At the same time, however, precarious employment did not influence electoral participation, and individuals with more autonomy in their jobs showed increased involvement in electoral and other forms of conventional political participation. Ančić, Baketa and Kovačić (2019) concluded after analyzing class membership in Croatia that it did not directly affect voter turnout. Still, it was mediated through political efficacy and interest in politics, as higher-class members showed greater interest in politics and better assessed their understanding of politics. Gheorghiță (2015) studied the leader effects, the added value brought by leaders to the electoral performance of their parties, among Romanian voters, and found a significant influence of political knowledge and party identification on the leader effects. Considering the effect of political messaging on participation in Croatia during the electoral campaign, Babac and Podobnik (2018) found that political messages with positive emotions and a two-way and tolerant communication of political actors increased citizen engagement.

The post-conflict context frequently emerged in the literature, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alacevich and Zejcirovic (2020) found that Bosnian municipalities that experienced more violence against civilians had lower voter turnout. Another study (Hadzic and Tavits 2019) used experimental design

and showed the interaction between the post-conflict setting and individual attributes. Priming participants to past violence in this study increased voting intent among men but had the reverse effect in women. Glaurdić and Lesschaeve (2022) studied the effects of voters' communities' exposure to war violence in Croatia, showing that populations more exposed to war violence rewarded war veterans in elections but that in areas whose populations avoided destruction, they were penalized.

Most research on non-electoral participation focused on youth participation, especially the individual-level factors. In a comparative study, Angi, Badescu and Constantinescu (2022) determined that volunteering positively affected youth political participation. Lenzi et al. (2012) came to a similar conclusion regarding family affluence, democratic school climate and perceived neighborhood social capital in Romania. A study by Marciniak et al. (2022) compared student civic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found no country-specific differences when examining students from Croatia, Lithuania and Poland. Instead, a recurring pattern emerged. Students' psychological well-being predicted civic engagement across the three nations, exemplified by factors like positive relations with others, personal growth and autonomy. The role of formal education was found to be more ambiguous. Persson et al. (2016) studied the effects of education on participation in Slovenia and three other countries out of the region. They found that an additional year of schooling had no detectable effect on political knowledge, democratic values or political participation. Similarly, Oana (2019) found that students' behavior in Hungary and Romania did not significantly differ from that of nonstudents, starkly contrasting with the college-effects model that argues that enrolling in higher education influences sociopolitical attitudes. They concluded that previously observed effects of student status on political participation and sociopolitical attitudes more generally might have been confounded with age or family background.

Other studies focused on contextual determinants of political participation. Botrić (2022) found that in Croatia, the size of a settlement shapes both the perceived participatory repertoires available to the youth and the kind of political activities toward which they gravitate. Specifically, she observed that smaller settlements foster participation in political organizations among the youth. Conversely, larger settlements see youth more inclined toward unconventional endeavors, such as protests. Others looked at the potential for civil society engagement. Pospieszna and Vráblíková (2022) found high mobilizing potential for culturally liberal issues in five postcommunist countries and a weak link between culturally conservative mobilizing potential and civil society engagement. Analyzing civil society assistance in Kosovo, Fagan (2011) found that receiving a European Union (EU) grant triggered a degree of network formation and, in some instances, engaged civil society organizations in knowledge formation and policy engagement, working with communities around identifying development priorities.

Several studies examined the supply side of political participation and the role of institutional designs. The study by Vodo and Stathopoulou (2015) compared the constitutions of Serbia and Albania regarding the space they provide for citizens to exercise their rights to initiate protests and referenda. The study concluded that while the two countries have distinct constitutional and historical trajectories, there was a common outcome: the space provided by the constitutions for participation is largely utilized by the opposition parties rather than ordinary citizens. Studying the broader region of Eastern Europe, Greskovits (2015) concluded that pure neoliberal capitalist regimes are more likely to undermine popular political participation than those that balance marketization with social protections.

In contrast to the national level, the difference in non-electoral engagement at the local level was also considered in some articles. For example, Koprić and Klarić (2015) found that citizens' initiatives, referenda and consultative meetings are not frequently used participatory mechanisms in Croatia. Citizens are more interested in the central than the local government in a highly centralized system. Several studies from Romania dealt with the problem of participation at the local level. Haruţa and Radu (2010) found that politically elected officials in Romania control decision-making at the local level. Crețu et al. (2022) found significant differences in active citizen participation related to the size of the commune, with smaller communes seeing more engagement. Radu (2019) examined the low level of citizens' participation in the decision-making process's local consultation and deliberation stages and found that the chances to be included in final decisions were higher if they were voiced during Local Council meetings. Duțu and Diaconu (2017) found that satisfaction can be both an enhancer and an inhibitor of participation and that the highest level of satisfaction can inhibit the consultation process.

Several other studies also dealt with disengagement and barriers to participation from the citizens' perspective. Pascaru and Butiu (2010) explained these barriers as ranging from citizens' indifference to the fear inculcated during the communist regime in Romania. Srbijanko, Avramovska and Maleska's (2012) findings concur with the former, identifying signs of high apathy, early resignation and detachment from the community among Macedonian youth. Neaga (2014) pointed to patriarchal constraints that profoundly affect the capacity of women representatives in Romania to promote gender interests. Tworzecki and Semetko (2012) explored the information environment, particularly how engagement with varied news outlets in the new democracies of Hungary, Czechia and Poland might foster or deter political involvement. They found a positive effect of exposure to broadsheet newspapers and news magazines on political participation. The Serbian case was studied thoroughly, including the causes and consequences of disengagement. Matić (2012) looked at the perceptions of the opportunities offered by the structure of the political system to participate in democratization processes in Serbia. She found that the public perceives democracy as a desirable aim, while on the other hand, citizens are highly dissatisfied with the performance of the political elite. Pešić, Birešev and

Trifunović (2021) researched structural inequalities and found that Serbian citizens exhibit one of the highest levels of internal political inefficacy but that this sense does not correspond to the levels of political participation. Answering a similar puzzle, Greenberg (2010) pointed out that nonparticipation should be centered as a useful critical lens in democracy scholarship, as nonparticipation in conventional politics can be understood not as an absence but as a presence of moral, political and cultural engagements. Addressing the common perception of widespread political passivity, Petrović and Stanojević (2020) found that Serbian citizens are more inclined to pursue unconventional or newer forms of political activism, such as ethical and political consumption and petition signing, than conventional modes of political participation.

The influence of informal institutions, primarily through clientelism and patronage, has also been examined, especially the links between informal and formal participation. Mohmand and Mihajlovic (2014) argued that citizen participation in the Western Balkans was not weakly institutionalized but rather informally institutionalized. Lantos and Kende (2015) pointed to the political socialization perspective in Hungary. The informal socialization agents, such as family and peer influences, played an important role in political socialization, while the influence of formal agents, such as school, was missing. On the institutional level, the informality was seen as an obstacle to democratic reforms in the region. Lyon (2015) argued that the advocates of decentralization in North Macedonia have failed to sufficiently appreciate the extent to which the pervasiveness of patronage-based politics and overdominance of political parties, which lack internal democracy, undermine the reform's potential benefits. Iancu and Soare (2016) analyzed the postsocialist party organizational adaptation of the Bulgarian and Romanian socialist parties. They found that informal reward structures explain the high variation in the patterns of party organization. Drishti, Kopliku and Imami (2022) explored the employment pathways under conditions of political clientelism. They found that entry-level jobs in Albania are used as an incentive for vote buying and political engagement of graduate students. Yet, the authors also found that this political engagement negatively affects life satisfaction and migration intentions.

Antecedents of Unconventional Participation

The factors affecting unconventional participation were primarily investigated regarding protests and civic activism, the embeddedness of individuals in wider social structures, the role of the post-conflict environment, and ethno-nationalist mobilization. The research topics of importance were also the exposure to news and social media and the political engagement of youth, as opposed to the general population.

Participation in protests and civic activism was explored in several articles through the embeddedness of individuals in broader structures. Dergić et al. (2022) considered the role of families and communities of belonging, which

affected the engagement of Croatian activists. Iguman, Mijatović and Nikolić (2022) analyzed a local initiative in Belgrade and found that even though it was politically potent, it did not have a strong foothold in the community and thus received only passive support. Susánszky, Kopper and Tóth (2016) studied the participants of demonstrations against and pro-government in Hungary and found that mobilization for the two demonstrations was radically different. The main difference, according to them, was in the nature of the embeddedness of participants in civil organizations and their media consumption habits. Rone and Junes (2021) studied the protest behavior of Bulgarian migrants in the EU. They determined a more complex scale of forms of protest organization and participation in which Bulgarian migrants participated, facilitated by social media and the freedom of movement within the EU.

Some authors pointed to the long-term legacies in the region that can help explain participation patterns. Rammelt (2015) compared regions in Romania that were parts of the Austro-Hungary and Ottoman Empire and found evidence of these historical legacies' impact on protest behavior in Romania. Cvetičanin, Popovikj and Jovanović (2019) explored the culture of informality in the countries of the Western Balkans and identified perceptions of the level of informality, lack of trust in institutions and readiness to justify informality as the strongest predictors of informal practices.

Several articles dealt with protest mobilization and activism in the post-conflict context. Among the works dealing with protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lai (2016) argued that they resembled the movements calling for social justice in the post-2008 crisis in Europe and, in that sense, had to be framed differently. Mujkić (2015) also analyzed the protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina and argued that citizen participation undermined the dominant ethnonationalist ideological hegemony. Further, Pickering's (2022) study provided an illustrative example of the significance of societal norms and political perspectives on participation. This research highlighted that Bosnian citizens are driven by aiding those in need and addressing everyday problems to engage in unconventional participatory activities that span protests, boycotts and strikes. However, the same study revealed another dynamic where a minority of citizens with conservative values exhibited more robust mobilization than those who emphasized socioeconomic concerns. As opposed to protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, protest behavior in postwar Kosovo remained significantly shaped by perceived ethnic grievances, and perceived ethnic discrimination was strongly associated with individual protest participation, according to Kelmendi and Skendaj (2022).

Ethno-nationalism as a prevailing framework for mobilization was examined regarding the general population and specific actors, such as women or youth. Analyzing activism in post-conflict societies, Bilić (2011) found Serbian and Croatian women activists could not evade the ethno-nationalist constraints of their surroundings, while Chao (2020) studied women's activism in Kosovo at the intersection of gender and nationhood. In a different setting, Feischmidt (2020) found that new forms of nationalism play a major role in the

radical right turn among the youth in Hungary. Feischmidt argued that this new form of nationalism is driven by a general sense of disempowerment and claims for collective dignity, framed in a hierarchical and mythical discourse about the nation.

Beyond the protests in post-conflict societies, the focus was also on protest framing and interactions within and between protests. Fairclough and Mădroane (2020) and Cmeciu and Coman (2016) highlighted how different framing strategies contributed to collective activation in ecological protests in Romania. Other authors looked at the interactions within and beyond social movements. Margarit and Rammelt (2020) attributed the lack of interaction between protests and trade unions in Romania to their incompatible mobilization frames. In the case of cooperation between different civic protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the pragmatic symbiosis between them was created based on the interests of separate groups but ultimately could not reconcile their views (Repovac-Nikšić et al. 2022).

Another focus on explaining protest and activist behavior was exposure to news and social media. A study set in Romania (Corbu et al. 2020) found that exposure to positively and negatively charged partisan news had a greater potential to motivate citizens to support the government online than exposure to disinformation and satire. Still, the effect was moderated by government approval. Further, Parent (2018) found that media coverage of refugees was an important motivating factor for first-time migration activists in Hungary, Serbia, North Macedonia and Greece. Burean and Badescu (2014) found that time spent online had a negative effect on the protest engagement of students in Romania, while gender, distrust in institutions and family income also influenced protest behavior. However, a later study by Mercea, Burean and Proteasa (2020) investigated the degree to which political information shared on public Facebook event pages during the Romanian #rezist protests influenced the participation of students and found that students are more likely to partake in demonstrations if they followed a page. Considering the widely documented extreme polarization of media landscapes in the region, the lack of media professionalism and growing anti-press hostility (e.g., Camaj 2023; Markov and Đorđević 2023; Markov and Min 2021, 2022; Polyák 2019; Stojarová 2021; Trifonova Price 2019), it came as a surprise that our sample did not include more studies reflecting on the impact of political information systems and audience–media relations on political participation.

The political engagement of youth, through activism or protests, was particularly interesting to the researchers. Petrović and Stanojević (2019) studied Serbian youth engagement from the perspective of value and instrumental motivations. They found that the motivation tends to vary between the different types of organizations, professional and grassroots. Engagement in professional organizations was more often instrumental and value-driven in grassroots organizations. Social capital had a positive and significant influence on the civic engagement of Croatian youth (Gvozdanović 2016), and youth protest engagement was positively linked to the pro-democratic and diversity-embracing

attitudes of students in Romania (Burean 2019). Regarding obstacles to the protest mobilization of youth, Susánszky (2020) dealt with the perception of risk in participating in demonstrations among university students in Hungary and found that almost half of students saw their participation in demonstrations as risky. Finally, Garic-Humphrey (2020) found generational differences among protesters in Bosnia and Herzegovina important when it came to opinions on the use of violence for creating political changes, reliance on existing political structures or creating new ones and whether power should be distributed horizontally or hierarchically.

Antecedents of Innovative Modes of Participation

A smaller portion of the articles dealt with factors that explain innovative participatory practices. This included participation in citizen assemblies, intraparty deliberation or participation in new policy areas, such as the environmental governance of urban planning.

What makes deliberation happen, and what makes it successful? Oross, Mátyáss and Gherghina (2021) explain why the Budapest Climate Assembly was organized and pointed to the local city government's commitment to deliberative decision-making tools. The commitment, in turn, was determined by a combination of election pledges, ideological matching, pursuit of economic interests and the desire to achieve environmental sustainability at the local level. Deliberative processes are increasingly used in engaging citizens in new policy areas. Sarlós and Fekete (2018) emphasized the need for the government to adapt communication strategies to engage disengaged citizens toward nuclear issues in Hungary. Peric and Miljus (2021) explored the role of moderators in the public deliberation procedure for regenerating military brownfields in Serbia. Intraparty deliberation was studied as a feature of new left-wing or progressive parties in Hungary in Romania (Oross and Tap 2021; Stoiciu and Gherghina 2021). Informal institutions and informal participatory activities are argued to have hindered participatory governance in Slovenia and Romania (Bergmans et al. 2015; Van Assche et al. 2011). Regarding participatory urban planning, some of the authors argued that there was a lack of democratization of planning or the overall state of democratic development in Hungary and Serbia (Bajmócy 2021; Perić 2020). On the other hand, in a study of Bucharest, Nae et al. (2019) pointed not to the lack of democracy in planning as much as to high engagement but the equally high fragmentation of civic initiatives.

Outcomes of Political Participation

A smaller portion of the articles (32 or 21%) examined the consequences of political participation. Like the articles that dealt with the antecedents, these articles also ranged from the changes in individual opinions or values following the participation to the effects at the more aggregated levels of analysis.

Outcomes of Conventional Participation

Most articles dealt with the effects of participation in electoral and policymaking processes. Electoral participation positively affected political interest in Romania (Gherghina and Bankov 2021) and increased motivation to pay taxes in Hungary (Dobos and Takács-György 2020). In a rare historical empirical study, Kouba (2021) determined that the introduction of compulsory voting in Austria-Hungary, despite boosting voter turnout, did not increase the support for parties representing the working classes. Two studies from Slovenia and Bulgaria concluded that including a broader scope of actors in the policymaking process improved the performances of local government (Nahtigal and Brezovšek 2011; Petrova 2011).

Some articles analyzed participation at a macro level. Greskovits (2015) pointed out that mass citizen participation before the 2009 crisis did not contribute to the subsequent resilience of democracies. Gora and de Wilde (2022) argued that liberal democratic backsliding in the region and declining participation are, in reality, separate processes.

Outcomes of Unconventional Participation

Studies of unconventional participation primarily focused on qualitative investigations of different forms, characteristics and effects of activism using context-rich approaches and qualitative methods. These studies included the formation of counterpublics in Serbia and Bulgaria (Dawson 2018), informal interactions in Romania (Nistor, Tîrhaş and Ilut 2011), everyday political talk in Bulgaria (Bakardjieva 2012), digital storytelling in Slovenia (Marshall, Staeheli and Čelebičić 2020) and digital activism in Croatia (Car 2014). Further, the studies examining the 2014 protests and plenum movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Agarin 2021; Murtagh 2016) highlighted the importance of studying the long-term effects of unconventional political participation. They found that the protest movement did not aim to enter formal politics and produce immediate political change. Instead, it strove to affect the political culture and civic consciousness in the long run, empowering citizens to recognize that they can influence political processes in their countries.

Outcomes of Innovative Modes of Participation

Studies also dealt with the effects of innovative participation, such as deliberative mini-publics. A comparative study set in Bulgaria and Australia found that intergroup contact through deliberative polling might increase support for policies benefiting minorities and improve intergroup relations (Kim, Fishkin and Luskin 2018). These findings are only partially consistent with those from Serbian studies examining citizens' assemblies, organized not by decision-makers but by academic actors and marked by the absence of policymakers. As a result, participating in a citizens' assembly led to increased political knowledge,

sophistication and willingness to engage in local decision-making (Janković 2022). Still, it did not increase institutional trust and further decreased participants' satisfaction with local democracy (Fiket, Ilić and Pudar Draško 2022).

Besides participation in deliberative mini-publics, articles investigated various other participatory mechanisms. A study from Albania (Dauti 2015) analyzed a top-down approach devised to promote participation at a local level. The study found that participating in a meeting with local decision-makers led to greater political knowledge, trust in institutions and satisfaction with the system. Milosavljević et al. (2020) analyzed participatory budgeting projects in Serbia and concluded that some political will for their implementation existed. The authors concluded that more effort is needed to promote this mechanism and ensure its sustainability. In Romania, Boc (2019) assessed participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca more favorably, emphasizing how these projects influenced the local administration's openness to more inclusive and collaborative forms of governance. Finally, some studies explored the effects of involving vulnerable groups in innovative practices. Vuksanović-Macura and Miščević (2021) found that the involvement of a marginalized Roma community in consultations surrounding land-use plans for informal settlements helped build consensus among stakeholders in Serbia.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the academic literature published between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal was to shed light on the nature and scope of research evidence concerning participation in SEE. To do that, we answered two main questions: if and how the research agenda of political participation has changed, and what can we learn about participatory practices in this period from the literature?

To the first question, regarding academic knowledge production, the analysis showed that, between 2010 and 2022, the scientific output on political participation in SEE steadily increased. We argue that this trend might suggest growing academic interest in political participation as an aspect of the declining or stagnating quality of democracy in most of the region. This view was further corroborated by another trend of an increasing number of articles focusing on unconventional and innovative modes of participation in contrast to conventional forms. We interpret it as reflecting the academic interest in the undergoing shift from conventional to alternative participatory mechanisms in the real world.

Concerning knowledge production, we found a strong positive correlation between a country's population size and the number of contributing authors' affiliations. Nevertheless, there was also a striking disparity between Serbia and Bulgaria and a complete absence of affiliations from Montenegro. These are some of the gaps in knowledge production we identified. More effort should be put into engaging the authors from these countries to get the research program of political participation underway. Another pattern we established is the

minimal cross/country cooperation of authors within the region. There simply is not sufficient interaction and exchange of perspectives, and we argued that this silo effect is hurting the visibility of the research output of regional authors. However, the authors from the region also publish articles with those from outside the region. We found this very useful for the visibility of research, as such cooperation led to articles being published in journals with higher impact.

Regarding the topics and methods of research, the vast majority of the articles, four out of five, explored the antecedents of political participation, which means that the research on the participation outcomes is still relatively unexplored. We found balanced methodological approaches, with quantitative and qualitative methods almost equally used. However, very few articles used more complex research designs, which would, for example, include mixed methods. These two elements of research design, studying participation outcomes and using more complex methodologies, seem lacking in the current state of the art.

Even though most articles dealt with the general population, approximately one-fourth of all studies delved into the participation habits of varying youth demographics. This may reflect a prevalent concern about diminishing youth participation in the region. A discernible uptrend in studying youth participation developed parallel with the democratic backsliding in the region. In addition, we found very few studies dealing with interactions between citizens and representatives or decision-makers, even though this issue could be considered central to the current challenges to democracies in the region.

Some countries stood out by the frequency of specific topics, for example, Bosnia and Herzegovina with protests, Serbia with disengagement, Romania with voting behavior, Albania with youth or Slovenia with conventional participation. However, overall, we did not identify any of the main topics of actors as absent from a country or a group of countries. However, we have identified very few comparative designs, which seems like an approach that might yield interesting results.

What did the literature tell us about participatory practices in SEE? The findings about the antecedents of voting behavior mostly do not stand out from the expected in the general literature. However, non-electoral participation has particular dynamics in the region. Political participation has a low supply side, so disengagement and barriers to participation are widespread. Active participation features prominently only at the very local level. The roots of this disengagement from conventional participation could be in the persevering influence of informal institutions and networks, which, to some authors, seem more influential than formal ones. The embeddedness of individuals in broader societal structures is well described as a determinant of participation in protests and activisms, where risks and commitment are higher than in voting behavior. Some authors pointed to the long-term legacies in the region that can help explain these participation patterns. However, the authors also argue that nonparticipation should not be observed as an absence but as a different form of institutionalization of political participation.

Regarding the outcomes of political participation, some studies point in the direction of improvement of the performances of institutions. However, other authors question how much participation contributes to democratization. These points might initially seem contradictory, but they might be understood in connection with the hybrid nature of political regimes where democratic institutions are maintained, while at the same time, power is centralized in the executive branch, and it is not willingly shared with the citizens. Participatory innovations fall along these same lines. They are primarily connected to a wish of progressive political actors to reinvigorate democracy, but otherwise, they exhibit mixed effects in an environment not supportive of participation.

In addition to the informality, a significant part of the participation puzzle can also be found in the complex effects of the legacies of violence. Citizen participation is still challenged and undermined by the competing ethno-nationalist ideological mobilization patterns. This is not a major topic in the body of literature we reviewed, but it is an unavoidable part of the explanation in the background.

Based on this scoping review, we could identify several possible directions for future research.

- For one, even though we made inferences about the connection between participation and the state of democracy, we still do not have sufficient evidence about the nature of relations between democratic backsliding in the region and declining participation.
- Second, even though studies deal with the longer-term effects of conventional participation and short-term outcomes of unconventional and innovative, we need to understand how the latter two modes of participation develop over more extended periods. We should study the long-term effects of protests, citizen engagement and participatory innovations, such as citizen assemblies or participatory planning. We particularly need to understand the question of the sustainability of these newer or more impermanent institutions.
- Very few of the studies dealt with the interactions of different actors or modes of participation. On the one hand, we do not know enough about how, for example, protest and voting participation interact, even though they are some of the most ubiquitous forms of political participation. However, we also found few studies dealing with interactions between citizens and elected representatives.
- The link between information environments and political participation, particularly how different media repertoires associate with participation, is ripe for comparative analysis of the region. In addition, how digital media promotes both the supply and demand side of participation is similarly under-researched.
- At the individual level, we should better understand generational differences and older adult political participation. A common assumption is that young people tend to be disengaged from formal politics; many studies thus

investigated youth participation, particularly in unconventional forms. Conversely, no study focused on older adults and considered generational differences in mechanisms driving participation. This is very unusual, considering all countries we analyzed are rapidly aging, and the proportion of the older generation is increasing.

- Special attention should be given to the spillover and backfire effects of democratic innovations. Innovative interventions sometimes fail to achieve desired outcomes, arguably more so in less democratic environments. How can these backfire effects be countered? Can innovative institutions motivate nonparticipants to engage?
- Finally, informal institutions and dark participation could explain the participation outcomes and disengagement from conventional institutions. Their toll on political participation should be researched, but it should be done through a lens of the culture of informality entrenched throughout the region.

Notes

1 For more on conceptualizations of political participation and criticisms of traditional participatory models, see Chapter 3 in this volume. For a discussion on how participation connects active citizenship, social movements and democratic innovations, see Chapter 2.

2 We acknowledge the ongoing conflict about the status of Kosovo. When discussing the political participation in Kosovo, we do not take a position regarding its status.

3 We performed a Pearson correlation coefficient and found a significant strong positive correlation between the number of article country affiliations and 2020 country population, $r(9) = .86, p = .001$. Population data source: UN Population Division Data Portal.

4 We conducted a one-way ANOVA between subjects to compare the effect of different patterns of authorships on Web of Science JCI (Journal Citation Indicator) scores of the articles in conditions in which the author or authors are only affiliated with the regional institutions, only affiliated with the institutions outside of the region or if the authors of the article are affiliated with both. We found a significant effect of authorship patterns on journal ratings at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups, $F(2,146) = 4.74$, $p = .01$. Tukey's post-hoc test showed that the mean JCI score for the articles with only regional affiliations ($M = .66$, $SD = .70$) was significantly different than the JCI score for the articles with affiliations from outside the region ($M = 1$, $SD = .55$). However, the articles that involved both regional and affiliations from outside the region ($M = .93$, $SD = .56$) did not significantly differ from the other two groups.

5 Here, too, the results of a Pearson correlation coefficient gave a significant strong positive correlation between the number of times a country appeared as a topic of an article and country's 2020 population, $r\ (9) = .82$, $p = .002$. Population data source: UN Population Division Data Portal.

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5 Toward the Democratization of Urban Planning

A Case Study of Three Deliberative Forums in Belgrade

Jovana Timotijević and Iva Čukić

Introduction

Given that the development of cities often reflects the dominant political and economic relations, it is not surprising that the urban areas in Serbia have in recent decades largely come under the logic of neoliberalism. In this context, the diversity of experiences and needs of the residents of the city of Belgrade have not been adequately taken into account by the decision-makers in producing solutions for common living. Rather, official urban planning is frequently utilized merely to legitimize the development approach taken by the hegemonic social and economic actors (Stein 2019).

Studies focusing on citizen participation in Serbia indicate a decline in institutionalized participation despite an increase in the number of bottom-up initiatives. On the one hand, there has been a decrease in citizens' engagement in political life in general (CRTA 2019; CRTA 2021); on the other, there has been a significant increase in the number of self-organized local citizens' groups. While this appears contradictory, it is only the case if one does not differentiate between institutional and informal participation practices (Fiket and Đorđević 2022). Specifically, while distrust of institutions remains high and leads to limited citizen engagement in formal participation procedures, citizens are increasingly relying on noninstitutional methods to voice their political demands (Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2019).

This holds true for urban planning as well. The decision-making process is *de facto* centralized, exclusionary and deregulated, the aim of which is primarily to facilitate further centralization (Čolić 2006; Maričić, Cvetinović and Bolay 2018; Perić and Miljuš 2017). Although participatory mechanisms in Serbia are theoretically provided for in the legislative framework governing urban planning, the formal procedures often suffer from a significant democratic deficit – citizens' participation in planning typically occurs at or even below the prescribed minimum (Čukić et al. 2022). Consequently, there is an escalating number of spatial conflicts and injustices that constitute urban life in Serbian cities. However, there has simultaneously been an increase in local struggles and self-organized initiatives (Čukić and Perić 2019; Lukić 2022;

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Stojić 2020), predominantly in opposition to planned, imposed, spatial interventions, but occasionally also initiating improvements in their communities.

In the context of persistent lack of deliberation, minimal and ineffective formal participation in urban planning and the rapid increase of production and adoption of urban plans shaping Serbian cities, we posit that the principles of collaborative planning, specifically a deliberative approach to participation, have the potential to enhance the democratization of urban planning in Serbia. Motivated by this perspective, we embarked on exploring the potential of deliberative mini-publics (hereinafter DMPs) in the process of adopting urban plans. Building on existing scholarship, our hypothesis is that DMPs can facilitate a more inclusive planning process that considers diverse interests within a specific territory, reducing potential spatial conflicts by incorporating different stakeholders in the deliberation process and yielding more legitimate planning solutions (Fearon 1998; Manin, Stein and Mansbridge 1987). Additionally, we anticipate that involving all parties in the deliberation process can strengthen their commitment to the long-term democratization of urban planning (Morrell 2005).

As members of the research team, we actively participated in the design and implementation of three deliberative forums during different stages of urban plan development, organized by the Ministry of Space (hereinafter MoS)[1] collective in Belgrade in 2021 and 2022. In this chapter, our objective is to share the conclusions drawn from the design and implementation of these forums. We will present the theoretical framework of collaborative planning that underpins our approach, explain the rationale behind specific elements incorporated in the forums' design and highlight the effects they had on the deliberation process and its final outcomes. Through a predominantly qualitative analysis of the data gathered from these three forums, we claim that the provision of relevant information in a timely and accessible manner significantly enhances citizens' capacity and competency to engage in the urban planning process. Moreover, we argue that incorporating diverse perspectives contributes to the quality and legitimacy of the final political decisions, in this case, the urban planning proposals. Finally, we assert that the deliberative process has the potential to transform the preconceived positions of all who participated.

Deliberative Planning Approach – Urban Planning and Deliberative Democracy

In the context of a wider democratic deficit, participatory democracy and, more specifically, deliberative democracy, have increasingly become focal topics in political science (Đorđević 2014; Fiket 2019; Shappiro 1999). Furthermore, these concepts have found application and garnered interest in various disciplines, including planning theory (Forester 1999). The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a notable shift in planning approaches. Alongside the *deliberative turn* in political theory, there emerged a *communicative turn* in planning, shifting from an expert-driven approach to one that emphasized

more intensive and widespread citizen participation (Friedman 1987; Healey 1992; Healey 1997; Perić and Miljuš 2017). Planning theory underwent a significant transformation by embracing the *communicative-collaborative* planning paradigm, which treats planning as an "interactive, discursive, conflict-mediation, and consensus-building" practice (Sager 2002: 369), marking a departure from the previously dominant *rational* approach. In accordance with this shift, active and substantial public participation in decision-making is considered a necessary foundation for coordinated and high-quality planning (Alexander 2008). Thus, the quality of planning is directly influenced by the quality of public debate and achieved communication, as these foster planning decisions and solutions that aim to reconcile individual interests with broader social efficiency and responsibility (Maruna 2019). This theoretical framework has led to the development of diverse collaborative planning approaches that "share an analytical focus on communication in the micro practices of planning and a normative preference for inclusive dialogues" (Westin 2021: 132).

The communicative turn in planning has brought about a significant and politically relevant intervention by repositioning and decentering the *role of the planner* within the planning process (Foley 1997; Milovanović-Rodić 2013; Perić and Miljuš 2017). In contrast to the rational approach that privileges the *expert planner*'s position as crucial in the planning process, the communicative planning approach recognizes the knowledge and insights of so-called *common people* as equally valuable and relevant (Innes 1995). In the communicative-collaborative process, the role of planners/experts is to contribute opinions to be considered and discussed, as well as provide clarifications on technical matters (Milovanović-Rodić 2013). Thus, the planner assumes the role of *mediator* rather than a central authority in the planning process (Forester 1999). Simultaneously, the inclusion of diverse perspectives and interests is believed to generate solutions that align closer to the *common interest* (Forester 1999; Healey 1992; Innes 1995).

However, collaborative planning models encompass diverse practices of participation, some of which have received critical reactions. One such critique is the perceived insensitivity toward alternate possibilities and access of actors involved in the collaborative process (Sandercock 1998). Furthermore, there is a lack of acknowledgment that power relations of external dynamics can permeate the decision-making process, regardless of the collective and equitable aspirations of the collaborative formats. To address these concerns, many scholars of collaborative planning emphasize the importance of *deliberation* as an integral aspect of the planning process (Hirt 2005). Deliberation offers a way to mitigate these drawbacks by providing a more inclusive and equitable decision-making process. Unlike traditional collaborative planning, which may allow certain interest groups with more power, resources or influence to exert disproportionate control, the deliberative approach goes beyond merely including diverse perspectives and takes into account participants' varying positions of power and access (Forester 1999). It seeks to reduce the dominance of

certain groups or individuals by creating a deliberative space where all participants have equal opportunities to express their views, critically examine arguments and collectively arrive at decisions. This approach helps prevent the undue influence of dominant interest groups and promotes a more inclusive and balanced outcome (Innes and Booher 2004). Additionally, the deliberative approach places a strong emphasis on recognizing and including the voices of marginalized groups that may be underrepresented or systematically excluded from traditional planning processes. By providing a platform for substantive discussions and open dialogue, deliberative approaches enable these marginalized voices to be heard and contribute to shaping urban planning decisions (Parkinson 2006).

In line with this differentiation and drawing upon Habermas's principles of *authentic dialogue*, the process of deliberation necessitates *inclusivity*, ensuring access for *all* actors who are affected by the planning solution at hand (Booher and Innes 2002; Manin, Stein and Mansbridge 1987). However, achieving such a level of inclusivity remains an ideal that is often challenging to attain. The concept of inclusiveness within deliberative democracy theory is approached differently by scholars (Thompson 2008), but in practice, it is frequently operationalized by ensuring that all relevant interests and perspectives are included in the information package on the deliberation topic if they cannot be presented in person among deliberation participants. In such a way, all perspectives become part of the discussion and are taken into account when collective decisions are made.

In addition to being inclusive, deliberation is also assumed to foster *equality*, not only by providing equal access to discussions but also by moderating them to ensure equal participation in it. Furthermore, the notion of equality in deliberation rests on the belief that it increases the potential for balancing existing power dynamics and resource distribution, decreasing their influence on the deliberative process and its outcomes (Forester 1999).

The purpose of the deliberative process is to facilitate discussions where participants present and support their individual positions with rational arguments while being presented with contrasting viewpoints. This process allows for the recognition and understanding of how different values and needs give rise to diverse spatial interests. As a result, participants may question and potentially modify their own attitudes and preferences (Đorđević and Vasiljević 2022; Fishkin 2009; Mutz 2006). Through such an exchange among participants, a stronger overall argumentation is shaped, not prior to but *through* exchange between participating actors (Innes and Booher 2010). In line with the *transformative* assumption of deliberative theory, the process of building a wider consensus through collaborative planning based on deliberation changes the participants, as they "can produce new relationships, new practices and new ideas" (Innes and Booher 1999: 413). Thus, when distinguishing between participative planning and collaborative planning centered on deliberation, Bentrup (2001) argues that the former assumes the necessity of education only for the wider public, i.e., citizens, while the latter asserts that all actors involved,

including planners and representatives of public institutions, should be informed and educated through the deliberative process.

Finally, the process of *communicative action*, as defined by Habermas (1984) as a type of communicative exchange oriented toward achieving mutual understanding through dialogue and negotiation, assumes the attainment of *consensus*. Although it can be challenging to reach a consensus on every territory covered by urban plans, considering the contemporary urban context and its polarizing spatial interests, deliberation still holds the potential to generate more legitimate planning solutions, even amid such tensions. The collaborative planning process aims to expose participants to diverse, often antagonistic, perspectives and values. Through rational discussion, it strives to arrive at universal arguments, resulting in deliberation outputs that are more *common*, as they are more inclusive of different perspectives and needs, and are more rooted in reasoned deliberation rather than arbitrary decisions made by political elites (Fearon 1998; Fiket 2019).

Taking into account these characteristics of the deliberation process, the following section will analyze the context of urban planning in Serbia, revealing that the existing participation, despite being nominally regarded as a collaborative planning model, lacks democratic capacity. It will also elucidate how the integration of the deliberation approach holds the potential to democratize the planning process and elevate the quality and legitimacy of plans to a higher level.

The Context of Urban Planning and Participation in Serbia

Participation in urban planning is not a recent or novel concept in Serbia or its legislative framework. It was formally established in 1949 (when Serbia was part of Yugoslavia),[2] with the introduction of a 30-day public hearing period for draft plans. All subsequent planning laws also relied on formal public participation and public discussions. The 1974 Constitution[3] introduced decentralization of power by outlining the rights and obligations of the local community (*mesne zajednice*), prioritizing the achievement of common interests and citizen needs in shaping their immediate environment. At the same time, the Law on Spatial Planning and Development of the Socialist Republic of Serbia[4] made *public insight* and *public discussions* part of regular planning practices. Amendments to this document in 1985 and 1989 defined fairly extensive public participation, expert discussions in two phases of plan adoption and public opinion polls in the analysis phase of planning.[5] The 1980s are often considered a "golden period of planning" by many authors, as it embraced an integral and intersectoral approach with mandatory public participation (Čolić 2006; Maričić, Cvetinović and Bolay 2018). According to some authors, some of the main assumptions of deliberative democracy were included at the time, as better access to information motivated citizens and delegates to actively participate in the planning process (Dabović, Nedović-Budić and Djordjević 2017).

The collapse of the socialist system and the subsequent transition period gave rise to a phenomenon known as the democratic deficit syndrome in planning practice (Maričić, Cvetinović and Bolay 2018), further exacerbated by inadequate institutional and organizational arrangements in spatial development (Vujošević, Zeković and Maričić 2010). Particularly after 2000, planning culture experienced a significant deterioration, deviating from democratic, participatory and emancipatory models (Maričić, Cvetinović and Bolay 2018). Opportunities for participation decreased, and there was a lack of political will to establish arrangements for more substantial participation and transparency. Consequently, the concept of public interest nearly vanished from the planning process, and participation was reduced to "mere public consultations on already prepared decisions" (Vujošević and Petovar 2006: 373). On the other hand, some authors argue, in the transition to a market-oriented model, planners failed to comprehend the complexities of the new political and economic framework (Maruna 2015; Petovar 2004). As a result, modern planning practice has been characterized by mistrust, arrogance and fear on the part of planners and planning institutions to open the planning process to the public, hindering the development of mechanisms for broader public participation and relegating it to a merely formal level to ensure plan *legality* rather than *legitimacy* (Maričić, Cvetinović and Bolay 2018).

The current Serbian legal framework of planning regulation[6] nominally recognizes public participation as one of its fundamental principles. Furthermore, Serbia is a signatory to numerous international agendas and conventions that prioritize this principle in urban development. However, in practice, participation is often reduced to a mere adherence to established procedures and the legal minimum, which only allows for consultations with the general public and professionals during two specific stages of the planning process. These two sets of public insights are followed by a public discussion, which is the final phase of plan drafting, during which citizens can publicly voice their objections to the Planning Commission. In addition, there is currently no formal mechanism in place to ensure maximum inclusivity in the planning process. As a result, participation is most often reduced to individuals already equipped with the technical knowledge necessary to comprehend the planning documentation and who possess the time and resources to engage in the process. Consequently, this leads to a low level of representation of the objections to the plan via formal procedure, considering the diverse range of interests and spatial needs in a given territory. At the same time, the public discussions, which follow the public insight phase, rarely provide an opportunity for equal and balanced discussion of proposals originating outside formal institutions.

The exclusionary nature of planning is also evident in the prevailing perception among citizens, which impacts their motivation to engage in formal participation opportunities. A public opinion poll conducted in 2021 (Aksentijević and Timotijević 2022) on the territory of Belgrade revealed that over half the respondents believe the city's development aligns with the private interests of the political and economic elite, while only 2% believe that the Urban Planning

Institute of Belgrade, the main planning institution, plays a significant role in shaping the city and as few as 3% believe that residents of Belgrade contribute to decisions related to its development.[7] Additionally, every other resident of Belgrade believes that citizens are generally poorly informed about city development strategies, urban plans and projects. The survey further indicated that a significant 93% of citizens have never submitted objections to a plan. The main reasons cited by citizens for not participating in the formal urban planning process include: 14.6% were uninformed, 8.5% did not feel invited, 7.9% were unaware of the opportunity for involvement and 6% believed there was no point or impact in participating.[8] These findings demonstrate a remarkably low level of participation, lack of adequate public information dissemination and a general lack of citizens' belief in their political efficacy and right to influence their own environment and quality of life (Fiket and Pudar Draško 2021).

Last, if we consider that legitimate planning outcomes can only be achieved through the inclusion of diverse interest groups in the planning process (Campbell and Marshall 2002), the absence of substantial and meaningful communication and public involvement in decisions regarding spatial policies directly undermines the planning legitimacy, which is the case in Serbia. Exclusion of the public from the planning process renders planning practices vulnerable to instrumentalization, favoring narrow interests of the alliance between private capital and political power.

Thus, the current low level of participation represents a significant weakness within the Serbian planning system, which is compounded by insufficient information, lack of process transparency (Čolić and Dželebić 2018), diminished authority and inadequate capacities of relevant institutions (Maruna, Čolić and Milovanović Rodić 2018). Within the highly politicized and polarized landscape in which spatial policies are created and implemented, and where the interests of investors and large capital prevail, escalation of spatial conflicts in urban development and the long-term degradation of urban space are ultimately unavoidable results. Therefore, it is crucial to explore various formats rooted in deliberative democracy, such as the DMPs, in order to better understand their potential application in fostering a higher quality of participation, increased inclusivity and, ultimately, enhancing the legitimacy of urban plans created through collaborative efforts involving diverse stakeholders.

Design and Implementation of the Three Deliberative Forums in Belgrade

In the following two sections, we will present the design, implementation and insights into the effects of the three *forums*[9] organized by the MoS collective between November 2021 and April 2022. These forums were methodologically inspired by the format of DMPs[10] and were implemented with the objective of exploring the potential of the deliberative approach in fostering a more inclusive and legitimate urban planning process.

DMPs represent a specific model of a group of citizens directly affected by a particular issue or policy engaged in deliberation to collectively develop a

consensual proposal (Goodin and Dryzek 2006). While the design of DMPs may vary across different contexts, they adhere to the fundamental principles and objectives of deliberative democracy outlined in the second section of this chapter. First, participants are recruited in such a way as to ensure diversity of experiences and attitudes toward the issue. Second, the discussion is facilitated by professional moderators who ensure equal access to the discussion, foster a respectful manner of discourse and encourage the use of rational arguments in expressing preferences and opinions. Last, supporting the discussion are relevant actors and decision-makers there to provide balanced information, present potential alternative solutions and discuss any structural limitations pertaining to the issue (Fiket and Đorđević 2022).

The three deliberative forums implemented did not strictly adhere to the DMP format for reasons that will be given in turn (Table 5.1). Furthermore, an *emergent design approach* was adopted, allowing for flexibility and adaptability to different circumstances and insights gained from previous forums. This

Table 5.1 Overview of design elements of the three deliberative forums

	Forum 1	*Forum 2*	*Forum 3*
Scope of the plan[a]	**Plan of detailed regulation** for the construction of a pedestrian-bicycle connection between Omladinskih brigada Street (Municipality of Novi Beograd) and Ada Ciganlija (Municipality of Čukarica) in Belgrade	**General Urban Plan** of Belgrade until 2041	**Plan of general regulation** for the area of the Municipality of Palilula outside of the scope of the General Urban Plan of Belgrade
Position in the adoption procedure	After the early public insight, before the public insight stage	After the decision to develop a plan, before the early public insight stage	During the public insight stage
Recruitment approach	Recruitment through local groups of active citizens	Random representative sample recruited by an outsourced agency	Recruitment through local groups of active citizens
Participants (number)	Local community (members of the local initiatives and their neighbors): 36; experts (urban planning and mobility): 4	Belgrade citizens (representative sample): 38; experts (urban and spatial planning, environmental protection, mobility): 8	Local community (members of the local initiatives and their neighbors): 25; experts (urban and spatial planning): 2

(*Continued*)

Table 5.1 (Continued)

	Forum 1	*Forum 2*	*Forum 3*
Structure	One-day event combining small-group discussions and a plenary discussion session with experts	Two-day event combining small-group and plenary discussion sessions with experts	One-day event combining small-group discussions and plenary discussion sessions with experts, with an informational session added at the beginning
Role of the experts	Experts participate in composing the information material and are available at the plenary session to respond to participants' questions and proposals	Experts are participating in composing the information material and are present in both group and plenary deliberation, co-creating the proposals	Experts are participating in composing the information material and are present in plenary deliberation
Relevance of the results/ propositions (impact of the DMP on the particular plan development)	Some proposed solutions from the DMP correspond to the elements of the plan displayed at the latter stage – public inquiry	Concept of the plan displayed in the early public insight did not show any element matching the principles proposed at the DMP	Proposals from the DMP sent as objections at the public insight; during the public insight, officials said that a separate plan for detailed regulation would be drafted for the particular territory

Notes:

a According to current legislation in Serbia, urban plans are organized into three levels. *General Urban Plans* (GUP) are strategic development plans that encompass the development of the entire city territory. These plans provide a long-term vision, achievable goals and corresponding directions for development. They outline the general distribution of land use and infrastructure corridors, and identify specific areas for further, more detailed planning and development. To facilitate implementation, GUP is accompanied by a regulatory plan known as the *Plan of General Regulation*, which translates strategic directions into specific spatial solutions. *Detailed Regulation Plans* are adopted for smaller territories, providing more specific parameters for the construction and modification of existing structures.

Regardless of the plan level being adopted, the main elements of the planning procedure remain consistent. After the decision to develop a plan is made by the City Assembly, the responsible institution or entity develops a plan concept, which is then presented to the public for a 15-day *early public insight* period. Taking into account objections received during this phase and opinions from relevant sectoral institutions, the plan is further refined into a pre-final version. This pre-final version is then subjected to another round of *public insight* lasting 30 days, during which time citizens and experts can submit objections. Finally, the plan is adopted by the authorities without prior public display of the final version.

allowed for the exploration of various approaches to participant recruitment (including both purposive sampling through outsourced agencies and direct recruitment through local citizens' groups), positioning of the forum within the time line of urban plan adoption, forum structure dynamics and other elements meant to assess their impact on the process and final outcomes. Table 5.1. shows how these elements varied in the three forums in question.

Phase 1: Selection of the Plan (Scope and Position in the Adoption Procedure) and Framing the Subject(s) of Discussion

Each forum was organized in relation to a specific plan that was at a different stage of adoption (see Table 5.1). This approach served two purposes: first, to enhance participant motivation by aligning the discussion with ongoing planning processes; second, to increase the likelihood of forum outcomes being integrated into the final plan. The choice of plan level and its development stage had a significant impact on how the discussion topics were framed by the research team.[11] For instance, plans of the detailed and general regulation could allow specific urban elements to be discussed (from the justification for a footbridge or accompanying garages in Forum 1 to the endangered green infrastructure and public facilities lacking in the community in Forum 3). Conversely, the strategic plan for a city of two million over the next 20 years (Forum 2) required a different approach – more abstract framing of discussion topics – and more general suggestions set as outputs: planning visions and principles related to the expansion of city territory, mobility infrastructure design and distribution of public use.

Phase 2: Providing Information on the Forum Topic

In order to facilitate rational and informed deliberation, it was essential for participants to have access to relevant and balanced information about the subject (Fishkin 1995). Recognizing the limitations of the formal process of informing citizens, each forum ensured the creation and timely distribution of printed and online materials for all participants. These materials explained the purpose of the deliberative process and provided relevant information on the subject at hand – overview of the proposed planning solution, affirmative and critical opinions on the planning proposal (if applicable) and other relevant information or statements by stakeholders. The initial drafts of the materials were prepared by members of the MoS collective. In the second stage of preparation, experts in their respective fields, including urban planning experts in all forums and mobility and environmental protection experts in two of the forums, provided their comments and suggestions to finalize the informational materials. The materials were distributed at least four days prior to the forum to allow participants ample time for review. As some practices of citizens' assemblies included the so-called *learning phase* (Gerwin and Gąsiorowska 2020), which involves live presentations and brief discussions of positions,

arguments and proposals from decision-makers, experts and stakeholders prior to the deliberation phase, the third forum also incorporated a 50-minute session at the beginning. The purpose of this session was to clarify and elaborate on the information previously provided. By including this session in the third forum, we aimed to explore how different methods of transferring relevant information pertaining to the subject of deliberation could impact participants' ability to engage in the discussion effectively.

Phase 3: Recruitment of Participants

Groups of participants were carefully identified and selected based on the specific topic or territory covered by the urban plan. The aim was to ensure the involvement of all those affected by the plan, following the principle of inclusive participation.

a **Citizens**: The recruitment of participants for the first and third deliberative forums targeted inhabitants of the specific territory covered by the plan and the surrounding area, as well as individuals working in the plan's territory (even if they resided elsewhere). In collaboration with already existing strong local initiatives,[12] recruitment of local inhabitants was conducted in two stages. First, the local initiatives collected a broader pool of potential participants (approximately 50 individuals) from their members and neighbors. The MoS collective then contacted these potential participants, collected socioeconomic data (sex, age, employment status, education level, disability, parental status) and identified any perspectives that were lacking in the sample. In the second stage, additional participants were recruited based on the profiles of participants deemed favorable. Furthermore, owners and employees of local shops were directly approached and invited to participate in the forums.

The second forum required a sample of citizens residing throughout the entire territory of Belgrade, and the recruitment was outsourced to an agency to gather a purposive sample of 40 participants.[13] As the only two-day forum, participants were expected to attend both sessions (one week apart), with incentives for participation provided. Unlike in Forums 1 and 3, the provision of incentives for Forum 2 aligned with the common practice of deliberative formats, such as citizens' assemblies. This approach acknowledges the involvement of citizens who are not self-selected and may have less interest or access to participation opportunities. Offering incentives also compensates for their time away from their usual obligations.

b **Experts**: In all three forums, experts were carefully selected based on their expertise in the topic of discussion. Urban and spatial planning experts were present in all forums, while experts in mobility and environmental protection participated in two of the forums. These experts were chosen from academia, professional associations and civil society to ensure a

diverse range of arguments and perspectives on the subject. Besides their involvement in creating the informational materials distributed prior to the forum, the experts played a crucial role during the forums. They presented their disciplinary knowledge to participants, either to assist in decision-making regarding proposed suggestions and solutions or to strengthen the arguments put forth by the citizens. In Forums 1 and 3, experts were present only during the plenary sessions and not during the small-group deliberations. However, Forum 2 took a different approach due to the complexity of the subject matter. In this case, experts actively participated in the small-group discussions throughout the duration of the process.

c **Representatives of public interest/decision-makers**: In line with the principle of diversity, MoS aimed to involve decision-makers and representatives of relevant institutions in the forums. Invitations were sent to these parties[14] during the preparation for the first forum, but all of them declined to participate. This lack of responsiveness was not surprising given the contentious relationship between the majority of institutions and the civil sector critical of the current government (CSP 2022). MoS members anticipated their absence, which was confirmed by the rejections received. Considering the present distrust in politicians and the fact that these forums were the first of their kind to be implemented in urban planning in Serbia, the primary objective was to empower citizens and motivate them to take a more active role in spatial decision-making, making this new format more appealing to a wider population. However, it should be noted that the information material included the position of the public sector based on arguments presented in the narrative section of the planning document and relevant officials' statements in the media (when applicable). The arguments put forth by city officials and the planning documents were discussed during the forum sessions. For instance, during the first forum, elements of the plan, such as the bridge, parking areas and green spaces, were deliberated from multiple perspectives, including those in favor based on the planning document, as well as arguments presented by the MoS collective and the local initiatives regarding the commercial potential of the location, air pollution and citizen participation levels, among other considerations.[15]

Phase 4: Structure of Discussions

The structure and length of the discussions varied among the forums, depending on the topics discussed and the involvement of experts and stakeholders. The forums consisted of small-group discussions with eight to ten participants, as well as plenary sessions. Experienced moderators, who were outsourced for this purpose, facilitated the discussions to ensure equal participation and keep the focus on generating proposals relevant to the forum's subject.

Phase 5: Reflection Phase

Following each forum, a collective evaluation and reflection phase took place involving MoS members, facilitators, moderators and experts. Focus groups were organized to discuss and assess the process and outcomes of the forum. The evaluation focused on various aspects, including (a) informational materials, (b) agenda and moderation guide (structure and time line of the forum), (c) roles of those participating in the forum (experts, moderators, facilitators, participants), (d) dynamics of the deliberation process and (e) the relevance of the results. The insights gained from these reflections played a crucial role in shaping subsequent modifications and improvements in the design of later forums in accordance with the emergent design approach.

Citizens' feedback and reflections were primarily gathered through informal conversations immediately after the forum. However, in the case of the first forum, a systematic anonymous post-forum survey was conducted among the participants. The survey consisted of questions that assessed participants' attitudes toward the informational material, the course of deliberation, the role of the experts and the participants' overall perception of the format.

Findings and Discussion

The data was collected through the method of participant observation, as the authors of this chapter were actively involved in the conceptualization and implementation of all three forums. Due to participants' explicit refusal to have their discussions recorded, transcripts were not available. Instead, the following sources of data were utilized: (1) field notes from multiple sources, including the authors and facilitators who documented the main conclusions and final proposals from the discussions; (2) focus group discussions for evaluation and reflection involving experts, moderators, facilitators and MoS members; and (3) results from the post-forum survey conducted after the first forum. The data analysis focused on examining the reflection of the informational input through materials or meeting phases, participants' opinions and references to the provided materials, changes in preferences and attitudes during the discussions and the quality of arguments presented by participants in support of their own positions.

In this section, our goal is to assess the potential of DMP-based forums in contributing to the democratization of urban planning in Serbia. We will provide insights into the design and process of the deliberative forums and their effects based on our analysis of the collected data. Our claim is that these forums achieved a higher level of inclusion and diversity of interests compared to the current urban planning procedures, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of the resulting planning solutions. We further argue that when informed adequately and in a timely manner, citizens have the capacity and competence to actively contribute to the discussion on planning solutions and provide relevant proposals. Last, we will discuss the transformation of preferences and

attitudes demonstrated by the participants, highlighting the political potential of this method in broader democratization efforts.

Finding 1: The methodology of the deliberative format, with its emphasis on diversity and equal opportunities for engagement, provides a platform for significantly higher levels of legitimacy in planning solutions compared to current procedures.

The absence of an effective public arena for creating and discussing spatial policies in Serbia raises concerns about the interests reflected in the adopted planning documents and casts doubt on their legitimacy. Even though the level of diversity in the three implemented forums differed between those participants who were self-recruited through active local initiatives and those recruited by an outsourced agency, the latter exhibiting significantly higher diversity, efforts were made to reach out to different target groups, including residents and people whose place of employment was on the relevant territory. These groups were provided with informational material that aimed to make the technocratic language of the planning documents more accessible and expand the relevant information with different perspectives on the planning solution. All this ensured a greater diversity of represented experiences, needs and interests compared to formal procedures. This was evident through the range of preferences presented during the discussions, as well as the various proposals that were introduced but then reviewed, filtered and modified both through small-group discussions among citizens and exchanges with experts.

In addition, moderation of the deliberation, both in groups and plenary settings, was carried out by experienced professionals. This made the exchange of information, arguments and proposals more inclusive, empowering *all* participating citizens to ask questions, challenge proposals from other participants and experts and view different positions as benevolent interventions toward constructive debate. As a result, participants were able to reevaluate their personal attitudes and modify their initial assumptions. These conditions, which differ significantly from those in formal decision-making processes in urban planning, have provided a stronger basis for creating legitimate planning solutions that prioritize community interests.

Finding 2: Recruitment approaches result in different levels of participants' motivation and openness toward educational and transformational aspects of the deliberative process.

In addition to diversity, the level and quality of engagement can also be ascribed to the recruitment process. Participants who were generally more active citizens tended to possess a higher level of information and knowledge on the particular subject. However, they also exhibited a greater resistance to

changing their initial attitudes and preferences, even after considering other perspectives and arguments. Furthermore, their personal (emotional) attachment to the subject sometimes posed challenges to maintaining an egalitarian discussion, as they occasionally dominated the discussion, driven to *persuade* others rather than engage in a thorough exploration of their own attitudes.

On the other hand, *non-active* citizens' knowledge relied heavily on the informational material and contributions from experts. Nevertheless, they proved to be more productive in the deliberation process, as they were inclined toward rational arguments and reflective thinking about different opinions. The question that remains to be methodologically explored more thoroughly is how the combination of these two participant types influences the discussion process and its outcomes. It is worth investigating whether such a mix is indeed beneficial to the overall deliberative process.

> *Finding 3: Timely and adequate gathering and presentation of information enhances the participants' competence to engage in discussions on urban plans and contribute to the co-creation of relevant proposals.*

As previously elaborated, citizens remain insufficiently informed regarding the timing of public insights and sessions in which proposed planning solutions are debated and decided, as well as about the content of the given proposals (Aksentijević and Timotijević 2022).[16] Alongside the limited availability of information, obstacles to public participation further manifest in the complexity of the documentation presented, which requires comprehensive knowledge in order to understand the content and form an informed opinion (Stojić 2020).

Considering these challenges, the informational material provided at all three forums played a crucial role in facilitating meaningful participation. The material was designed to translate the technical planning vocabulary into a clear and accessible format that considers multiple perspectives on the topic. The evaluation conducted after the first forum showed that 70% of the participants who responded to the survey found the information in the material useful in articulating their attitude toward the plan. Additionally, all survey correspondents agreed that the material adequately represented diverse perspectives. The average grade given to the information material was 8.31 on a scale from 1 to 10, indicating a high level of satisfaction. This approach to informing participants contributed to the generation of argument-based conversation and empowered citizens to actively and competently participate in the discussion. This was evident from the content of the arguments and references during the discussions, reflecting personal experiences, expert claims and information from the material. Furthermore, the analysis of the proposals that resulted from the deliberation and the rationale behind them demonstrated both their relevance to urban planning and their alignment with the interests of the community as a whole.

Simultaneously, the implementation of the project provided valuable insights, suggesting that printed informational materials may not always be the most effective means of informing citizens. The second forum was a notable example in this sense, where only approximately 30% of participants read and incorporated the arguments from the materials into their own perspectives. This is attributed to the complex and abstract nature of the topic at hand. It has led us to the conclusion that more concrete, smaller-scale plans allow for this format of informational materials. However, for large-scale plans, there should be an extended learning phase in order to allow the participants to interact more closely with the relevant information. In addition, the in-person session for the presentation of the relevant information, conducted in Forum 3, also seemed to have a significant level of effectiveness, resulting in a reduction of difference in motivation among the participants to engage in discussion, as they had all been acquainted with the same set of information prior to the discussion.

Finding 4: When exposed to different opinions and provided with the opportunity to share and discuss different positions in a rational exchange, it becomes evident that all participants (including both citizens and experts) possess the ability to learn and transform their initial preferences and attitudes.

As previous studies show, a transformative aspect of the deliberation was evident among both citizen and expert participants involved in three deliberative forums. Analysis of the positions and arguments shared during the discussions revealed that a significant number of participants, upon being exposed to the opinions of other citizens or experts, experienced a change in their initial attitudes. In many cases, this resulted in amendments to their initial proposals or claims, while in some instances, participants underwent more substantial shifts in their positions.

To illustrate this, let us consider two examples. In the second forum, within the group deliberating on whether the city should expand or intensify in a compact manner, the majority of citizens initially favored expansion due to their daily experiences with traffic congestion and limited parking space in the central zone of the city. However, when presented with expert insights regarding the costs of such a strategy of urban growth, in terms of infrastructure and transportation networks, as well as the negative environmental impacts of urban sprawl, most participants eventually supported the proposal for compact urban growth. They recognized the need to address current problems through innovative means, such as promoting green mobility options in the central parts of the city.

Another example highlights the transformation of experts' perceptions regarding citizens' capacities and competencies to participate in the deliberation process regarding urban planning. Prior to the forums, many experts held assumptions that citizens lacked sufficient knowledge to engage in discussions on

urban and spatial planning issues. Some even had strong skepticism about citizens' ability to discuss matters of common interest beyond their personal needs. However, upon the reflection and evaluation process after each forum, experts demonstrated a significant increase in their trust in citizens' capacities and competencies. They also got to acknowledge the importance of providing inclusive and adequate information to all participants, often lacking in formal urban planning procedures. This transformation is noteworthy because many of these experts are also involved in those formal institutional procedures. Their positive experience with the forums and the change in their attitudes have the potential to contribute to a more favorable stance toward institutionalizing such methods within formal planning procedures.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have presented an overview of the key findings derived from the implementation of the three deliberative forums in the field of urban planning. Our intention was to present the elements of design and implementation of these forums and contribute to a better comprehension of their potential to foster democratic urban development. Additionally, our goal was to establish prospective strategies for advancing the design of similar forums in the future.

Our findings underscore the significant contribution of the diversity of perspectives and attitudes present in the co-creation process of urban planning for the quality and legitimacy of planning solutions. This diversity, inherent to the deliberative format, stands in contrast to the formal planning procedures in Serbia. Typically, plan adoption tends to involve selective inclusion of interests, often aligned with capital, thereby exacerbating spatial inequalities. However, the three implemented deliberative forums showed how diverse perspectives of citizens, strengthened by expert knowledge, can generate solutions that align more closely with common interests. Although the planning proposals that emerged from these forums were not entirely integrated into the adopted plans, they still constitute relevant suggestions and are more representative of the community's needs. As such, they have the potential to contribute to the greater legitimacy of final planning documents.

Moreover, the process of deliberation proved to have a transformative influence on the individuals engaged in the forums, including both citizens and experts. By participating in respectful exchanges of different arguments and attitudes, initial preferences are challenged, while discussions lead toward exploring commonalities and reaching consensual proposals. Such transformative potential contributes to long-term change in the political culture in Serbia, particularly regarding citizens' participation in decision-making. Additionally, the practice of rational dialogue and exchange with opposing standpoints strengthens all participants, equipping them with enhanced capacity for future democratic processes.

The implemented forums also confirmed the crucial role the design of the deliberation process plays in fostering meaningful participation and facilitating

informed decision-making. The presentation of comprehensive and easily accessible informational materials, coupled with the involvement of experts throughout the forums, empowered participants to engage in rational and evidence-based deliberation. Furthermore, two distinct recruitment approaches – recruitment through local citizens' groups and outsourced to an agency – affected the quality of discussions. The differing motivations of participants emerging from these approaches also generated different dynamics of exchange and affected the transformative nature of deliberation. Citizens active prior to the deliberation were eager to engage in discussion but had more difficulties with their attitudes being examined. On the other hand, citizens who were at first hesitant to participate in the discussion became more supportive of rational debates and exploring consensual suggestions, often resulting in a change in their initial preferences. This insight also inspired future prospects for investigating how a combination of more and less active citizens can contribute to the outcomes and objectives of the deliberative process of urban planning.

It is also relevant to reflect on the limitations of this study. One notable limitation was the absence of representatives of relevant institutions and decision-makers from all three forums, a significant obstacle to realizing the full potential of deliberative forums for democratizing the urban planning process. This stemmed from the external structural tensions between the current authorities and civil society actors, as elaborated in the section on the context of urban planning in Serbia. Nonetheless, this absence undermined the process in several ways. First, the diversity of attitudes exchanged during the discussions, unlike the informational material, lacked an important perspective from the decision-makers' side. While this posed a challenge, we believe it did not invalidate the assumption regarding the legitimacy of planning solutions created through these deliberative forums. Second, as mentioned in the findings, there was a significant change in the attitudes of the involved experts toward the process of deliberation and the capacity and competence of citizens to participate. Similarly, the potential participation of decision-makers and the possibility of transforming their assumptions about these matters would not only be productive for this specific process but also for the long-term institutionalization of deliberative methods in urban planning. Finally, one of the most notable negative effects was the lack of direct feedback from decision-makers during and after the discussions when the plans were further developed. This left citizens without tangible evidence of the impact of their participation and their political efficacy, and perpetuated a level of distrust in institutions. However, it is worth mentioning that out of the three plans addressed by the forums, two have not yet been fully adopted by the city government, making it impossible to determine whether there has been any impact from the forums or not. An example of potential impact can be seen in the Plan of Detailed Regulation discussed in the first forum. During the public hearing period in February 2023, the presented version of the plan removed one of the initially planned

garages. The rationale explicitly mentioned the preservation of the tree line along the main street, which was one of the main arguments and demands that resulted from the deliberative forum. Furthermore, in the final version of the plan adopted at the end of February, the second garage was also removed, as demanded by citizens during the forum. These instances suggest a potential influence of the deliberative forum on the planning process, although the overall impact is yet to be fully determined.

Another issue that requires further development in the future is the lack of systematic qualitative and quantitative empirical measurement of the effects of the forums. This limitation arose due to insufficient resources. Although a survey was conducted in the first forum, it was not consistently followed up on in the other two.

Finally, the main challenge lies in the informal nature of this entire endeavor. Without institutional support, the development of this collaborative planning model requires substantial resources for thorough testing and measurement. At the same time, there is a specific tension in pursuing a model that aims to fundamentally change the existing approach to planning while still plugging its results into the current formal participatory procedures, such as early public engagement, public insight and public sessions. However, potential conflicts and challenges do not diminish the potential of the deliberative approach to achieve multiple objectives, even within the existing model.

Following up on the elaborated limitations, to further advance the use of deliberative methods in urban planning, several strategies can be considered. Securing institutional support and engagement from decision-makers is crucial for the effective integration of deliberative forums into formal planning processes. Comprehensive measurement and evaluation should be implemented to provide robust evidence of the impact and effectiveness of these forums. An iterative design approach that allows for continuous improvement and adaptation based on feedback and insights from previous forums can enhance their effectiveness.

The implementation of deliberative forums in the Serbian context has demonstrated their potential for democratizing urban planning and enhancing the legitimacy of planning solutions. By embracing inclusive participation, informed deliberation and transformative dialogue, these forums offer a promising avenue for achieving more sustainable, equitable and community-driven urban development.

Notes

1 The Ministry of Space is an activist collective based in Belgrade, dedicated to advocating for spatial justice and the democratization of urban development. The collective actively engages in research, community mobilization and educational initiatives focused on various areas, including participatory urban planning, the right to housing and climate justice.

2 Basic Decree on the General Urban Plan, Official Gazette of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia no. 78/49.
3 Official Gazette of SFRY no. 9/74.
4 Official Gazette no. 19/74.
5 As part of the planning culture at the Center for Urban Development Planning (CEP), Open Door Days were organized to foster trust between the local community and urban planners. Additionally, surveys were conducted among residents in the planning area to gather information on their needs and expectations. Through these practices, the aim was to resolve most issues and problems through consensus or by finding solutions that met the needs of the majority (Gligorijević and Graovac 2018: 85).
6 Law on Planning and Construction (Official Gazette no. 72/2009, 81/2009 – corr., 64/2010 – decision US, 24/2011, 121/2012, 42/2013 – decision US, 50/2013 – decision US, 98/2013 – decision US, 132/2014, 145/2014, 83/2018, 31/2019, 37/2019 – law, 9/2020 and 52/2021).
7 In addition, a recent report by Čukić et al. (2022) presented an analysis of 109 plans that underwent one of the phases of the planning procedure in 2021: (1) decision to develop a plan, (2) early public insight, (3) public insight, (4) public session and (5) adoption of the plan. The quantitative research confirmed the low level of participation, with only 30% of the total capacity provided by law being utilized in the past year. Consequently, participation has been reduced to a mere formality without significant impact on the planning solutions being offered.
8 A significant proportion of citizens in Belgrade display reluctance in submitting objections to urban plans, with only about 5% having done so. However, nearly one in four residents expresses active engagement or willingness to participate in addressing urban issues within their area of residence. Men (28% compared to 19% of women) demonstrate a higher level of readiness for engagement, as well as the younger population up to 24 years of age (close to 40%). Conversely, more than half of all citizens, particularly the older population (72%), either do not engage or are unwilling to participate in addressing such problems (Aksentijević and Timotijević 2022).
9 When announcing and presenting each of the forums, we have used the term *participatory forum*. This choice was made in order to align with the prevailing public discourse on participation and the critical perspective on its implementation within the existing planning system. By using this term, we aimed to make it more accessible and familiar to the participating citizens and the broader public, while also emphasizing the alternative approach to *participation* compared to the current institutional practices.
10 These deliberative forums were inspired by two citizens' assemblies organized by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade in 2020 (Fiket and Đorđević 2022).
11 The research team consisted of MoS members, urban planning experts and deliberation scholars.
12 "Zajednička inicijativa Blok 70&70A," "Za Blok 45" and "Ne dam Kej" for the Forum 1 and "Volim Padinjak" for Forum 3.
13 Participants for the deliberative forum were selected using an exploratory and qualitative approach, employing quota sampling. The selection process aimed to ensure diversity and inclusiveness among the participants. Initially, the population of interest was identified as people living in Belgrade, and relevant characteristics such as socio-demographic factors (gender, age, education, income, family status) and topic-related factors (municipality of residence, distance from the city center, commuting habits) were taken into consideration. These characteristics served as quotas to ensure the representativeness of the selected participants. The selection process also involved a 'snowball' approach, where participants were selected based

on recommendations and referrals to include individuals with various characteristics. Each of the four groups was organized to include representatives with a mix of the identified important characteristics.

14 Invitations were sent to the Belgrade Urban Planning Bureau, as the processor of the plan; Chief City Urban Planner, as the president of the Commission for Plans; Secretariat for Urban Planning and Construction, City of Belgrade; and Secretariat for Environmental Protection, City of Belgrade.

15 Private investors, who have a direct interest in the planning solutions as they pertain to regulatory frameworks for their investments, could have been an additional targeted group. However, they were not present at any of the forums, as they were not easily identifiable. It is important to note that investors have the right to initiate and finance the drafting of urban plans, particularly plans of detailed regulation. In the case of the three plans discussed in this context, it was the public sector that initiated the planning process.

16 Furthermore, it should be noted that public consultations are typically scheduled on weekdays during working hours, which presents an additional barrier for many individuals to participate due to other commitments and obligations. This further contributes to the lack of inclusivity and limits the opportunities for broader public engagement.

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6 Heterotopia, Social Movements and Democratic Innovation

The Case of AKC Metelkova Mesto in Ljubljana, Slovenia

Nathan Siegrist

Introduction

The current global political landscape is characterized by increasing autocratization and a growing gap between states and citizens, leading to what scholars have dubbed a 'crisis of democracy' (McCaffrie and Akram 2014). In response, there has been a surge of interest in participatory forms of democracy as a means of revitalizing the democratic process. Social movements have played a significant role in this development by experimenting with new democratic structures in their internal organization and spreading these ideas to a wider audience (Flesher Fominaya 2022). These movements represent a challenge to conventional politics and a fundamental critique of the liberal conception of democracy. In the face of shrinking civic space, social movements have moreover become increasingly important in manifesting prefigurative arenas of democratic deliberation and defending arenas of participation (Buzogány, Kerényi and Olt 2022; McMahon and Niparko 2022).

This chapter approaches questions on democratic and participatory practices through the lens of urban grassroots movements and activism. Following Flesher Fominaya's (2022) assertion that the literature on democratic innovation has not sufficiently interrogated the role of social movements, it connects to her subsequent call to interrogate social movements' contributions to democratic innovation. To understand this relationship further, this chapter turns to squatters' movements and the establishment of what Martínez (2020: 213) dubs *anomalous institutions*, meaning autonomous movement institutions positioned "away from the dominant social relations." Through means of urban squatting, such *autonomous spaces* have often been centered on ideals of horizontality and demands of "real" or "deep" democracy (Aureli and Mudu 2017; Gagyi 2016; Martínez López 2013). Yet, the potential for such spaces to provide innovation in the face of democratic backsliding has gone under-addressed within the literature.

The contribution of this chapter is twofold. First, it will argue that we can theorize the character of autonomous spaces as *heterotopic* (heterotopia meaning *other space*), which entails considering the interplay between the movement institutions and the 'dominant social relations' they position themselves

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against, critically assessing whether the heterotopic practices and frameworks are able to transcend their spatial enclosures. Second, this framework is applied within the empirical analysis of the squat AKC Metelkova Mesto in Ljubljana to interrogate the possibilities and limitations of heterotopic struggles for the revitalization of democracy within and beyond the activist enclosures under conditions of democratic backsliding. Having existed as an 'autonomous space' throughout the postsocialist history of Ljubljana, Metelkova users have perpetually identified themselves as 'horizontal,' 'self-governed' and 'autonomous' in contrast to both official institutional bodies and the professionalization of postsocialist civil society (Svete 2013). Such contrasts became manifest during the recent "illiberal" trajectory of state management under Prime Minister Janez Janša's government of 2020–2022, not least during the strict COVID-19 lockdown regime, which spurred international critique and mass protests (Vučko and Šori 2021). The question guiding this chapter thus is, *How can the concept of heterotopia help theorizing contributions of social movements to democratic innovation*? Furthermore, by adopting the heterotopic framework to research urban movements, this chapter argues that urban movements in particular can be viewed as contexts of democratic innovation. This will be achieved through a theoretical discussion on the concept of heterotopia in the upcoming section and an empirical analysis of Metelkova's political functions as a heterotopic space in subsequent analytical sections.

Conceptualizing Heterotopia

This section engages in critical dialogue with classical works within heterotopia studies. This discussion is rooted in my and Thörn's (2012) prior conceptualization of *autonomous heterotopia* as a theoretical device for understanding squatted autonomous spaces as heterogeneous sites of resistance against homogenizing forces of contemporary forms of capitalist urbanization. This conceptualization drew on case studies of Metelkova in Ljubljana, Haga in Gothenburg and Christiania in Copenhagen as heterotopic sites connected to urban movements (Thörn 2012; Thörn, Wasshede and Nilson 2011) and accounts linking political activism, autonomism, alternative spaces and social movements. Due to the various applications of the concept within the literature, sometimes lacking coherency and specificity (Harvey 2000; Johnson 2013), this section will interpret three foundational accounts of heterotopia to discuss how the term was operationalized in these seminal works and to interrogate the strengths and weaknesses in each approach, respectively. These three accounts of heterotopia are Foucault's (1986) initial conceptualization, Hetherington's (1997) re-interpretation of heterotopia as foundational for modernity and Lefebvre's (2003) theorization of heterotopia within capitalist urbanization.

Foucault's account positions heterotopia as existing 'counter-sites,' "enacted utopia in which (…) all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (1986: 24).

In this account, heterotopia emerges in the interplay between utopic and enacted space, defined through the way they mirror contradictions or exclusions within society at large and thus also provide a utopic horizon beyond society in its reified form. Although notoriously open-ended, his emphasis on actually existing sites that invert and contest societal conventions highlights the key contribution of heterotopia theorizing – namely, that of underscoring the importance of 'other' spaces in 'inverting' an imagined mainstream, thus providing societal alternatives. Crucially, Foucault ends his essay on heterotopia by gesturing toward the role of heterotopia in counter-balancing authoritarian trends through the metaphor of the ship as a potentially subversive alternative space: "The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates" (1986: 27). While Foucault thus provides a conceptual basis for considering the linkage between counter-spaces to dominant social relations, loosely positioning such spaces in relation to authoritarian trends of development, lacking in this conceptualization for the purposes of this chapter is (a) the role of collective action in constructing and maintaining heterotopia, (b) an elaborated understanding of how heterotopia may harbor radically democratic practices and (c) their relation to social change beyond the heterotopia itself. Indeed, Foucault spends little time contemplating how and through which actors' heterotopias emerge.

Turning instead to Hetherington (1997), we find a more systematic development of Foucault's account. Hetherington (1997: 13) positions heterotopia centrally within modernity as sites wherein "new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out," which solidifies the connection between heterotopia, innovative practices and social change. This conception opens the door for a nuanced theorization of how alternative spaces and relatively isolated forms of social experimentation may transcend the heterotopia itself and become incorporated into an established order. However, Hetherington's aversion to associating heterotopia with groups "seeking to articulate a voice that is usually denied them" (1997: 52) pursues a different direction than remedying what was found lacking in Foucault's account. The issues of resistance and collective action previously unaddressed in Foucault's account are instead explicitly rejected in Hetherington's articulation of heterotopia not as deviant spaces but as foundational for modernity's progression.

In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre (2003) briefly joins the dissonant choir. Although his account of heterotopia merely spans a few pages, it contains many key components for theorizing power and resistance within the context of urbanization. For Lefebvre, isotopic spaces reflect dominant praxis, meaning geographies of capitalist rationalization, whereas heterotopias make out their opposites – namely, the antipodes wherein urban space may be re-configured to cater to needs excluded by the dominant praxis. Lefebvre describes these spaces as intermingled dialectically: "Anomic groups construct heterotopic spaces, which are eventually reclaimed by the dominant praxis" (2003: 129). Like Foucault's account, this dynamic puts into focus the interdependent, dialectical

relationship between heterotopias and their constitutive outsides (recognized by Lefebvre as isotopias). However, whereas Foucault fails to give weight to exclusions, power and resistance, Lefebvre's definition – albeit brief and underdeveloped – is informed by precisely such themes.

In Lefebvre's account, we thus find an emphasis on the dynamic relationship between heterotopia and dominant praxis. Moreover, Lefebvre hints at the role of collective action in underscoring how anomic groups construct heterotopia. While we thus find many of the shortcomings of preceding accounts amended, it is important to recognize how Lefebvre's notion reverses the prospect of social change when compared to Hetherington (an account lacking in Foucault's concept of heterotopia). Whereas Hetherington (1997) discusses heterotopia as a testing ground of societal alternatives within modernity, which can be integrated to embody social change and thus fulfill modernity's self-promise of *progress*, Lefebvre instead posits the political horizons of heterotopia in terms of *recuperation* into the isotopic dominant praxis of urban capitalism. Although this may be considered a cynical account of the prospects of social change through heterotopic collective action, it predicts how urban alternative spaces have regularly found themselves incorporated in entrepreneurial city plans, for instance, as parts of branding strategies or normalization, during the decades following Lefebvre's writing (e.g., Breznik 2008; Martínez 2020; Ntounis and Kanellopoulou 2017; Thörn 2012). Thus, accounts of alternative urbanisms must understand them as (a) context-dependent and non-static and (b) operating through dialectical tension with "dominant praxis" rather than emerging as "enclaves of emancipation," as Stavrides (2006: 547) has also argued.

Urban heterotopia should, subsequently, not be theorized as idealized 'pure' outsides of capitalist urbanization but rather as sites embodying novel practices and social relations. This allows a consideration of heterotopia as simultaneously embodying geographies of *rupture* and *continuity*. They position themselves as 'other' to an imagined 'mainstream' by embodying alternative utopic political and social horizons, yet they constitute themselves relationally to precisely those outsides, inverting rather than sublating them. This connects to the literature on democratic innovation, as heterotopia, embodying *sites of alternate ordering*, have been conceptualized as sites of experimentation in democratic practices in the face of undemocratic conditions (Chambers 2005). The heterotopic insight to be gained here is to understand these innovations not as isolated, reified practices that can be adopted cross-contextually or cross-institutionally. Instead, the heterotopic conceptual lens suggests an understanding of innovative democratic practices as contextually and dialectically situated in relation to the core conflicts that spur their articulation.

Although urban movements have traditionally been understood as engaging within a cluster of problems relating to, e.g., housing, urban renewal, gentrification or collective consumption, the relationship between urban heterotopia and democratic innovation allows for further consideration of the role of urban movements in producing counter-hegemonic formations whose scopes transcend the scope of *urban* politics. Instead, the sustainment of a

counter-hegemonic "autonomous" space through collective action may function to also contest dominant trends of socio-political development. Within the context of autocratization, such sites may instead function as democratic innovators by sustaining radically democratic visions of an open society. This will be discussed through empirical analysis of the case of the squatted cultural center Metelkova in the upcoming sections to clarify both the potential contributions of urban movements to democratic innovation and the specific yield of the heterotopic framework.

Autonomous Cultural Center Metelkova Mesto

Metelkova is a complex of seven buildings covering an area of approximately 12,500 square meters. Originally built as the military headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian army, it later served as the Slovenian headquarters of the Yugoslav People's Army. Upon Slovenia's declaration of independence, the site was to be dedicated to culture, following requests from alternative communities in the late '80s. However, after the municipality abandoned these plans and initiated the demolition of the site in 1993, it was quickly occupied by activists and has since become a permanent squat. By the mid-90s, it had established its identity as an *autonomous cultural center*. In 1997, as part of Ljubljana's designation as the European Capital of Culture, Metelkova agreed to stop hosting permanent residents, and in exchange, the city officially dedicated the buildings to the promotion of culture and art. Despite this agreement, Metelkova still operates in a legal gray area, and its relationship with authorities remains tense.

Metelkova attracts a diverse range of groups, including artists, club organizers, grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and anti-systemic political collectives. The exteriors of the buildings reflect this diversity, with graffiti, art installations and unique decorations filling the open area, in sharp contrast to the surrounding landscape of modern museums and glass buildings. The sources of funding and purposes of the NGOs located in Metelkova also vary widely, with some receiving support from state and/or municipal institutions, others from international funds for culture or civic engagement and still others seeking alternative sources of income. These organizations can be considered *grassroots NGOs* or *civil society organizations* (CSOs), as they are rooted in Ljubljana's alternative cultural-political scene and connected to the squatted space of Metelkova rather than being highly professionalized and disconnected from grassroots struggles.

As a site for alternative cultural activities and a space associated with contentious action in the postsocialist neoliberalized city, Metelkova has been in constant tension with state and city authorities (Babić 2013; Breznik 2008; Gržinić 2007; Korda 2013; Lebarič 2013). This makes it an interesting case study of how heterotopic sites, characterized by legal, cultural and political autonomy, have emerged in relation to political and democratic developments in wider society. Prior accounts have highlighted Metelkova's

heterotopic qualities as shaped in dynamic interplay with gentrifying and cultural branding strategies, which in turn have also shaped the development of Ljubljana as an aspiring city on a scale of global competition (e.g., Ntounis and Kanellopoulou 2017; Rodríguez-Barcón and Sousa 2021; Siegrist and Thörn 2020). The upcoming analysis expands this discussion, connecting to comparatively more scarce literature on Metelkova's heterotopic position in relation to democratic malaise and the role of the political signifier of *autonomy* in constituting this position (Pavlišič 2013; Pistotnik 2013; Pureber 2013; Svete 2013).

Methods and Material

The upcoming analysis draws on document analysis and interviews with activists, urban planners and municipal officials conducted in tandem with ethnographic observation in Ljubljana, spanning a total of nine weeks across three periods of time (in 2019, 2022, 2023). Besides interviews, the analysis draws on several forms of documents, such as texts produced by different Metelkova groups, policy briefs regarding Slovenian civic engagement and other forms of textual output detailing developments related to Metelkova (e.g., newspaper articles or public statements). The material has been coded thematically, informed by the theoretical approach and an inductive overview of its contents. Drawing on this empirical base, the analysis will interrogate how Metelkova's heterotopic qualities are articulated as a counter to conventional political institutions, embodying a site of 'real' democratic practices and horizons. Methodologically, the analysis centers a plurality of voices yet seeks to contextualize them in relation to each other and wider socio-political settings. In doing so, the analysis not only interrogates the relationship between Metelkova and 'dominant praxis' but also the differing positions constituting Metelkova's heterotopy.

The analysis is separated into two sections, presented thematically: first, an overview of the *ideational framework* of Metelkova users in articulating its autonomous position. This section approaches the discursive-political construction of *autonomy* as an open signifier in relation to varying ideas of "real" democracy, interrogating Metelkova's heterotopic position. This section chiefly draws on the coding of 19 qualitative interviews, along with textual output produced by Metelkova collectives, focusing on the framing of 'autonomy' in relation to NGOs, institutional politics, grassroots practices and social change. Second, a discussion on an emergent conflict between Metelkova and the far-right government enacted in 2020 over so-called Building 6, wherein the ruling party explicitly targeted one part of Metelkova with eviction in a broader assault on civil society and NGOs. Due to scarce interview data concerning 2020–2021, during which the events discussed took place, the second section relies on texts reporting on the conflict, as well as on policy briefs regarding the state of Slovenian civic freedoms during the 2020–2022 far-right government (e.g., Vučko and Šori 2021). Drawing on these sources, the analysis unpacks

the eviction attempt and contextualizes it in relation to differing articulations of the relationship between Metelkova and civil society, exploring how the heterotopia is constituted through a complex inside-outside dynamic.

Analysis

The Heterotopic Political Horizon

This section focuses on *ideational frameworks* as defined by Flesher Fominaya (2022: 85), understood as discursive and collective practices that connect democratic ideals to specific movement practices, such as nonhierarchical organizing, and to demands and proposals outside of movements. The case study of Metelkova highlights the interplay between the heterotopic inside-outside dynamics and how Metelkova users frame the concept of autonomy and its relationship to democracy in Ljubljana and Slovenia. This interplay provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between movement practices and their wider contextual surroundings. Despite shared adherence to Metelkova as an autonomous space, the meaning of autonomy remains open to interpretation among different groups and users and at times became a point of contestation within Metelkova. However, the collective articulation of Metelkova as autonomous helps to sustain its heterotopic status and legitimize its presence in Ljubljana, as its autonomous status is recognized by municipal institutions. Although the autonomous identity was often associated with claims to democracy, interpretations of this relationship varied among Metelkova users. The upcoming discussion highlights how the interpretation of autonomy oscillated between *internal* and *external* ideations and interprets this according to the heterotopic framework.

The connection between autonomy as an organizing principle and grassroots democracy was widely acknowledged among the user organizations and collectives interviewed. Autonomy was defined in terms of self-organization, self-determination and bottom-up and horizontal democratic principles within Metelkova. Thus, the squat became a prefigurative arena for the expression of 'real democracy,' reflecting an imagined undemocratic society outside. One interviewee, a long-time Metelkova user and member of a grassroots NGO within Metelkova, stated,

> We are still autonomous. For example, we have monthly assemblies, although they are poorly visited. But it's still here. We inside decide something and then this, with the permission of the members, goes public. (…) Of course, autonomy can be about being autonomous also from funding from NGOs and things like this, being a complete autonomous entity. But autonomy here is about self-determination and doing things from the bottom-up rather than asking for permission or waiting for the municipality to approve of something.
>
> (Interviewee 1)

"Being autonomous" in this context refers to monthly direct-democratic assemblies organized within Metelkova, where decision-making is done in a "self-determined manner" and operations are conducted "from the bottom-up." However, another interviewee noted that they do not believe in "complete autonomy," including independence from NGOs and external funding. This highlights an internal conflict within the collective understanding of autonomy, especially with regard to the role of grassroots NGOs in Metelkova. Another user and club organizer stated that the essence of autonomy is the ease of organizing alternative cultural events, thanks to the horizontal and un-bureaucratic structure of Metelkova. These statements often do not explicitly connect the prefiguration of autonomous organizing to political goals outside of Metelkova but maintain antagonism toward professionalization of alternative culture. Additionally, the focus on alternative culture within Metelkova is often linked with "alternative models of society," "alternative politics," and "resistance," as expressed by a representative of a grassroots NGO in the field of culture based in Metelkova:

> This alternative cultural scene is very connected to alternative politics, and forms of resistance. (…) We avoid [established] politics because. … We see big shit, lots of corruption, lots of strange compromises. So, we don't trust anybody. We learn not to trust anybody. Of course, we want a better future – more equality, better living conditions, because this is not the right path. And I hope it will not continue in the next step, which is federalism – even more backwards. So, we have to invent alternative models. I think autonomous spaces are very important in this.
>
> (Interviewee 2)

Disillusionment with established political institutions has thus fueled a continued engagement within the 'autonomous space,' perceived of as a laboratory of social change wherein alternative models of society could be 'invented.' Such connections highlight linkages between the prefigurative practices within the heterotopic site and utopian horizons for social change beyond Metelkova. Organizing nonhierarchically as 'autonomous' thus constituted a prefigurative moment of rupture within the movement imaginaries yet bound by a dialectical constitution in relation to 'official' political bodies, and in this case, political trajectories toward centralization and 'backward' trends of democratic development. Yet rather than translating into concrete political demands or proposals for the organization of outside society, such statements rather connected the ideational framework of autonomy to the constitution of a "spatial guarantee" of democracy in the face of backsliding. As such, the main political claim posited in relation to the principle of autonomy was that of "being left alone," i.e., maintaining the heterotopic position (cf. Pruijt 2013). This sentiment was echoed by a member of a political collective within Metelkova:

> We see this in [postsocialist central- and eastern European] countries that did not have autonomous zones, their political horizons are totally subjected to. … You have to be a formal entity, you have to be an NGO, you have to be a political party, a youth organization or whatever, if you want to do politics. (…) What I would say Metelkova represents and struggle for is to reject this, to claim that there is a possibility to do politics outside of those structures. (…) When Orbán and his brand of authoritarian politics came, there was absolutely no real resistance, no point in society from which it would be possible to resist. I would claim that because everyone who was doing politics was institutionalized, dependent on funding, part of hierarchical structures, there was no point in society [from where you could resist]. And if there was it could easily be neutralized by very simple policing. If we have a different situation, it is because we had Metelkova, it is because the horizons were much wider, it is because, for the past 25 years, there was always – even if marginal – some political entity, something that was able to engage in political processes, as autonomous, self-organized, totally independent, radical political force, also in opposition to NGOs.
>
> (Interviewee cited in Siegrist and Thörn 2020: 1852)

In this statement, the autonomy of Metelkova is characterized by horizontality, self-organization and independence and is portrayed as constituting a spatial counter-public that safeguards democratic openness in the face of authoritarianism and democratic decay. The heterotopic position of Metelkova, being "outside of the structures" of formal institutional political engagement, is central to this articulation. The utopian vision articulated by the interviewee is not only directed toward the future but also toward the past, positioning Metelkova as a guarantee of democracy in the face of the hap-hazard postsocialist transition. Additionally, this view aligns with a general tendency among the radical political collectives to juxtapose autonomy with the institutionalization and NGOization of civil society, which is perceived as contributing to democratic malaise and authoritarian 'takeovers.' This raises questions about the inclusion of various grassroots NGOs within Metelkova in the concept of 'autonomy,' highlighting the heterogenous and sometimes conflicting relations between different groups within the heterotopic site. In the interview statements, these conflicts amount to a schism in the articulation of the interconnectedness between autonomy and democracy within the ideational frameworks identified between that of *internally* and *externally* oriented framings.

The internally oriented framing situates the concept of autonomy in relation to various prefigurative practices – horizontal assemblies, self-determined decision-making, bottom-up action – which construct Metelkova's heterotopic unicity as a site of 'real democracy.' Contrasting this heterotopy is that of

dominant political institutions, which occasionally were framed not only as mired in bureaucracy but also as prone to corruption and democratic stagnation. One of the factors motivating sustained engagement within the heterotopic 'anomalous institution' of Metelkova was thus precisely a disillusionment with established institutions, referencing bureaucracy, instability, lack of transparency and a perceived lack of citizen influence.

Moreover, the externally oriented framing, mostly but not exclusively held by radical political collectives of Metelkova, goes one step further in linking these prefigurative practices and political horizons beyond the heterotopia. The opinions expressed in the statements varied from perceiving Metelkova as a laboratory for democratic experimentation that sets the path toward a "better society" to viewing the heterotopic space as providing a spatial safeguard for societal openness against democratic instability, backsliding and the ascent of authoritarianism. In these instances, autonomy was strongly linked to the potential for social change through prefiguration and preserving independent civic space. Importantly, such tendencies were not mutually exclusive per se. The external framing also builds on an internal and practical framing of autonomy yet contextualizes such internal practices in relation to large-scale trends of social development.

These positions closely illustrate the interconnectedness of utopia and heterotopia. In the Foucauldian rendition, heterotopia represents *enacted utopia* embodying sites of alternate ordering. In this context, the two respective framings of autonomy may be considered an innovative context for democratic experimentation by way of constructing a heterotopic site inverting that of the imagined isotopy, thus embodying a position of critique of the "mainstream" by materializing a civic space of democratic prefiguration. In doing so, users posit a connection between Metelkova's heterotopy and an imagined potential for 'real' democracy beyond the heterotopic confines.

Metelkova represents a broad and varied community, encompassing various groups and political collectives. As a joint body, Metelkova rarely makes concrete political proposals or demands. Instead, the autonomous identity is chiefly oriented around the political goal of being left alone, as discussed earlier. In turn, this goal implies maintaining Metelkova as a counter-public formation and organizing space of LGBTQ+, anarchist, feminist and alternative sociocultural struggles. However, as some interviewees discussed, the pursuit of autonomy can lead to puritanical tendencies. The goal of being left alone can turn into a pursuit of 'true' or 'full' autonomy, necessitating strict demarcations barring 'outside elements' from entry. This may put limits on the democratic innovative capacity of such heterotopic spaces. On the other hand, the claim to autonomy can also become fragile when violated by its outside constituents. The following section explores one such instance, in which one particular Metelkova building was targeted in a wider attack on civic space and how this affected the autonomy underpinning its heterotopic position.

Heterotopia Under Attack

This section examines the conflict that arose on 19 October 2020, when organizations located at 6 Metelkova Street (henceforth Metelkova No. 6) received an eviction notice with a deadline of 31 January 2021. The Ministry of Culture, citing renovation needs, planned to take control of the building, with no indication that the users of Metelkova No. 6 would be allowed to return after the renovation. In response to the eviction notice, the 18 NGOs in the building, along with wider networks of activists, NGOs and collectives, launched a call for support and challenged the decision, which was framed as an unprecedented attack on Metelkova in recent memory. By focusing on this conflict, this subsection examines how ideas of democratic practices and innovation were invoked in connection with Metelkova as a heterotopic site in the face of autocratic state intervention.

In contrast to the majority of Metelkova, which is formally owned by the municipality of Ljubljana, No. 6 is situated on state-owned grounds. Furthermore, Metelkova No. 6 distinguishes itself in three significant aspects: (1) Unlike other buildings in Metelkova, it has never been part of the *squatted* cultural center. Instead, it is technically rented by the state under a 'zero-rent lease' arrangement. Despite this unique arrangement, No. 6 has deep historical roots within Metelkova and is integrated into the urban environment of the area. (2) Although there are other buildings accommodating NGOs in Metelkova, No. 6 stands out as being exclusively utilized by grassroots NGOs and formalized collectives, some of which, such as NSK and the Peace Institute, enjoy international renown. (3) The status of No. 6 within Metelkova is ambivalent, as some groups do not consider it a genuine part of *autonomous* Metelkova, despite No. 6 interviewees recognizing themselves as such. Whereas anti-systemic political collectives typically position themselves as counter to an NGO-funded civil society as part of the autonomous ideation, other groups, stressing an internally oriented framing of horizontality *within* Metelkova, were less prone to make such distinctions. Such ambivalence notwithstanding, these factors highlight the distinctive position of No. 6 within Metelkova and elucidate why only No. 6, out of the seven buildings, received an eviction notice in 2020.

Beyond Metelkova, the eviction notice relates to two key contextual factors, which highlight the strained relationship between Prime Minister Janez Janša's government (2020–2022) and civil society broadly (and Metelkova specifically). First, the notice followed an increase in government rhetoric criticizing NGOs and civic initiatives, which specifically targeted Metelkova No. 6. In a speech to parliament, the prime minister claimed that the funding allocated to Metelkova No. 6 was "why people were dying," suggesting that the grassroots NGOs were draining resources from public nursing homes and hospitals:

> That's why people were dying. List one national achievement of a single NGO at Metelkova 6 that you remember. Anyone knows? Yes, the spread of the virus last year across the country, (…) staining facades of

> ministries, and death threats, these were the achievements. The eighth oldest population in the world in the last 10 years, parental allowance, childbirth allowance, large family allowance, childcare allowance – 367 million. Funds for NGOs in the same ten-year period – 706 million, more than double. And then you fight an epidemic in a situation like that.
>
> (Cited in Vučko and Šori 2021: 9)

The allocation of funds to NGOs, with "NGOs at Metelkova 6" being cited as a paragon example, was here explicitly juxtaposed to the funding of healthcare and public services. This placed blame for the spread of COVID-19 on civic organizations for allegedly hoarding resources at the expense of the healthcare sector. In the general trend of disarming and vilification of civil society, this was not an isolated incident of zeroing in on Metelkova. On the contrary, in some ways, Metelkova No. 6 became a symbol of a perceived 'degenerated' civil society draining public funds for its own self-betterment. In a questionnaire sent to households and distributed online, the governing right-wing party SDS asked whether the public funding allocated to Metelkova No. 6 NGOs was either "a) fully appropriate, 'non-governmentalists' are the most important; b) inappropriate, the essential needs of students and pensioners must be given priority; c) scandalous, because they are pointlessly spending our money" (cited in Vučko and Šori 2021: 10). One Metelkova user, active in a prolific grassroots NGO, expressed frustration about these attacks:

> [T]he right-wing government (…) wanted to kick us out from here. And [Janša] was telling lies about what's happening here, how much money we get. And you know, people who live in the villages, they believe it because they don't know anything about us.
>
> (Interviewee 1)

Second, the notice of pending termination of Metelkova No. 6 was delivered the day of the enactment of the national COVID-19 curfew, which was described by international observers (among them Amnesty International) as strategically disarming the capabilities of civil society and protest, even when respecting measures reducing the spread of COVID-19 (Vučko and Šori 2021). Thus, the threat of eviction was perceived as part of a broader strategy centered around the lockdown regime, which aimed to deliberately limit civic freedom and civil society as a means of deterring and controlling opposition, using the pandemic as a pretext.

In an official response of the Peace Institute, a well-known independent nonprofit research institute founded in 1991 housed in Metelkova No. 6, the eviction notice was framed as "an attack on civil society and independent culture intended to prevent the functioning of the critical public" (Peace Institute 2020: para. 1). This was echoed by the cross-regional Southeastern European platform for independent culture *Kooperativa* in a public statement responding to the eviction notice:

> In light of the crisis caused by the coronavirus, which has hampered and threatened working conditions for the entire civil society and independent cultural sector, we are appalled by the Ministry's decision to further destabilize the work of some of the key organizations of Slovenia's civil and cultural scene. (…) We can only interpret this decision as an attack on some of the fundamental democratic principles: freedom of work and expression and engaged citizenship. It is precisely these principles that the mentioned organizations have been promoting in their work for decades, thus contributing to the creation of a stable civil and democratic infrastructure both in Slovenia as well as in neighboring countries. This decision will have far-reaching consequences beyond the borders of Slovenia.
>
> (Kooperativa 2021)

Metelkova No. 6 was thus made emblematic of "civil society" broadly and crucial for "the functioning critical public," thereby framing Metelkova No. 6 as a key nodal point within a wider attack on civil society. Metelkova's heterotopic character was thus simultaneously, perhaps paradoxically, conceived of as a unique outpost for "autonomous" civic initiatives and as representative of "mainstream" NGOs and civil society under threat within the context of Southeastern European democratic backsliding.

The defensive effort of Metelkova No. 6 included protest repertoires viable during lockdown, such as public appeals, calls for support and petitions to withdraw the notice of eviction. While it may be difficult to posit any concrete causality between these acts of protests and the outcome, the eviction of 31 January 2021 did not materialize. Instead, the case was taken to court. Ultimately, the Janša government was dissolved in June of 2022, before any concrete action to vacate Metelkova No. 6 was taken, and replaced by a liberally profiled government, which pledged not to remove the occupants (although my interlocutors still expressed uncertainty regarding the court process, at the time of holding the interview in September 2022). Yet, the incident highlights how, in the context of autocratization in Slovenia, which mirrors general trends across Southeastern Europe, the autonomous heterotopia of Metelkova became a strategic site of conflict and defense, made emblematic of, on the one hand, democratic innovation and civic engagement and, on the other, a 'degenerated' civil society and thus a motivator of further backsliding. The heterotopic character of Metelkova reveals core ambivalences framing Metelkova as a guarantee for democratic openness, shifting between embodying a position of rupture toward both established institutions and 'mainstream' civil society and a position of continuity as a symbol for the defense of civic freedoms broadly.

In doing so, the conflicts starting after 19 October 2020 not only reveal ambivalences of the heterotopic position in relation to an inside/outside dynamic but also the multifaceted and complex internal relations within Metelkova. These can largely be interpreted as operating along the core tensions embodied

by the political identity of *autonomy*, which, as shown earlier, oscillates between internally and externally oriented horizons of meaning-making. In the case of the former, the idea of autonomy was reconcilable with NGOs and project-funded civic activism. In the case of the latter, autonomy being conceived in utopian terms in line with embodying an outpost for civic and democratic engagement beyond institutional structures (including NGOs) was toned down in the defense of Metelkova No. 6. Yet, arguably, precisely this radical position contributed to Metelkova No. 6 becoming a focal point within a wider set of attacks on civic space. Thus, rather than separating them as two separate strands within the heterotopic space, it might be more analytically fruitful for the heterotopic framework to conceive of Metelkova in a dialectical manner, as embodying a position sustained by ideological tension by heterogeneous practices and ideational frameworks that are diversely centered around, among others, demands for deepened democracy.

To summarize, the incident surrounding Metelkova No. 6 understood through the heterotopic framework highlights complexities within the constitution of autonomous space and their capacities to contribute to democratic innovation for the revitalization of democracy. By considering heterotopia as dialectically posited in relation to an imagined mainstream, we can recognize how Metelkova's heterotopy becomes constituted as an embodied critique of outside relations. At times, this position may become a strategic site within wider social conflicts, as was the case in 2020. In such cases, attempts to recuperate the heterotopia are met with defenses not only of the site itself but the values it embodies by virtue of inverting the dominant order.

Conclusion

The analysis has attempted to provide answers to questions on the role of urban movements in contributing to democratic innovation and the potential yield of the heterotopic conceptual framework for these purposes. By reading classical conceptualizations of heterotopia against the backdrop of the "crisis of democracy" and through the lens of social movements and activism, this chapter has interpreted heterotopia as alternative spaces constructed and maintained through collective action, positioned as 'other' to an imagined mainstream while being relationally constituted to those outsides. The empirical analysis of AKC Metelkova Mesto in Ljubljana, understood as a heterotopia established and upheld by an urban squatters' movement, drew on this conceptualization to provide a complex understanding of how Metelkova's political identity of autonomy is essential in the construction of its heterotopic position. Moreover, the analysis has highlighted two tendencies in the interpretation of autonomy in relation to practices and principles of 'real' democracy. These were divided into (a) internally oriented ideations articulating horizontal and self-governing practices within Metelkova as providing a space of prefigured 'real' democracy, thus inverting an imagined undemocratic outside, and (b) externally oriented

ideations connecting such prefiguration to social change outside of the heterotopic confines, also positioning Metelkova as a safekeeper of democratic openness within de-democratizing trends of societal development.

Whereas previous literature has established that autonomous spaces, such as Metelkova, often emerge through horizontal democratic practices and demands of deepened democratic influence, this study has contributed a novel perspective on how such spaces can provide innovation in the context of democratic backsliding. The analysis of the eviction attempt targeting Metelkova No. 6 orchestrated by a far-right state formation highlighted how democratic ideations may or may not converge and how the heterotopic position can engender both a target and a source of defense for civic freedoms in times of democratic malaise. Crucially, the analysis showed how Metelkova's autonomous status enabled it to embody an ambivalent role within the wider assault on civil society, oscillating between a position of continuity and one of rupture toward 'mainstream' civil society and democratic institutions, which speaks to the foundational ambiguities of its heterotopic status. Thus, the analysis has centered the weight of movement contributions to democratic innovation, while the heterotopic framework has been conducive to a dynamic understanding of the relationship between innovative contexts and their constitutive outside. The framework is applicable to further explorations of the potential of heterotopic activism in prefiguring social alternatives beyond the case of Metelkova in its centering of the dynamic relationship between innovative contexts and their constitutive outside(s) as object of analysis rather than theorizing innovation as a contextually detached phenomenon.

This chapter suggests that autonomous political spheres bear considerable impact on the development of civic and democratic spheres, noting, however, that this relationship needs further consideration. Though limited in scope, the findings point to how the claim to autonomy need not be considered a retreat from dominant institutions of society but rather as affirmative of parts of their constitutive ideations while rejecting others, which allows for a critique of social relations and prefiguration of alternate orderings. The heterotopic framework allows for a nuanced understanding of the dialectical dimensions of such relations. I close by emphasizing the importance of heterotopic action, particularly under conditions of shrinking civic space. To borrow a phrase from Walter Benjamin, we may, under such conditions, perhaps think of autonomous heterotopic action as anomic groups *pulling the emergency break*.

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7 Enacting Resistance, Performing Citizenship

Trajectories of Political Subjectification in the Post-democratic Condition*

Bojan Baća

Introduction

Sociology generally ascribes political subjectivity to active citizens: those virtuous members of society who do not see voting as the principal duty toward their political community but instead remain proactive in-between elections. Scholars have used a wide range of adjectives – 'radical' (Mouffe 1993), 'monitorial' (Schudson 1998), 'activist' (Isin 2009), 'critical' (Norris 2011), 'effective' (Steele 2017), among others – to describe these citizens and answer why, how and to what extent they exercise their civic autonomy outside of conventional political channels. Whereas this literature has discussed instances of active citizenship in the context of affluent western democracies, in this chapter, I argue that Central and Eastern Europe's (CEE) 'post-democratic condition' offers rich empirical material for the exploration of 'performative citizenship' (Isin 2017), that is – the enactment of political subjectivity through contentious practices of society's apolitical segments.

Social movement scholars have generally found postsocialist CEE uninspiring (cf. Baća 2022; Bieber and Brentin 2018; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Kopecký and Mudde 2003). The limited research that was initially conducted on the region portrays local civil societies as overtly passive, characterized by low social trust, widespread skepticism toward institutions, chronically weak associational life and mass withdrawal of citizens from the public sphere (Howard 2003; Mendelson and Glenn 2002). These findings on the lack of civic and political participation led to the development of the influential 'weak postsocialist civil society' thesis that ultimately shifted scholars' gaze to advocacy-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs), identified as the key actors in postsocialist civil societies (cf. Ekiert and Kubik 2014; Foa and Ekiert 2017; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). Simply put, externally sponsored civil

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society building resulted in the professionalization of associational life and civic engagement, ultimately culminating in a strong *civic sector* – a surrogate for a weak civil society – that was alienated from its constituency and, as such, detached from the genuine needs of society (Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson 2015; Kopecký and Mudde 2003). This process of *NGO-ization* removed incentives for civil society building 'from below,' which might have advanced the 'organic' creation of new democratic (counter-)cultures through contentious practices (Baća 2022). The resulting socio-political configuration limited meaningful challenges to dominant power relations and, ultimately, solidified the civic sector as an ideological and logistical support for the development of western-style liberal market democracies, a strategic objective that was normalized as an apolitical and ahistorical necessity. Therefore, not only was the NGO sector disembodied from civil society, but it also became depoliticized.

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has convincingly challenged the 'weak postsocialist civil society' thesis, mapping instead the vibrant life of social movements and variegated terrains of civic engagement beyond the professionalized civic sector (Baća 2022; Bieber and Brentin 2018; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Razsa and Kurnik 2012; Štiks 2015; Stubbs 2012). These grassroots initiatives often criticize the liberal consensus of NGOs, both from the progressive left and the reactionary right. What remains understudied, however, is the process of their *political subjectification*,[1] that is – understanding why traditionally apolitical segments of society *become* political and how they comprehend their predicaments, articulate their grievances, make their demands, formulate their critiques and justify their positions on *political* grounds.[2] In analyzing political subjectification through contention – that is, the constitution of citizens as political subjects by (re)claiming and performing their citizenship through acts of resistance – I use empirical material from contemporary Montenegro (2010–2015). Accordingly, the chapter is structured as follows: first, I argue that Montenegro represents a paradigmatic example of a *postsocialist post-democracy* and, as such, provides fertile ground for an exploration of political subjectification; second, I examine three case studies illustrating three distinct trajectories of political subjectification; and, finally, I discuss the theoretical bearings of my empirical findings on political sociology and adjacent interdisciplinary fields.

Rethinking Political Subjectification in a Postsocialist Post-democracy

With the emergence of *illiberal democracies* in East-Central Europe and the consolidation of *stabilitocracies* throughout Southeast Europe in recent years (Bieber 2019), the "post-democratic condition […] looks even more accurate" in CEE than in its western neighbors, as the "substance of democracy has been challenged by the collusion between economic and political elites" despite "formal democracy [being] now solidly established in most countries of the region" (Pleyers 2016: 8). The idea is that, unlike old democracies in which neoliberal restructuring hollowed out the democratic substance and turned

liberal democracies into post-democracies (Crouch 2004), it was the elite-driven postsocialist transition that led directly from state socialism to the post-democratic condition in CEE.

Accordingly, instead of using terms such as 'illiberal democracy,' 'stabilitocracy' or even 'hybrid regime' – notions that primarily denote the forms of government – I employ the concept of 'post-democracy,' which has been demonstrated to be the most precise in accounting for the state-society relations developed in Montenegro under the rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) from 1991 to 2020 (Baća 2019).[3] The term denotes a condition characterized by the primacy of parliamentary democracy, which renders all other instances of (direct) democratic intervention undesirable (Rancière 1999). In short, post-democracy turns political action into a purely formal procedure in which parties become disconnected from their base of support (Mair 2013). Within such a configuration, politics is reduced to the technocratic administration of social issues and any substantial transformation is relegated to elite-pacts (Žižek 1999). Since Montenegro was the leading European Union candidate-country during the 2010–2015 period analyzed here, the institutional politics of liberal democracy were strongly promoted by the international community, regardless of the ability of such institutions to actually uphold the rule of law or to provide credible venues for dissenting opinion (Baća 2017c; Bieber 2019).

This external insistence on and validation of stability at the expense of (more participatory forms of) democracy reinforced the post-democratic condition in Montenegro, which is in itself a product of two interrelated processes that characterized its postsocialist transformation. The first process can be described as *horizontal depoliticization*: the non-anonymous nature of Montenegrin society – which consists of roughly 600,000 citizens living in a small territory marked by close personal and kinship ties – has weakened the social forces that produce contention in large 'anonymous' societies, making its civil society disengaged and compliant (Jovanović and Marjanović 2002). The second process can be designated as *vertical depoliticization*: the fusion of the reformed Communist Party and the state in the form of the DPS strengthened elite-mediated patronage networks as the key mechanisms for resolving existential-*cum*-political issues (Komar and Živković 2016). As a result, anything that would elsewhere inspire collective action was primarily addressed and resolved in Montenegro through the merger of these horizontal (nepotistic) and vertical (clientelistic) patronage mechanisms.

This shrinking of the public space entailed a simultaneous contraction of the public sphere, ultimately leading to the post-democratic sidelining of socio-economic and socio-political issues from public debate (Marquand 2004). In a word, as the political game became increasingly focused on ethnonational issues in the lead-up to and after state independence in 2006, Montenegro's body politic has been divided by its elites into two antagonistic ethnopolitical subjectivities: 'loyal Montenegrins' and 'disloyal Serbs' (Morrison 2009, 2018). The DPS used a populist 'divide-and-conquer' strategy to deepen and widen

this gap by framing all challenges to its neoliberal policies and corrupt practices in ethnopolitical terms, effectively delegitimizing any (direct) democratic interventions as essentially illegal activities conducted by 'enemies of the state' (Džankić and Keil 2017; Komar and Živković 2016; Morrison 2018). Against this backdrop, Montenegro did develop a relatively strong civic sector, but its civil society was fairly weak in articulating and aggregating interests and identities 'from below' (Baća 2017c; Jovanović and Marjanović 2002). Accordingly, short-term, small-scale and low-key *apolitical* protest activities became the defining features of Montenegrin civil society, alongside widespread pessimism toward political participation as something that can change the status quo (Baća 2017c; Komar and Živković 2016). Therefore, a context where all politics has been reduced to ethnopolitics, and all civil society to NGOs with no tradition of social movements – and where people experienced a change of government at the ballot box for the first time in 2020 and, before that, only incremental political alterations through elite-pacts – makes an ideal setting for studying the process of political subjectification.

To this end, I use empirical material from three instances of popular unrest in which Montenegrin citizens decided to abandon institutional venues of political participation and exert their political agency – namely, the student uprisings of 2010–2011, the ad hoc mobilization of urbanites in 2015 and the environmental movement of 2010–2014 – to demonstrate how each exemplified a distinct trajectory of political subjectification. By taking a practice-oriented approach to the study of postsocialist civil society (Baća 2022; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020), coupled with varied insights from critical theory (Castoriadis 1991; Isin 2009; Rancière 1999), I conceptualize these trajectories as (1) *political becoming*, a process through which a traditionally apolitical demographic group (re)politicizes its social role; (2) *political bonding*, a process through which ordinary citizens exercise their civic autonomy by forging new political bonds between hitherto antagonistic collectives; and (3) *political embodying*, a process through which localized citizen-led struggle is given universal attributes, standing in as a symbolic representation of other marginalized grievances in the polity.[4] Additionally, I draw from the research program of pragmatic sociology by relying on the accounts of those I interviewed – especially on their reflexive insights *in* and *on* the "critical moments" that "break the ordinary course of action" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999: 360) – as a fundamental element of theory construction. Therefore, in order to grasp the nuances of different trajectories of political subjectification in the post-democratic condition, I investigate higher normative principles to which social actors appeal in order to defend their activist cause and to prove their political competencies.

Identifying Trajectories of Political Subjectification

In this section, I lay out three trajectories of political subjectification in post-democratic Montenegro from 2010 to 2015. I begin by tracing a wave of

student uprisings to demonstrate how this notoriously apolitical group in Montenegro managed to politicize its social role. I then explore an ad hoc mobilization of urbanites to demonstrate how they found common ground in civic values to set aside deep ethnopolitical differences and articulate a novel joint anti-government platform for collective action. I end by investigating a unique grassroots movement to demonstrate how a local(ized), single-issue environmental struggle became a nationwide movement by symbolically embodying numerous grievances that had been previously left unarticulated and/or unrepresented in the polity.

As shown in Table 7.1, my research design used a three-step protocol and was based on an inductive approach through which I revisited qualitative data gathered during three separate yet methodologically and thematically interrelated projects investigating grassroots mobilizations in postsocialist Montenegro, selected for their political relevance and prominence in the media.[5] I began

Table 7.1 An overview of data sources

Trajectory of Political Subjectification	*Main Actors Involved*	*Duration of Resistance*	*Archival Sources*	*Ethnographic Sources*
Political becoming	Students	13 months (November 2010–December 2011)	54 newspaper articles	Three semi-structured oral interviews with the most prominent activists: Slobodan Radović, Aleksandar Novović and Ognjen Jovović; approximately 60 minutes, July 2015
Political bonding	Urbanites	Two weeks (October 2015)	Two movement documents and seven newspaper articles	Fifteen structured written interviews with the most prominent activists who wished to remain anonymous; approximately 60 minutes, June 2016
Political embodying	Villagers	43 months (August 2010–March 2014)	51 newspaper articles	Three semi-structured oral interviews with the most prominent activists: Jovan Lončar, Gojko Cimbaljević and Nebojša Babović; approximately 50 minutes, September 2013

by constructing the narrative for each case study by analyzing newspaper articles (N = 112) from high circulation dailies *Vijesti*, *Dan* and *Pobeda*, as well as the weekly *Monitor*, and, where available, movement materials such as petitions (N = 2). During this step, I acquired key facts about the political subjectification of these actors (through their public reception) and developed basic thematic codes for later analysis. In the follow-up step, I conducted interviews (N = 21) in Serbo-Croatian with the most prominent activists of their respective movements to understand the reasons for and justifications of their actions described in the media. In the final step, interviews were coded to analyze the actors' sense of (in)justice and the development of their political competencies with a focus on emergent themes, which were then cross-referenced with the key topics identified during the first step. By juxtaposing the analysis of my research subjects' political voice on the public stage during the events (via newspaper articles) with analysis of their *post festum* reflections on these events (via the interviews), I was in a position to create a coherent account of the process of political subjectification and map its three trajectories: political becoming, political bonding and political embodying.

Political Becoming: From Administratively Defined Students to Politically Empowered Citizens

This case study covers a wave of student uprisings that swept the University of Montenegro from November 2010 to December 2011, which ultimately initiated cross-sectoral anti-government protests in the first half of 2012. In tracing the *political becoming* of the student body, I distinguish three critical moments in which students developed political competence to "demand what is not theirs to demand." The first involves informal gatherings and alternative organizing to fight corrupt practices of the umbrella student organization and publicize professional incompetence of the university management. The second includes blockades and occupations of university buildings to criticize neoliberal higher education policy reforms and associated austerity measures. The third moment involves protests that took place in the streets of two major cities to raise the student voice against the authoritarian rule of the DPS.

Due to numerous problems with the umbrella student organization – including but not limited to unfair election processes for its members and inadequate representation of its constituency – discontented students began mobilizing through informal deliberative forums for marginalized voices to be heard on these issues. Such gatherings were constructive and empowering to the extent that they unfolded "without taboos and constraints," addressing "all the problems [they] were facing, not only as students, but as members of an unequal society" (Slobodan). Diagnostics developed at these events eventually rendered them "politically aware [...] in terms of jointly identifying and addressing the roots of social problems" and made them feel "like citizens and not mere machines for the reproduction of knowledge" (Slobodan). The planning of actions through horizontal consensus-based models was founded on

principles of direct democracy in which "everyone was a member and a leader at the same time," thus creating an intellectually stimulating and emotionally supportive environment for students to "freely express their frustration with how things work [...] at the university and beyond" (Aleksandar). The ultimate effect of these spaces for encounters was articulation of a student's sense of belonging to a distinct social group with a set of its specific needs and interests. This newly founded identity began manifesting in flash mobs that purposively intruded into administratively controlled places to disrupt the routine flow of everyday life at the university. Since they increasingly viewed the problems they were encountering as students – incompetence, clientelism and cronyism – as yet another manifestation of issues that society was facing at large, disgruntled students began to understand their social role less within administrative parameters but rather rewriting it in political terms instead. With the process of their political becoming in motion, rebellious students continued to resist and transgress the institutional boundaries of their administratively defined social role in creative and disruptive ways.

Whether they were spending a night in the occupied campus buildings to symbolically assert that the university belongs to the students or blocking the halls to express their dissatisfaction with higher education policy, discontented students performatively delimited autonomous spaces that not only made their voices audible and recognizable in public but also facilitated an ideologically inclusive and emotionally supportive environment for their peers to publicly distance themselves from the official student representative structures and join their cause. These takeovers created an opportunity for "diverging voices to cumulatively produce the desired outcome – what [rebellious students] jokingly called then, the dictatorship of the studentariat" (Aleksandar). This approach effectively turned their administrative demands into political discontent, not in the sense of "siding with political parties" but by "taking actions, as free citizens, against those who were responsible for [students'] predicaments" (Aleksandar). My respondents perceived themselves as victims of the neoliberal restructuring of higher education and the labor market, as their time was reduced to navigating between the precariousness of the transitional economy and the grip of patronage mechanisms as the only way of escaping existential uncertainty. Consequently, students became contentious not only to end the commercialization, commodification and monetization of knowledge but to also initiate a radical transformation of a university system that was "dominated by the DPS *apparatchiks*" (Ognjen), as well as to restore its autonomy through its liberation from the condition they characterized as "autocracy" and "tyranny." By jointly deciding that their actions "cannot be anything else but political" in the sense of bringing "a new, different voice in the public sphere" that would "speak about issues that were rarely spoken about," activist students began working on "patenting a new, radically different student class" (Ognjen). As their political messages appeared on banners such as "Death to corporatism, freedom to the university!," and "Don't want to join the party, just want a job!," hundreds of students used their respective faculty buildings to protest

against political clientelism and austerity measures that they characterized as an "allowance for science." They were united in demanding a more democratic and inclusive system within university and higher education structures that would include students in decision-making processes that affected their lives and post-graduation employment prospects. At this point, they were no longer acting as dissatisfied individuals nor as disgruntled administratively defined students but as an empowered political collective with a sense of self, determined to make substantive change.

My respondents reflect on their collective actions as the key factor in developing "student class consciousness" that was pivotal in taking their discontent outside of campuses. During the first prominent rally that rebellious students "saw as [their very own] 1968," they idealistically called for the "awakening of students in the streets" and publicly announced their detachment from the official student structures, criticizing the class privilege of university professors and student representatives that had turned them into a part of "the ruling establishment" and "servants of the system" disinterested in protecting student welfare and defending the public good. The protest was not, however, organized as an expression of dissatisfaction related to narrow student interests, but was instead framed as a "struggle against government policies, austerity measures, [and] the lack of job opportunities and job stability" (Slobodan). In the second prominent protest held in front of the Parliament of Montenegro, several hundred students demanded that parliamentarians acknowledge their existence. Under the slogans "Our leaders are our ideas!," "Students unmute!" and "Why do I need a degree when I have relatives in power?," they were protesting against the systemic precarity and the widespread corruption in the country.

Now that these student groups were expressing dissent toward the system outside of formal student representative structures, the official student leadership had no option but to finally acknowledge their grievances and offer joint organization of protests in order to convince a growing pool of discontented students that they were on their side. During the largest student rally in Montenegro's history, several thousand students marched down the streets of the capital to highlight the combined effects of problems in the higher education sector and in labor policy on the student population. While unified in demanding improvements in higher education policy, curriculum and teaching standards, student material status and post-graduation paid internship opportunities, independent student groups differed from the umbrella student organization in their expression of anti-establishment sentiment by calling for the liberation of the university from the DPS's partitocratic grip and the reassertion of its autonomy. Despite the formal student leaders' stance that academic affairs should not be politicized, rebellious student collectives were determined to address the structural causes of their predicaments and their future as a precarious workforce and to proactively fight for the country's constitutional identity as a 'state of social justice.' As the official student leadership continued to fight only along corporatist lines for narrow student interests through a series of

closed-door meetings with authorities, activist students turned to trade union and civil society activists for help, a collaboration that had its epilogue in a wave of (unsuccessful) anti-government protests popularly called the 'Montenegrin Spring' in the first half of 2012.

In conclusion, this case study demonstrates how a group of discontented students abandoned official student representative structures to contentiously pursue their goals, eventually creating the dynamics for mass protests against precarity, corruption and partitocracy. By doing so, they developed a sense of their specific needs and interests and, through political becoming, identified structural – and thus unabashedly political – causes of their predicaments. In breaking the public image of Montenegrin students as civically disengaged and politically passive, these disobedient student collectives not only developed a self-confident social identity but also instigated public acknowledgment of their newly found political subjectivity.[6] As they gained competence to address issues they had been deemed unqualified to speak on, rebellious students became recognized as legitimate political partners for civil society and trade union organizations in addressing key socio-political problems.

Political Bonding: Bridging Ethnonational Divides through Civic Values

In September 2015, the largest opposition coalition Democratic Front (DF) organized a sit-in protest in front of the Parliament of Montenegro. While its main demands were the establishment of the first free and fair elections, Serb ethnonationalist rhetoric and iconography were present among some participants, which added fuel to state propaganda that this weeks-long gathering was merely 'nationalist,' 'anti-Montenegrin' and essentially 'uncivil,' thus limiting the spread of the protest's message beyond the DF's core constituency. However, when the police violently raided the 'tent city' and arrested peaceful protesters in mid-October, a group of predominantly young urbanites initiated a petition in solidarity with the wronged citizens that would ultimately transform into *#Građanski*, a self-organized and inclusive network of discontented citizens.[7] They crafted two 'open letters' addressed to the government and the public, the *Protest Letter* (Građanski 2015) and the *Protest Memorandum* (Građanski 2015), which I treat as critical moments at which its signatories not only reasserted their civic autonomy by appealing to their constitutionally defined political subjectivity but also offered 'civic values' as a political bond between their ethnopolitically divided fellow citizens for a joint action against the DPS regime.

Reflecting on their petitions, my respondents explain how their guiding idea was to put an end to ethnonational divisions that had split Montenegrin body politic into two camps: those who supported the DPS were seen as the "embodiment of Montenegrin identity and sovereignty," while those who were against its rule – the majority of whom were ethnic Serbs – were delegitimized as "enemies of the state" and "anti-Montenegrin" and thus framed as

"disloyal citizens" (Danilo). They view this oversaturation of the political field with ethnocultural content as an "artificial product of the [DPS] party machinery" that "instrumentalizes [ethnic/national differences] to shape public discourse within nationalistic parameters" (Novak) and, with such highly affective issues at stake, easily exercises "emotional manipulation and control over impoverished people" (Miroslav). This "merger of party affiliation and ethnonational belonging" has colonized every aspect of Montenegrin life, its effects being "nowhere more evident than at the level of everyday life" (Darko). For instance, my respondents found themselves in a position where "ethnonational identity [is imposed] without the right to object": anyone who "expresses his or her criticism towards the DPS [policies and practices] ends up being viewed as a Serb nationalist" (Radmila) and thus a disloyal citizen.[8]

To overcome this "delegitimization through [ethnopolitical] labeling" (Borislav), #Građanski was established as a way of acting upon 'civic responsibilities' and 'civic duties' in defending the constitutionally guaranteed rights of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic/national belonging, political affiliation or ideological position. In light of the brutal raid of the 'tent city,' my respondents saw it as their duty to embrace "civil disobedience and resistance to oppression" (Radmila) and engage in the "organised action of people against state violence" (Milorad), even if it meant "fighting for the rights of those whose politics [#Građanski] did not support" (Ranko). By appealing to 'civic values' as the key source of political bonding between members of a political community, #Građanski called upon their fellow citizens to exercise their political agency not by simply forgetting or abandoning their symbolic and material conditions but rather by momentarily disconnecting from inherited (politicized) identities to affirm solidarity with "those blatantly wronged by the DPS regime" (Vojislav). They, however, faced a problem of how to communicate this message in a context where ideological divisions do not move along a 'left–right' spectrum but instead a 'civic–ethnic' axis. Namely, with the culmination of ethnopolitics throughout the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the notion of 'civic(ness)' became equated with the urban habitus, cosmopolitan outlook and elitist civility of the liberal middle class (Jansen 2005). Consequently, anything that did not fit into the ideological-*cum*-aesthetical parameters of the dominant understanding of 'civic values' was delegitimized as 'uncivil' and thus ethnonationalist by default. As my respondents explain, this 'civic worldview' entails what its advocates should believe and do as political beings and with whom they should cooperate, which in particular excluded the maltreated protesters who were seen from this perspective as 'backward,' 'primitive,' 'uneducated,' 'traditionalist,' '(ethno)nationalist,' 'uncivilized,' 'radical,' 'retrograde,' 'barbaric,' 'peasant' or simply 'ugly,' and therefore not worthy of sympathy, solidarity or support.

In a situation in which many who "adhered to the so-called civic values used every excuse not to solidarize with the wronged people" (Nela), their "cultural-fascist rhetoric was employed to show [the protesters] as being unworthy of

support" despite them having "legitimate claims" and the government "violating the constitution" (Tanja). My respondents refused to accept this position as 'civic' (*građanski*), instead calling it 'citizenist' (*građanistički*). For them, this 'citizenist discourse' was one and the same as ethnonationalist rhetoric in its exclusionary zeal: it demonized the underclasses who were often defined primarily by their ethnicity/nationality. Guided by the idea that in today's Montenegro "every individual and every group wants to be tolerated, but no one wants to show solidarity" (Stevo), #Građanski declined to vilify members of the alleged 'uncivil society' ravaged by socio-economic restructuring – whom they saw as the 'true losers of transition' – and instead treated their conservatism and traditionalism as symptoms of broader social injustices they did not create but were victims of. They hoped the "underclass material interests" would eventually "place them on the left instead of the right" (Draško), and so they steered public debate towards the socio-economic dimensions of national identity as the "divisions that matter" in that "the real problems [...] are essentially class-based" (Sreten). In doing so, #Građanski strived for these issues to become a "unifying factor in fighting the divide-and-conquer politics" and ultimately result in a broader coalition for "liberation from the dictatorial regime" (Aleksandra). Underscoring "civil liberties, civic action, republican order and social justice" as the "essence of civic values," my respondents described their political relation to the state as "anational republicanism" predicated upon the "consensus that Montenegro is a country of its citizens, regardless of their ethnonational belonging or political affiliations" and an awareness that "institutions arrested by political parties" do not treat all citizens equally (Novak). In the resulting discourse, 'civic values' were no longer understood as falling within the ethical and aesthetical parameters of the liberal, if not outright apolitical middle class's 'urbanity' and 'civility.' They were framed instead as a manifestation of the progressive and contentious political activity of all concerned members of the political – and not ethnonational – community in the face of state oppression.

Establishing itself in opposition both to ethnonationalist and citizenist approaches to politics, #Građanski refused to view conflict resolution as a reconciliation between seemingly homogenous ethnonational-turned-political blocs but rather as a joint action of a multitude of constitutionally defined 'bearers of sovereignty.' For them, 'civic values' not only represented liberal ('civil') alternatives to ethnonationalist ('uncivil') politics as was the case in the 1990s; rather, they denoted an extra-institutional "course of action based on compromises between abundant diversities in the Montenegrin society" and "the citizens' awareness of the [need to protect] public, common good" in the face of abuse of state power (Sreten). Guided by the idea to challenge the DPS regime not because a particular ethnonational identity was wronged but because the constitutionally guaranteed political rights and civil liberties of members of a political community were negated, my respondents called upon their fellow citizens to disidentify with ethnopolitical categories and, hence, detach themselves from the party affiliations that thrived on these divisions. Accordingly,

#Građanski explicitly stated that "at the moment when a repressive state apparatus openly carries out aggression against its own citizens, all existing divisions – of ethnicity/nationality, political party, ideology, religion, gender, sexuality, generational – disappear" (Građanski 2015). By acting as "we the citizens of Montenegro," their political bonds created an ad hoc social movement of autonomous political subjects that saw itself as "[standing] together in defence of Montenegro, its peace, statehood, and republican constitution, as well as the human and civil rights of all of [its citizens] regardless of [their] political, ideological, identity, or other differences" (Građanski 2015), with the ultimate goal of reinstituting Montenegro's constitutional identity as a 'state of social justice.'

In conclusion, despite the failure of my respondents to achieve their objectives, the case of #Građanski demonstrates how a group of citizens momentarily created a radical space of inclusion for numerous anti-establishment sentiments through temporary political bonds between more than 10,000 hitherto ethnopolitically divided citizens who answered their call and came to follow-up protests. This ad hoc mobilization functioned as Montenegro's autochthonous version of the 'We are the 99%' rebellion. Moreover, as opposed to previous elite-driven attempts at establishing 'civic values' as a symbolic unifier of an ethnonationally divided Montenegrin society, #Građanski reinvented these political bonds 'from below' by grounding 'civic values' in civil liberties, social justice, republican order, contentious politics and the dignity of (other) citizens, as well as in empathy and solidarity with wronged segments of society.

Political Embodying: Symbolically Representing the Unrepresented

A near four-year struggle against environmental degradation in the village of Beranselo stands as not only the most successful grassroots movement in contemporary Montenegro but one of the most prominent instances of the 'new left' in the post-Yugoslav region (Štiks 2015). In analyzing how this inconspicuous citizen-led struggle in a small village became a new, transcendent political subjectivity that embodied the grievances of all those wronged by and discontented with the DPS regime nationwide, I distinguish two critical moments. The first is the coordinated and collective repertoires of political contention in physical spaces aimed at righting an environmental wrong, with the second being the spontaneous and individual tactics of everyday resistance in virtual spaces aimed at exposing this wrong, among others, as a symptom of structural injustices common throughout the country.

By the time contention began in 2010, the municipality of Berane had become home to an ecologically hazardous dumpsite holding half a million tons of unprocessed waste without any technical infrastructure for its storage. Whether the locals were petitioning the authorities to hear their grievances, using citizen science to prove that the location did not fulfill legal criteria and technical requirements for an acceptable regional landfill site or implementing

their statutory right to organize a community referendum to prevent rubbish disposal in their settlement, the powers that be did not recognize their actions as legitimate.[9] My respondents explain that the officials' chronic non-responsiveness eventually led the villagers to complement these attempts at 'obedient citizenship' with collective acts of civil disobedience. They ranged from daily pickets on access roads to the dumping ground and collective blockades of police-escorted garbage trucks, across performances to creatively expose the contradictions that lay in the discrepancies between what the authorities were saying and doing, to protests in the capital in which they criticized their political representatives for being silent about the systemic oppression of those they were supposed to represent. The locals were determined to challenge the decisions of those who "have never or will never live in Beranselo" yet were using their living space as "an instant and cheap solution to a long-term problem [the government] had" (Jovan), without previously consulting citizens whose livelihoods were directly endangered by the decision. In the face of the "infrastructure project" that was turning their town "into a 'garbage centre'" and the north region as a whole into "the 'Third World' within Montenegro" (Jovan), Beranselo's residents fought for answerability, responsibility and accountability from the local and national authorities.

Unlike comparable grassroots mobilizations against environmental degradation in rural Montenegro that remained single-issue affairs and local struggles, the resistance in Beranselo stopped being perceived only as a fight for a healthy environment but was characterized instead by the public as a defense of constitutional order, civil society and human dignity, ultimately becoming a paradigmatic example of civic responsibility and civil courage, as well as a nationwide symbol of resistance to political oppression.[10] What differentiated the uprising in Beranselo from all these citizens' initiatives were the individual, decentralized and uncoordinated acts of everyday resistance of creating and sharing images on social media platforms depicting the wrongs they had to suffer. These actions, performed daily by a number of non-activist 'ordinary people' who supported their cause, can be classified into two categories. The first category of action is the dissemination of unsettling visual representations of the dump and confrontations with the police, while the second is the creation of a Port Berane (*Luka Berane*) page on Facebook, which served an autonomous community-art project that lampooned the establishment through photoshopped pictures of a more desirable environment.[11] In a nutshell, Port Berane was envisaged as an 'alternative history of Berane': through the creative editing of images and usage of popular culture imagery, a former industrial town was symbolically relocated from a poor continental area to the wealthy coastal region where it became a 'tourist giant,' a sarcastic utopia in which "[the ruling] elites used privatization and corruption for the good of all its residents" (Nebojša). Ultimately, this project (re)situated the resistance of the villagers within a wider socio-political context and deconstructed its apparent localized particularism, rendering Beranselo not as an isolated injustice but rather as a symptom of the structural violence common throughout postsocialist Montenegro.

Publicly visible resistance began with a billboard in the town square of Berane, where villagers displayed four disconcerting photographs of the dump. This gesture was not a provocation but a "desperate attempt" to make the townsfolk "*see* where their trash ends up, where it is hidden – in the backyard of *their* town, but in [villagers'] homes" (Jovan). Dissemination of images quickly became a viral awareness-raising tactic on social media as hundreds of pictures were shared on Facebook for everyone to see "what was really going on." Visuals they produced were "pictures of a crime in progress, a crime against one village, one town, one region," demonstrating that "official policies aimed at 'protecting the environment' were nothing but a lie" and that Beranselo's residents "were not standing in the way of progress, as [the authorities] claimed," but instead "preventing the [environmental] apocalypse" (Gojko). Addressing the public directly through photographs unmediated by "words that can be twisted and turn everything into another [ethnopolitical] identity issue" was of fundamental importance in providing "evidence of the injustices that everyone in Montenegro talks about, but is seldom able to support with facts" and thereby giving to the public "proof that the other side, the official side, was lying" (Nebojša). By converting images into a medium of everyday resistance through which the wrongs they had to suffer could not be symbolically polluted nor co-opted by the hegemonic discourses of the DPS regime, this approach could not leave anyone indifferent, and no political narrative could defend and thus misrepresent the injustices revealed. Ultimately, these visuals turned the subjective gaze of a marginalized group into an objective concern of the local community and, gradually, the entire country.

In the non-anonymous society of Montenegro, Port Berane – as "the voice of the truly marginalized" – gave an opportunity for every member of the community to "create an image and communicate their grievances […] to say something [critical or subversive] and remain anonymous," so "it wasn't important who made the photos, but what they were showing – critique, difference and change" (Gojko). When the dump became part of Port Berane's imaginarium, it translated political oppression and structural injustices into visual representations of a concrete, tangible and visceral problem that could be widely identified and, therefore, *identified with* – a town in which privatization, incompetence and corruption had not destroyed its infrastructure, local industry and people's lives. By deconstructing the dominant neoliberal narrative of progress and overriding ethnopolitical cleavages in the name of civic unity against environmental-*cum*-social injustice, the placeholder of 'Beranselo' was not only resignified as a symptom of structural violence committed in the name of the government's strategic goals that benefited only the establishment but eventually became an embodiment of emancipatory politics in Montenegro. Over time, rather than simply representing the residents of Beranselo and the concrete injustice they faced, the democratic claim of solidarity "We are all Beranselo!" – made in the name of shared political goals rather than an identity associated with Beranselo – came to represent the multitudes of individuals and collectives demanding respect for human dignity and protection of the

environment, questioning official policies and narratives and renouncing the elite's definition of politics in which the primary function of the political system is to serve the interests of the few.

In conclusion, waste disposal in Beranselo was officially halted, and its residents and the rest of Montenegro celebrated victory in early 2014.[12] This case study, nevertheless, demonstrates how a local struggle became an egalitarian space of social inclusion, political enunciation and democratic innovations for the entire country by connecting issues rarely spoken about in post-democratic Montenegro, such as environmental harm, social injustice and constitutional abuse, and through highlighting these as shared and common problems. This was especially the case for those who were failed by electoral democracy and were unrepresented in the polity or wronged in the name of 'economic development' and 'general progress,' to allow them an avenue to express solidarity and practice civil disobedience, address the public on a daily basis and fight the authorities without being (mis)perceived by their fellow citizens as 'enemies of the state' or 'a threat to the public order.'

Concluding Discussion

In this chapter, I examined the performing of citizenship through civil resistance in postsocialist Montenegro. Given the post-democratic condition that prevailed in the analyzed period (2010–2015), I considered the process of political subjectification through three case studies, focusing on how (apolitical) social actors came to comprehend their predicaments, articulate their grievances, make their demands, formulate their critiques and justify their positions on *political* grounds. By drawing on pragmatic sociology, I used my respondents' reflexive insights and critical capacities – in particular their appeals to higher normative principles when legitimizing their actions and defending their causes – to propose three trajectories of political subjectification.[13]

In doing so, I moved away from approaches that view the 'postsocialist condition' as a mere 'area studies problem' that provides empirical material for theories developed from the historical experience of affluent western democracies, using instead the 'postsocialist experience' for knowledge- and theory-production in its own right. Accordingly, my chapter demonstrates how postsocialist civil society is 'built' outside of the civic sector, contesting the 'weak postsocialist civil society' thesis by identifying democratic counterculture(s) emerging 'from below' in order to challenge dominant power relations through radical action. This piece also clarifies how needs, interests and identities articulated from the ground up often move beyond the liberal consensus permeating the civic sector. More importantly, these needs, interests and identities are clearly formulated in political terms (contrary to much of the scholarly literature that views civil societies in CEE as *apolitical*).

My findings suggest that the process of political subjectification entails escaping post-democratic constraints present in Montenegro by (1) refusing to resolve issues through patronage networks, (2) going against the dominant

political culture that promotes disengagement from public affairs and (3) adhering to organized collective action as a fundamental expression of citizenship. Moreover, this process involves transcending the ethnopolitical cleavages that shape Montenegro's electoral politics in three ways, including (1) challenging socio-political relations that perpetuate this antagonism, (2) articulating and aggregating interests and identities from the ground up and (3) (re)politicizing other issues, in particular the socio-economic dimensions of everyday life, and bringing these into the center of public debate. In other words, in a context where political opposition is depoliticized and thus delegitimized by the state as its 'enemy,' political subjectification entails gaining recognition and, more importantly, legitimacy to think, speak and act on the public stage as a relevant political actor.[14]

Reflexive accounts by my respondents provide three important inputs for political sociology and adjacent interdisciplinary fields that study civil society, social movements and contentious politics. The first case study investigated *political becoming* as a trajectory of political subjectification through which a traditionally apolitical group politicizes its social role. The student uprisings of 2010–2011 demonstrated how deliberative forums and alternative forms of organizing promoted sociality, community and autonomous interactions in which students were well positioned to understand the myriad problems they shared as a social group despite coming from different class backgrounds, identity groups and ideological positions (enabling them to jointly identify the political causes of their common predicaments). Political becoming, hence, denotes a gradual transformation from the initial intent to fight only for one's personal interest into a willingness to fight for broader causes that benefit all citizens.

The second case study investigated *political bonding* as a trajectory of political subjectification through which ordinary citizens exercise their civic autonomy by forging new political bonds between hitherto antagonistic collectives. The mobilization of urbanites in October 2015 demonstrated how the ad hoc activist group #Građanski temporarily transcended the apolitical habitus of the urban middle class and the civic sector's nonsubversive 'civility.' By advancing 'civic values' as a symbolic unifier for joint action, these activists displayed civil courage that momentarily created a political bond between hitherto ethnopolitically divided citizens, uniting them around the one and most important goal: the defense of the country's constitutional order and the rights and liberties it guarantees.

The third case study investigated *political embodying* as a trajectory of political subjectification through which a localized citizen-led struggle attains universal attributes, effectively standing in for other marginalized grievances unrepresented in the polity. From 2010 to 2014, the grassroots environmental movement in rural Montenegro demonstrated how local villagers managed to mobilize the solidarity of their fellow citizens and thereby universalize resistance to a geographically specific wrong. In the process, instead of simply representing the grievances of Beranselo's residents, the idea of 'Beranselo' came

to embody all communities across the country that faced similar injustices, alongside the demand that they should 'have a say' in the decision-making affecting their lives.

The lesson of these three cases is that political subjectification functions as disidentification through performativity during scenes of dispute. It occurs when people disconnect from their already existing identities and perform citizenship that, depending on the situation and relations, takes divergent trajectories in politically emancipating hitherto disengaged, estranged, if not antagonistic individuals and collectives, prompting them to pursue their common goals under new symbolic unifiers. This process is democratic to the extent that citizens not only interact with authorities on an equal footing but also move in between and beyond their extant political affiliations, social positions and cultural belongings. As such, political subjectification denotes not only an articulation of new political narratives but a creation of novel, inclusive and egalitarian spaces of political enunciation, social inclusion and democratic innovations, of relations that motivate and empower citizens to contest the inegalitarian logic of the social order, challenge political authorities, question national dogmas, practice civil disobedience, diagnose the problems and provide alternative solutions.

Notes

1. While three terms are used to describe subject-formation – such as 'subjectivation,' 'subjectivization' and 'subjectification' – I have opted for the latter due to its similarities with *identification*, a concept that denotes the process of identity-formation.
2. In postsocialist contexts, the dominant self-perception of activists is that of apolitical actors who pursue their goals by non-political means in the name of moral principles or self-interest rather than in allegiance to a political agenda (Jacobsson 2015). This activism entails a "discursive and practical view of political action which is primarily personalised and conscientised" and, as such, "focused on the personal and interpersonal with scant regard to the structural and only minimal regard for social and institutional change" (Stubbs 2012: 18).
3. Since the DPS is a direct successor of the League of Communists of Montenegro, it can be argued it had been in power consecutively from 1945 until it lost the 2020 elections. It was the first time since the introduction of parliamentarism in Montenegro in 1906 that the country witnessed a change of government at the ballot box.
4. It is important to note that analogous concepts such as 'political becoming' (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020) and 'the politics of becoming' (Razsa and Kurnik 2012) have been used in accounting for other trajectories of political subjectification in the postsocialist settings.
5. I analyzed these case studies in depth – albeit through different theoretical lenses – in three papers that explored how political subjectivity is related to autonomous spaces (Baća 2017a), everyday resistance (Baća 2017b) and ethnonational disidentification (Baća 2018).
6. Unlike other post-Yugoslav countries in which universities have been hotbeds of political activism, students in Montenegro have been notoriously civically disengaged and politically passive (Baća 2017a).
7. 'Građanski' can be translated as 'the civic,' 'civic' and 'civicness' but also has a similar connotation as the adjective 'urban.'

8 In terms of ethnonational belonging, 12 of my respondents self-identify as Montenegrins, with only three as Serbs.
9 It is crucial to emphasize that the villagers' struggle was not a local instance of a NIMBY ('Not In My Back Yard') movement. Their main demand was to halt waste disposal until independent experts could determine whether Beranselo fulfilled the criteria for a landfill site. If their expertise confirmed the findings of local authorities, Beranselo's residents agreed not to protest the decision.
10 Moreover, the word 'Beranselo' became a threat in the discourse of other wronged and discontented groups as in, for example, "If you don't fulfil our demands, you will have another Beranselo!" (Nikolić 2013: 33).
11 Due to the involvement of the most prominent environmental activists from Berane in the Port Berane project, this impromptu and informal virtual space was (mis) perceived by the general public as a constitutive element of the struggle in Beranselo.
12 Environmental remediation of the landfill was completed in 2018.
13 It is important to remind that these three trajectories are not exhaustive. Other trajectories are likewise theoretically possible in accounting for political subjectification in the post-democratic condition.
14 An important outcome of political subjectification is that many of my respondents continued to practice civic and political activism around numerous issues after the events described in this chapter.

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8 Agonist Reading of Social Movements in Illiberal Democracies

The Case of the Social Movement for Truth and Justice

Jasmin Hasanović, Valida Repovac Nikšić and Emina Adilović

Introduction

Recent academic interest in politics and democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has focused on the country's complex system of government and weak central institutions. Functioning along the principles of power-sharing and multilevel governance, along with ethnic tensions and challenges in the reforms and innovation of its existing consociational form, it continues to confound scientific research (local and international). After almost three decades of consociation-blocked democracy, we can say that this complex system follows the trend of democratic regression and rising autocratization rather than the overall process of democratization (Bieber 2020; Kapidžić 2020a, 2020b; Kapidžić and Stojarová 2022).

As a reaction to democratic backsliding and state capture by the ruling elites, experience has shown that the 2013 and 2014 popular protests and bottom-up forums that voiced citizens' concerns about corruption and other socioeconomic issues fizzled out in just a few months, as the energy that drove this activism turned into dispiritedness (Jansen 2018). In other words, it demonstrated the shortcomings of this approach, whether because the broadly advocated systemic change was too far out of reach or because the popular means of achieving it were too limited in postsocialist BiH. However, Kurtović and Hromadžić (2017) argue that the plenums[1] and other protests might signal the emergence of a new relationship between citizens and politicians. Referring to their claim that this new form, known as prefigurative politics, has since remained in play, in our previous research (Repovac Nikšić et al. 2022), we focused on the case of the social movement "Justice for Dženan" and its *pragmatic symbiosis* with a political party in the local legislature of the Sarajevo Canton, examining whether it could be identified as a novel form (innovation) of sociopolitical cooperation. Our goal was not only to examine the potential and the feasibility of this kind of alliance-building but also to see whether it can create a space where current democratic institutions can play an essential role in promoting pluralist democracy and inclusive institutions and overcome

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systemic disadvantages in competitive authoritarian regimes perpetuated by illiberal politics (Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020).

In this chapter, we complement our previous research by examining the movement from a different theoretical perspective. In the framework of contentious politics, our previous paper focused on ways in which social movements and other actors could disrupt the *status quo* and create opportunities for political and social change. Mobilization based on the desire for truth and justice has encouraged new collective forms of identification in quest of more democracy, attempting to limit illiberal politics through diverse citizens' demands to hold politicians to account. Although contentious politics sees the importance of power relations in a democracy that co-opts powerful interests, it does not legitimize conflict as a factor that keeps democratic contention alive. The gap between being represented and (the feeling of) being excluded rests on a personal, subjective sense of injustice transformed by the movement into a political demand for accountability. Considering the importance of central agonistic principles such as empathy or emotion and the dichotomy of "us," regular citizens vs. the alienated "them" holding political institutions captive as the movement's mobilization strategies, its connection to a political party – whether understood as a symbiosis and innovation or not – takes these principles into an official, institutional domain.

Therefore, we think it is useful to use the lens of agonistic theory, primarily as understood and advocated by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, to interpret the possibilities and functions of the kind of cooperation that enables pluralistic openness of democracy by embracing conflict as productive and challenging. Their theoretical understanding of agonism poses a challenge here, considering that conflict is seen as a democratic opportunity that should be anticipated in the political institutions for the purpose of a functioning democracy that permits plurality in order to allow the voices of diverse and marginalized groups to be heard. In other words, we want to examine whether the movement's action through government institutions could create opportunities to emphasize the importance of conflict in politics. Finally, this chapter examines whether this theoretical model is indeed applicable on the other side of liberal democracy and what this could mean for democracy, specifically, in the context of BiH.

Innovating Democracy through Pragmatic Symbiosis?

After 21-year-old Dženan Memić died under dubious circumstances in early 2016 in Sarajevo, the Memić family expressed doubts about the completeness of the police investigation. When the Cantonal Prosecutor's Office became involved in the investigation, the civic group "Justice for Dženan" was created on Facebook. Launched as a family initiative, the goal of this movement was to identify and prosecute the persons responsible for the death, and its unceasing demands over the past six years have garnered significant public attention. Very quickly, politicians, public figures and citizens from different Bosnian

cities and the diaspora joined in support of the demands made at all 20 peaceful protests held (at the time of writing). The election of Dženan Memić's sister to the Sarajevo Canton Assembly in 2018, coupled with pressures from other members of the Cantonal Assembly, the international community and the media, has led to some progress on the case. The BiH State Prosecutor's Office started the procedure, but the process, due to the concealment of evidence and cover-ups, grew from an investigation of responsibility into an "investigation of the investigation." Trials ensued against Dženan's girlfriend, her father and law enforcement officers for suspected evidence planting, thus uncovering an entire complex chain of responsibility of the various authorities in obstructing the investigation. At the end of 2022, the accused were acquitted of the charge of obstruction of the investigation of Dženan's death, after which the State Prosecutor's Office appealed the acquittal to the Appeals Chamber of the Court of BiH. Regardless of the massive growth of the movement, candidacy of Arijana Memić on the list of the right-center political party People and Justice (*Narod i Pravda* – NiP) and an opportunity to submit direct questions in legislative sessions, the family still did not receive an answer, partly due to procedural obstacles, corruption and nepotism of the government and the sluggishness of the judicial system.

This case had several distinct qualities relative to other popular protests and social movements. Earlier examples of protests and plenums attracted not just local and regional but also substantial international attention and were tackled by a number of authors (Milan 2017, 2021; Murtagh 2016; Puljek-Shank and Fritsch 2019). On the other hand, we highlighted that interest in social movements and their connection to political parties and elections gained theoretical attention both in Western democracies and in Southeast Europe. However, whether dealing with the specific case of the "Justice for Dženan" movement or similar mobilizations on a quest for accountability and strategic practices that introduce novel types of alliance-building with external actors (political parties or social movements), with the exception of only a few cases known to us (Milan 2021; Žižek 2018), there is still a lack of academic writing from the perspective of BiH. Another distinction is that previous protests and attempts at deliberation were quite limited in terms of space and time: taking a stand on a highly specific demand, they dissipated after that demand was met. Although we must acknowledge the fact that they did manage to reintroduce socioeconomic frames into popular mobilization (Milan 2017) and even target the country's ethnopolitical structure for its dysfunctional and opaque governance (Mujkić 2016), they failed to produce any notable social change, even in the short term. It was also evident that the energy of collective hope was not sufficient to mobilize a broad spectrum of the population.

With its ability to gather extensive popular support and sustain high popular turnout over a long period of time, the "Justice for Dženan" movement overcame that particular problem. Insofar as it joined forces with a similar movement, "Justice for David" from Banja Luka, it fostered transethnic

solidarity that, for the first time, produced notions of justice that transcended entity boundaries (Hasanović 2020; Majstorović 2022). On the other hand, by entering into dialogue with specific political actors, such as political parties – in particular, the People and Justice Party (NiP) – the movement created a pragmatic symbiosis, which we interpret as a kind of democratic innovation that created space for potential political change in the democratic process. This direct contact with political institutions distinguished the movement from previous protests that took place exclusively outside (as in the case of the JMBG protests – referring to *jedinstveni matični broj građana* or Unique Master Citizen Number in English – in 2013) or in parallel with institutional structures (civic plenums in 2014) (Jansen 2018; Kurtović 2018; Mujkić 2016).

In the previous paper, written while the aforementioned trials were still underway, we tried to question the viability of Arijana's decision to enter the party list as a candidate in the elections for the cantonal parliamentary assembly as a form of cooperation, pragmatic symbiosis between a social movement and a party, as a new form of sociopolitical cooperation in the quest for accountability. Using the technique of semi-structured in-depth interviews, we explored the innovation in the movement's interactions with a specific political party in the context of the question of whether it can impede the rising autocratization of the predominantly ethnicity-based society. Yet, while stressing the importance of that symbiosis between a social movement and a political option in a joint quest for accountability, it is doubtful whether it created new ways of sociopolitical interaction that could prevent autocracy (Repovac Nikšić et al. 2022). The "Justice for Dženan" movement is a new form of civil engagement that expands the political space and fights against authoritarian policies and practices. Criticism, on the other hand, is directed at the responsible institutions, such as the prosecution, the judiciary, the police and the healthcare system, rather than the government that controls parts of society. More precisely, criticism of the movement was directed only at those institutions that are responsible for the case but not toward the entire system that enables the reproduction of "power relations" (ethnonationalism, illiberalism, clientelism) that harm democracy in BiH. The focus, in other words, was rather narrow and concerned only with the case – without the broader social and political dimension. This is the crucial reason why the potential for the movement to grow into something more was not exploited.

It may seem reasonable to ask whether the decision of one person in a movement can be seen as a movement-party alliance or not. Certainly, the mixing of individual political activism with activism through a certain political party on the one hand or activism in social and political movements on the other does not as such constitute democratic innovation, nor symbiosis of movement and party. Given that this specific movement was made up of family and friends of the murdered Dženan Memić in terms of its organization, goals and ideas, Arijana's entry into the Sarajevo Canton Assembly via the party list was not her independent decision – it was made in consultation with other

family members and friends. In an interview conducted for the purposes of the previous paper, Arijana Memić stated that she joined the assembly upon suggestion from family members and due to Muriz Memić's interest in political engagement that would allow her to directly ask questions and examine documents. However, although the movement continued to address its demands through formal, legislative institutions, according to her statement, she never formally joined the party, nor did the overall movement; it continued to exist independent of the political party. This is also apparent from the movement's public relations manager when speaking to us about the movement's activities and policies in the digital public domain:

> We consciously decided against a [social media] page for Arijana Memić the parliamentarian and maintained that she should continue to have a personal profile. Arijana didn't go into politics to be a politician, but to provide us with an alternative, a path we can use if others fail.

What remains unanswered in the previous paper is the question of what makes this interplay of extra-parliamentary and parliamentary struggle different from previous responses to the corrupt system and weakening democracy. Also, now the recognition of institutions as a key field of political struggle for fulfillment of the movement's demands has undoubtedly revitalized the democratic space, enabling the engagement of conflicting citizens in politics while at the same time having a minor impact on the whole case. As we concluded, the process of assuring accountability with and within the institutions through a pragmatic symbiosis of social movements and political parties operates under the dominant ethnically determined social and political framework (Repovac Nikšić et al. 2022: 157). Faced with cover-ups and obstruction of the investigation by instruments of the state, such as the prosecution, the judiciary, the police and the healthcare system, the movement highlighted the interconnectedness of state institutions and clientelist interests, and pointed to various forms of state capture by the dominant political elites. Calling the institutions and individuals employed in the institutions to account for omissions, in this case, allowed the subjective sense of injustice to be translated into a political demand for accountability. However, pointing out unaccountable politics or intermittent questioning of the dominant order through this pragmatic symbiosis were just ancillary demands arising from the need to solve a specific case.

Theoretical Background

Plural Agonism as an Alternative to the Deliberation Model

The idea of agonistic democracy emerges as an alternative theoretical model to deliberative democracies. Marie Paxton's book *Agonistic Democracy – Rethinking Political Institutions in Pluralist Times* (2020) details and analyzes classical theoretical sources and postulates of agonistic democracy. Paxton

cites Nietzsche, Foucault, Schmitt and Arendt as the classics and creates a link between them and contemporary agonist authors: Owen, Tully, Connolly and Mouffe. Paxton finds three common features in both classical and contemporary theories that represent the starting points for different institutional design for experimentation with this form of democracy and possibly democratic innovation. The three themes in the idea of agonism common to the listed authors are political contestation of conflicting values ("refers to the way in which antagonistic democrats want to revive the political sphere, reigniting passion and emotion"), contingent nature of politics ("an acknowledgement that any consensus is provisional and must always be open to challenge") and the necessary interdependency of citizens ("denotes the agonistic commitment to using conflict as a productive force which can unite citizens") (Paxton 2020: 12). In short, what they advocate is a redefinition (erasing) of the boundaries between the public and the private, placing the individual (citizen) in the center of the political. That is, returning the political to politics or returning substance and content to politics and political action. Sociologically speaking, they are committed to restoring the importance and role of society in relation to superior institutions and the state.

Created as a response to or critique of the deliberative form of democracy, the idea of agonism criticizes the postulates that politics can be grounded in the universal principles of reason, rationality and neutrality. Using examples such as the rise of right-wing populism and the establishment of radical right-wing politicians in Europe and around the world, Marie Paxton presents the argument of contemporary theorists of agonism who see a systemic fault in liberal democracies rooted, inter alia, in Rawls's theory of justice based on the "veil of ignorance." It is exactly this liberal blind spot, objectification and neutralization of various positions and demands, that generates antagonisms that are impossible to manage and threaten to escalate into hostility and conflict. Agonistic democracy overlaps to a lesser extent with the communitarian demand for recognition of diversity and distinctiveness of groups, but certainly not in any way that would imply dominance of group rights over the rights of individuals. The idea of agonism is, in this sense, perhaps closer to the idea of multicultural citizenship and liberal theory of minority rights, as advocated by Will Kymlicka, only far more open and pluralistic. Chantal Mouffe argues her theory by contrasting it against liberal universalists (such as John Rawls), cosmopolitan democrats (primarily sociologists Beck and Giddens, followed by political theorists such as Held and others) and deliberative democrats (such as Habermas, Benhabib and others). We opted for her theory as opposed to those of other theorists of agonism (Owen, Tully, Connolly) because Mouffe not only says that conflict is an integral part of democracy and politics but also because she sees conflict as something that can benefit democracy and propounds pluralism as an essential characteristic of democracy.

Certainly, the idea of agonistic politics and democracy contains certain shortcomings that are subject to dispute (Devette 2014; Ince 2016; Machin 2014; Ostoya 2014; according to Tambakaki 2014: 2; Wingenbach 2011; *cf.*

Purakayastha 2014). The crucial challenge in the context of this chapter is that it is limited to considering alternatives (advancements) to Western liberal democracies, which are primarily deliberative. This is precisely the challenge in projecting agonism onto other forms, especially the so-called illiberal or hybrid regimes in which the democratic order is threatened by autocratic tendencies.[2] This is the case with the never-concluded transition countries of the Western Balkans or the post-conflict and postsocialist context of the BiH society and democracy that is in focus here.

It now becomes clear why we could read their demands to hold politicians to account in an attempt to limit illiberal politics through the lens of agonistic theory. By democratizing conflict and placing it at the center of democracy, agonistic theory holds that conflict does not undermine democracy but becomes an indispensable part of its vitality, keeping the democratic contestation alive. On the other hand, it is clear that the democracy in BiH, due to both its specific institutional design and measurement indices (Freedom House 2023), is far from the models of liberal democracy. Conflict, as the central concept in agonistic theory, is an integral part of the consociational model of democracy in BiH. By suppressing wider social pluralism and separating individuals from the political process, it seems functionally limited to politically subjectivization and integration of different social requirements and connect them into constitutive democratic elements beyond the ethnopolitical ones. So, by recognizing democratic innovation, we wanted to see if it could surmount its particular objective and grasp the structure of power relations by demanding accountability in the development of a broader, more pluralistic democratic framework.

The Bosnian Model of Democracy – Power Structure/Consociation

We sought to perceive the conflict between the nonaccountable institutions and the accountability-seeking citizens as a productive force that can unite citizens, not through common values but through engagement in a shared process. Instead of advocating deliberative theories in our approach (Habermas 1996, 1998; Rawls 1971, 1993), we would like to read the symbiosis between the "Justice for Dženan" movement and the Sarajevo Canton Assembly through an alternative, agonistic model (Mouffe 1993, 2000, 2016, 2019).

First conceptualized by the Dutch-American political scientist Arend Lijphart (1977), consociative democracy as an equally analytical and normative category describes the democratic systems in deeply divided societies, which are based on an accommodation approach to ethnic conflict regulation. Such systems are based on key features of what Lijphart termed "consociational engineering" and include elite-level power-sharing via a grand coalition, segmented cultural autonomy, proportionality between groups in public positions and group veto rights over issues of vital interest, which is now central to many negotiated peace agreements (McCulloch and McEvoy 2018).

The Bosnian War ended with the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH in 1995, establishing a Bosnian-Herzegovinian consociation model based on the balancing of territorial and ethnic representation. Annex 4, serving as a constitution of sorts, defines BiH as a state of three constituent peoples, "Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, along with others, citizens of BiH," and of two subnational entities – the unitary, Serb-dominated Republic of Srpska (RS), the mixed Croat and Bosniak entity Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) with a Bosniak majority, further divided into ten cantons and the independent unit of District of Brčko. Giving power to "the two entities (…) granting most governmental functions to them and only the most limited powers to the central government" (Hays and Crosby 2006) while granting "these three 'constituent peoples' (…) far reaching veto-rights in the House of Peoples" (*cf*. Gromes 2009: 432; Mujkić 2007: 112–128) together with the collective Heads of State – a rotating tripartite presidency composed of three members from each of the 'constituent peoples' elected from the territory of the two entities – makes the country a case of a "weak and unconsolidated consociational democracy, with strong asymmetric federalism and subnational competitive authoritarianism" (Repovac Nikšić et al. 2022: 146).

The consociation model that lies at the core of the political system in BiH shares certain similarities with agonism. Although both theoretical concepts are based on defined opposing groups represented in political institutions, the consociational democratic subject is essentialized and homogeneous. Consociation is based on a conflict between ethnic or religious pluralities, as opposed to variable and contingent entities that are a result of historic and various other identifications dependent on hegemonic power relations, rearticulated in a chain of equivalence and structured around a nodal point.

It may seem that within these pre-assigned, essentialized identities, as well as between them, political representatives of a particular group would discover unique perspectives while resolving conflicts and reaching decisions that are acceptable to all parties involved, placing a strong emphasis on dialogue, cooperation, negotiation and compromise, but this is not the case in practice. Instead of assuming an inclusive public deliberation process in which citizens discuss and decide on public issues through rational dialogue, the postwar consociational model in BiH is based on the principles of power-sharing between the political parties representing the three main ethnic groups. In this model, the decision-making process is based on the principle of representation in government and decision-making bodies rather than relying on the principle of free and open participatory public deliberation. This form of power-sharing emphasizes accountability toward one's own group rather than toward national institutions or the citizens of the country as a whole (Kapidžić 2020b: 82) while leading to the subjectification of society to a fragmented education system (*cf*. Becker 2017; Kapo 2012; Soldo et al. 2017; Torsti 2009) and divided and shrinking public spaces (Turčilo and Buljubašić 2017).

Reading Symbiosis through Key Elements

Conflict, Consociation, Pluralism

Chantal Mouffe insists on the importance of pluralist democracy, which is necessarily agonistic, according to this author. The pervasiveness of conflicts must not be ignored, and an adequate framework for moderation is the policy of agonism. As Mouffe notes, a well-functioning democracy calls for the confrontation of democratic political positions constituting the 'agonistic struggle':

> [F]or the agonistic perspective, the central category of democratic politics is the category of the "adversary", the opponent with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles (…) while disagreeing about their interpretation. Adversaries fight against each other because they want their interpretation of the principles to become hegemonic, but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for the victory of their position.
>
> (Mouffe 2013: 7)

This democratic space is therefore vital as it allows "to hold politicians to account, fulfill individual autonomy, develop better relationships between diverse citizens and achieve well-constructed outcomes" (Paxton 2020: 2).

This, however, seems not to be the case in Western Balkan countries or in illiberal regimes. The aim of such movements is not to replace one group with another, one hegemonic project with a different one, but to question the very legitimacy of their political opponents in order to challenge and change nationalism-based governance. For this very reason, attempts of popular protests and social movements to change the unaccountable politics have the potential to break the dominant hegemonic power relationship that for decades (here we refer to BiH, as well as other countries of the Western Balkans) allows political parties and their leaders to engage in various forms of state capture that serve to perpetuate clientelist governance and patronage.

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian model best reflects the assertion that every consensus is just a result of a certain stabilization of power, of hegemonic configuration, and that it always contains a certain form of exclusion (Mouffe 1999: 756) presented as the only possible outcome without any alternatives. However, the constitutionality of conflict and its institutionalization through the consociational democracy in BiH are inadequate and restrict the creation of a pluralistic society outside the ethno-confessional framework and revitalization of democracy in its full sense. The consociational institutional framework makes it impossible for these hegemonic articulations (above and beyond the ethno-religious) to be recognized as contingent in terms of constituting and establishing social relations that do not depend on the *a priori* rationalization or essentialization that underpins the existing political identities. The consociational model creates space for the concentration of power and control

over democratic institutions in the hands of a small group of political elites, and as such, it undermines democratic processes, deepens existing power imbalances and captures institutions. Furthermore, this model rests on political representation based on the principle of "power-sharing among political parties representing the main ethnic groups in a way that emphasizes accountability towards one's own group rather than towards citizens of the country as a whole" (Kapidžić 2020b: 82). It is based on discriminatory practices of ethnic representation (for example, the case of the Sejdić–Finci ruling),[3] diminished space and fragmented public sphere and education, where subjectification is accomplished through homogenization. Since the political race primarily involves parties that prefer to represent a single ethnic group, Kapidžić concludes that cross-ethnic voting is almost nonexistent, and this impacts democracy at the national level. In such a political and social context, antagonism threatens to remain untransformed to agonism and pluralist democracy. The idea behind the agonistic concept is that it should only be understood as a temporary result. In this sense, democracy should be understood as a constant process of contestation between different political actors and groups rather than a static system in which one or several groups hold power and others are excluded. Considering that in BiH, there is no pluralism outside the ethnopolitical, agonistic democracy cannot anticipate the socialization of the subjects of hegemony. Instead of competition between various hegemonic projects, what a consociational democracy does is prevent the domination of one group over another.

Drawing arguments from the post-structuralist ontology, political subjects are relationally constructed, for which the existence of what Mouffe calls a constitutive externality is crucial – it implies the establishment of a difference as a prerequisite for the existence of any identity. Therefore, this we/they rivalry model cannot be eliminated, just as the emergence of antagonism cannot be eradicated or eliminated from the social or political community. But what is possible is to presume that antagonism is constitutive for the society and for democracy itself, transforming the enemy into a rival with the help of democratic institutions so that conflict is "staged in a way that is not antagonistic but agonistic" (Mouffe 2016: 29). Mouffe warns that if the democratic framework does not recognize the different identities one could identify with due to the lack of anticipation of pluralism as an integral part of democracy "there is a risk that this will multiply confrontations over essentialist identities and non-negotiable moral values" (Mouffe 1999: 756). Mouffe takes the disintegration of Yugoslavia as an example of the locus of antagonism in which some "they" are perceived as a threat to the identity and existence of some "we" (Mouffe 2016: 22), with democratic confrontation being replaced by moral values and collective, essentialist forms of identification, from nationalist to religious or ethnic, which are non-negotiable.

The intrinsic nature of the conflicting aspect of pluralism was not manifested through the institutions of BiH because they themselves failed to 'recognize' the interests of other different identities. Such a reduction of politics to

ethnic determinism, besides stifling every possible ideological polarization within itself, has also succeeded and still succeeds in reducing politics solely to the matter of friend–enemy relationships. The essentialization of politics, i.e., of the political to the friend–enemy relationship, raises the question of *eliminating the enemy* – whether, at first, you demonize and criminalize a group or an individual by labeling and thus marking them or even openly pursuing their physical elimination. But since politics is a collective thing, the enemy is never an individual; it must always be placed in the framework of a group or the opposition, and homogenizing similarities must be attributed to it – *Soros pawns*, *foreign mercenaries*, *Yutel people*, *commies*, *balije*, *Ustashas*, *Serb Chetniks, Yugo Chetniks*. … But now comes the crucial reversal, as the other side is also constructing the enemy. Thus, this outline starts to be recognized in ethnopolitical subjects. Ethnonational parties are not just mere political opponents in the fight for power; they are also *fascists*, *terrorists* and fundamentalists – *khanjar wielders*, *Chetniks*, *Ustashas* and whatnot, thus excluding the option of political cooperation and, in the example of one party, even making it a statutory clause. It can be said that politics in BiH works on the Schmitt distinction of friend–enemy because antagonism fails to transform into agonism. 'Transformation' could have happened by recognizing the constitutionality of conflict for democracy, as well as by accepting demands and interests that are different from those found within the ethnopolitical coordinates. The "Justice for Dženan" movement had that potential, but it focused on a symptom of the captive state and merely diagnosed it.

Mobilizing Emotion and Democratic Innovation – Why the Movement Has Failed

One of the frequent criticisms of consensus democracy is that it rests on rationalism and the potential for neutral political decision-making. Equally, the consociational model is designed to create institutional space for rational and objective decision-making. Lijphart concludes that the majority model of democracy is inadequate and dangerous for inhomogeneous, pluralistic and deeply divided societies. Minorities would be continually denied access to power and feel excluded and discriminated against, the majority rule spelling majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy. Hence,

> what such societies need is a democratic regime that emphasizes consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes, and that tries to maximize the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with a bare majority: consensus democracy.[4]
>
> (Lijphart 2012: 32)

Mouffe, on the other hand, sees emotions as an important factor in how we envisage politics in a pluralist democracy project, asserting that "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to

the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs" (Mouffe 1999: 755–756). However, the experience of BiH, marked by an omnipresence of war and victimological narratives (Ćurak 2016), indicates that the political process is tainted by frequent retraumatization and evocation of emotions (fear of war, for example). Emotions play a negative role here because, on the one hand, they impede democratic consensus and are used to challenge numerous decisions and discredit political opponents, while on the other hand, political elites use them to mobilize and homogenize their electorate[5] and take possession of political power by legitimizing it through narratives, as is evident from clientelist tendencies, etc. In the context of BiH, we do not start from the assumption that we are not aware of the absence of conflict or the absence of the irrational and emotional; rather, we think that it does not lead in the right direction: toward the desired democratic changes and reduction of illiberal practices. What the example of the "Justice for Dženan" movement shows is that, at first, emotions proved to have an important democratic potential and that they cannot be removed from the democratic process or even from the process of 'fixing' democracy. But the real question is – have they been able to contribute to some actual change?

One of the core elements of agonistic approaches to politics is the concept of hegemony. Expounded in the *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, hegemony is necessary to point out the importance of acknowledging the dimension of radical negativity that manifests itself in the ever-present possibility of antagonism while impeding the full totalization of society and foreclosing the possibility of a society beyond divisions and power (Mouffe 2013: 1). Relying on the post-foundational theory – hegemony, ontologically speaking, requires the absence of the final setting of foundations. Hegemonization is characterized by contingency, where every order is a temporary expression of a particular configuration of contingent practices of power relations predicated on the repression and exclusion of other, alternative possibilities (Mouffe 2013: 2). Recognizing the hegemonic nature of every social order and society in a post-foundational manner is assumed as an articulatory practice in which "floating signifiers are fixed within a network of signifying chains (…) always constructed vis-a-vis an excluded element that serves as a constitutive outside" (Decreus, Lievens and Braeckman 2014: 137).

Post-foundational ontology thus helps not only to understand how change happens but also how it is connected to democratic practice. From this perspective, it is of fundamental importance to reveal the impossibility of establishing a consensus without exclusion (Mouffe 1999: 757). The impossibility of fully accomplishing democracy, of finding its ultimate grounding, naturalization and of equating the ontic with the ontological under the veil of rationality or morality would make it impossible to keep the democratic contestation alive. Anticipating change from the perspective of agonistic interpretation would entail a clash of contingent, counter-hegemonic narratives. If we were to view the symbiosis of the social movement and the

political party as a response to the growing dislocation (nonrepresentation) caused by the current constellation of power relations, then we could read in it the reason why the symbiosis did not lead to change. The reason why this did not happen, from an agonistic reading, actually lies in its inability to set itself up as a counter-hegemonic narrative. We will try to read this argument through two aspects: the first is the creation of political subjects, while the second is based on the locus around which it should have been counter-hegemonically focused.

Laclau states that universality is produced through a process of "empty signifiers," meaning signifiers detached from specific meanings that serve to unify a particular discursive formation. Although the demands of different groups concerning the "Justice for Dženan" were logically connected, on the other hand, they were not primarily determined. As our respondents previously said, accountability was demanded from specific institutions (in the case of the "investigation of the investigation") rather than from the actual systemic framework, which fosters such illiberal political practices and lack of accountability (Repovac Nikšić et al. 2022: 151–152). As one element in the construction of the subject, through the articulation of passion, empathy and emotions ("seeing ourselves in Dženan"; "guided by purely human motives"; "with their heart in the right place"; "parents whose child was killed"; "they lost a child, a brother, a cousin"), the movement stretched between "them" – those who are protecting the killers, and "us," who identify with Memić's fate. However, since political identities are always relational (Mouffe 2005: 56), the problem arises when attempting to establish a chain of equivalence in relation to some constitutive external. According to Laclau and Mouffe, in such an ontology of the social, society as a democratic subject is not seen as essentialist and pre-given but rather as constructed through the public space of politics. Subjectivity is not a fixed essence but is instead constructed through social and cultural discourse. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they write, "[A]antagonisms are not objective relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity. Society is constructed around these limits, and they are antagonistic limits" (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: xiv). Therefore, social division or even pluralism is not only inherent to politics but also represents the possibility of democratic politics. Just as conflicts and divisions cannot be eliminated, no society can be fully constructed. Equally, interwoven with numerous other identifications and interactions, it will never be possible to construct a fully inclusive 'we,' which is why democracy must always be open to plurality – and all hegemonic identities must be constructed around a single 'nodal point.'

Construction of hegemony, or counter-hegemony, primarily calls for connecting different demands with the help of one that can be presented as universal. Although the movement fulfilled this requirement and the background of its demands was comprehensive enough to be presented as broad and systemic, it revolved around a highly specific personal case, and thus it seems that it could never assume the role of an empty signifier and remain open, content-wise, for

wider systemic change. Its struggle failed to become a point of identification around which some political subjectivity could be formed. Yet, it had that potential. Addressing the entire system of state institutions with the goal of calling the prosecution, the judiciary, the police and the health system to account for their omissions and cover-up – the political movement can be said to have created a very broad chain of equivalence with a broadly identified enemy. While failing to identify a constructive externality, they became inclusive and, on the other hand, established a very weak chain of equivalence, which made it impossible to create a single 'nodal point' that would target the wider system. It is interesting to note that the movement did not aim to transform the complex sociopolitical system but instead focused on identifying and remedying the gaps in the system. The support shown for the "Justice for David" movement intensified the people's struggle to a more significant degree. In previous interviews and research, one respondent stressed that the movement's significance lay in its reach beyond a single location, indicating that the issue was not specific to one area but was, in fact, a widespread epidemic that affected the country's triumvirate or triple regime.

Although there were opportunities for cathartic experiences (Hasanović 2020), these remained only sporadic, while the system, on the other hand, recognized the wider dangers and used them to attack transethnic solidarity ("Justice for all our children"). Unlike in Banja Luka where conflicts did occur, except for a minor incident during the election campaign (during the general elections in 2018), there were no other incidents. Delegitimization was more focused on social networks, using troll farms and anonymous members of the public in an attempt to portray the Memić family in a negative light and as exponents of the NiP. Considering the problem of perception – given our respondents' views given for previous research – we concluded that perhaps the absence of symbiosis could have been more significant for the movement. Given that this case cannot be considered a symbiosis that resulted in the provision of resources and organizational support from the political party, this type of collaboration may not be inherently harmful, but it can stifle the passion and drive that are often necessary for meaningful change to occur.

Also, addressing the entire system of state institutions as the locus of power and the fact that the movement did not shy away from political institutions seems to be an additional problem. The unattainability of democratic innovation can be read from the perspective of the turning point in the case, that is, the moment when the case became an "investigation of the investigation." It was, in retrospect, the decisive moment that led to the verdict and the acquittal while preventing the symbiosis from leading to a wider social change. The focus expanded, and the investigation was transferred to higher authorities, which further complicated the already complicated course of the investigation. Although the movement did not aim to change the system, the "investigation into the investigation" turned the case in this direction but failed to follow through with the process of articulating broader demands on which the

investigation of the investigation would depend. Instead, the prevailing belief was that the system would collapse by solving a single case, and the goal set could never produce broader results that would also address other ongoing scandals associated with the ruling right-wing party.

Closing Remarks

This chapter builds on and complements our previous paper that, using the lens of contentious politics, examined the nature of the relationship between the "Justice for Dženan" movement and the right-center political party People and Justice. At that time, we concluded that it is doubtful whether what we termed pragmatic symbiosis, resulting from the decision of Dženan's family member to engage in politics through a political party, represents a novel form (democratic innovation) of sociopolitical cooperation and interaction within the ethnopolitical structure, that is, that it could inhibit the trend of democratic regression and autocracy and create opportunities for political and social change. Although examining the same symbiosis, this chapter focuses on the actual movement by viewing it through a different theoretical prism. Bearing in mind that Dženan Memić's sister, Arijana, became an elected member of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly, the onus is on how the movement, through her, operated inside the formal political institutions. By noting the importance of empathy and emotion in addressing this joint quest for accountability, by contrasting 'us,' the regular citizens, against 'them,' the alienated political elites, and without pointing to the movement's cooperation with a political party, we attempted to read the movement's claims and demands through the agonistic lens.

Whether this was a symbiosis, a democratic innovation or not, we primarily relied on the agonist theory of Mouffe and Laclau as a descriptive tool to emphasize the importance of conflict in politics and institutions of democracy. Our reading – although it provided some important insights – also demonstrated its theoretical shortcomings. Even though the consociational model of democracy in BiH shares certain similarities with theoretical agonism and rests on conflict-based relationships between political groups, we have identified some significant differences on both the practical and the theoretical levels. These, just as the fact that the movement revolved around a highly specific personal case, failed to become a point of identification and formation of some new, contingent political subjectivity beyond the essentialized and homogenized ethnic particularities. Thus, it also failed to assume the role of an empty signifier remaining open for wider systemic change, creating a 'nodal point' that would target the wider system. Furthermore, by identifying the system as the problem – the movement did not aim to transform it. The mixing of interests of the movement and those of the political party, which formally supported a family member, effectively boiled down to delegitimization of political opponents linked to the institutions that were targeted as responsible.

This chapter was written as a contribution to the substantial body of local and international literature on subjects related to social movements and active citizenship in BiH. The idea was to offer an alternative reading and a different theoretical framework that has the potential to foster similar research in the future. By acknowledging the importance of conflict for democracy, particularly in such a complex national sociopolitical context, we assumed that an agonistic angle on the "Justice for Dženan" movement deserves more attention than it has received from the academic community.

Notes

1 After protests in 2014, plenums were organized in several cities in BiH as an alternative form of political representation and direct democratic participation in political processes. Bringing together citizens who wanted to express their dissatisfaction with the bad political and economic situation, high unemployment and corruption in the country, in an attempt to identify solutions these plenums put forward proposals and asked for changes with the main objective to create opportunities for direct participation in the political process, discussions on key issues and decision-making. Although they discussed decentralization of power, transparency of the political system and demanded greater participation of citizens in political decisions, the intensity of the plenums began to weaken. However, they remained an example of civic engagement.

2 This needs to be understood in the context in which Mouffe and Laclau write – and this is the context marked by consolidation of the neoliberal hegemony from the mid-1980s and the end of the Cold War, primarily in the 1990s and 2000s, and the associated de-democratization processes (Laclau and Mouffe 2014) or post-democracy in general (Crouch 2004, 2021).

3 The case of Sejdić and Finci refers to the issue of ethnic discrimination in the politics of BiH. By prescribing that the president and vice president of the state are elected from the ranks of the three constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – the Constitution of BiH limited the eligibility for highest state offices exclusively to persons belonging to certain ethnic groups, while other ethnic groups, such as Roma and Jews, were excluded. This discrimination led to lawsuits by members of minority groups, Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci, and the European Court of Human Rights ruled that BiH violated the European Convention on Human Rights. Although the European Court of Human Rights ordered the harmonization of BiH laws with European standards, BiH authorities failed to reach agreement on constitutional changes that would eliminate such discriminatory provisions for over a decade.

4 Lijphart identifies grand coalition as the primary characteristic of consociational democracy, along with three others – mutual veto, proportionality and segmental autonomy. As he underlines,

> The function of grand coalition can also be clarified by placing it in the context of the competing principles of consensus and majority rule in normative democratic theory. On the one hand, broad agreement among all citizens seems more democratic than simple majority rule, but, on the other hand, the only real alternative to majority rule is minority rule – or at least a minority veto.
>
> (Lijphart 1977: 28)

5 For example, the narrative of fear of/intimidation by others has been successfully used by ethnic political elites in their election campaigns for three decades.

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9 Yugoslav Self-Management as a Model of Participatory Municipal Governance?

Local Communities in Belgrade in the 1980s

Mladen Ostojić

Introduction

Over the last decade, we have witnessed the emergence of the municipalist movement, a global alliance of citizen platforms bringing together political parties and civil society organizations seeking to reinvent democracy from the bottom up. Inspired by Murray Bookchin's works on libertarian municipalism and communalism (Bookchin 2007), these citizen platforms promote the democratic reappropriation of local politics and the exercise of municipal power by nonprofessional citizen collectives through the development of self-governing institutions based on the model of the commons. In contrast to both state- and market-based models of governance, the commons refer to an institutional setting in which resources are managed by self-governed and self-organized communities of users (Ostrom 2010: 77). Turning public institutions and services into commons entails a radical transformation of state institutions toward an increased and more direct citizen participation in the design of public policies and the management of public goods and services (Laval, Sauvêtre and Taylan 2019: 101). In line with this, municipalism strives to establish an inclusive model of municipal governance based on direct decision-making by citizens, which would allow for a transparent management of public resources and prevent their appropriation by private interests.

Municipalism has become particularly prominent in Spain following the takeover of over 30 municipalities by municipalist citizen platforms at the 2015 municipal elections, including the city of Barcelona, which has since then become the center of the global municipalist movement. The citizen platform *Barcelona en Comu* has sought to enact a municipalist agenda by transposing participatory democratic practices associated with the commons to municipal institutions (Ambrosi 2019). This involved the creation of neighborhood assemblies where the political program and policies of *Barcelona en Comu* were debated, the organization of local referenda on major issues and the practice of participatory budgeting to maximize citizen involvement in local politics. It also involved a (re-)municipalization of public services through the development of a municipal public economy based on the principles of the commons (Sauvêtre 2018).

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In spite of these developments, the Spanish municipalist movement suffered a blow at the 2019 municipal elections, with only three cities (Cadiz, Valencia and Barcelona) remaining in the hands of citizen platforms affiliated with municipalism. Spanish municipalism has been criticized for relying excessively on participatory mechanisms in which citizen engagement is reduced to public consultations organized by the municipality instead of promoting direct democracy through the development of self-governing institutions in the form of popular assemblies (Cossart and Sauvêtre 2020: 143). This criticism suggests that municipalism has failed to challenge the sovereignty of the municipal administration and to generate a deep transformation of municipal power that would allow the bridging of the gap between the electorate and the elected.

While municipalism has placed participatory and direct forms of democracy back on the agenda, attempts to generate direct forms of citizen engagement in decision-making are not new, nor are they unique to liberal democracies (Dolenec and Žitko 2016). Socialist Yugoslavia was a one-party state that extensively cultivated citizen and worker participation in decision-making at their place of residence and their place of work. Unlike Soviet-style state socialism, Yugoslav socialism was based on the notion of self-management, which involved a radical decentralization of the state and the transfer of power from state institutions to self-governed organizations and communities (Jović 2009). The cornerstone of Yugoslav self-managed socialism was the socially owned enterprise, in which workers had a considerable say in strategic decision-making through workers' councils. As a form of ownership that is not the monopoly of any individual subject or the state but the common property of all workers, social property entitled workers to have direct influence on the management of the means and conditions of production and the fruits of their labor. In addition, workers and citizens were meant to have a direct influence on state institutions through the process of 'socialization' of the state, which involved the transfer of state functions to independent self-managed communities. This process was essentially implemented at the level of the municipality, notably through the creation of local communities (*mesne zajednice*) designed to allow citizens to directly participate in decision-making over local matters.

This chapter gives an overview of how Yugoslav self-management was designed at the municipal level through an examination of the institutional setup of local communities and their interaction with municipal authorities. While it primarily deals with how the communal system and local communities were conceptualized and institutionalized by the Yugoslav authorities, it also gives insight into the functioning of local communities without aspiring to provide a comprehensive evaluation of their work. Following an outline of the methodology applied in this research, the first part of the chapter looks at how the Yugoslav leadership conceived the process of decentralization and the role of the commune in self-governing socialism. This is followed by an analysis of the role of local communities and their mode of operation, with a special emphasis on the role of sociopolitical organizations in the work of local communities. Finally, the interactions between local communities,

urban municipalities and the city government are discussed through a critical examination of the voluntary contribution (*samodoprinos*) financing mechanism introduced in Belgrade in 1982.

Methodology

This chapter draws on a variety of sources to outline and examine the role of local communities in promoting self-management at the municipal level in late socialism in Yugoslavia. To understand how self-management was conceptualized at the municipal level, this text draws on the work of Edvard Kardelj, the main ideologist of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and one of the creators of the Yugoslav self-managing system. As the man in charge of structuring the political system and ideology, Kardelj was one of the most influential figures in the LCY (Jović 2009: 70–71). Among the many political and state functions he held was the chairman of the Constitutional Committee for three Yugoslav constitutions (1946, 1963 and 1974). He played a particularly prominent role in the constitutional debate that preceded the adoption of the 1974 Constitution, which enshrined the representational self-managing system that characterized Yugoslavia until its disintegration in 1991. As such, it is justified to use Kardelj as a primary source for analyzing official thinking on Yugoslav self-managing governance. This study specifically draws on a comprehensive collection of articles, speeches and public addresses on local governance produced by Kardelj throughout his life and published by the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities in 1981, two years after his death (Kardelj 1981). Since this collection covers the period from 1941 to 1978, it not only gives evidence of how Kardelj conceived self-management at the municipal level but also provides some insight into his thinking on how municipal self-management could be fine-tuned and improved following the implementation of the 1974 Constitution.

In addition to the analysis of how Yugoslav self-management was conceptualized at the municipal level, this chapter looks at how this concept was implemented by examining official documents and secondary literature, as well as through interviews. Self-management was implemented at the municipal level after the 1974 Constitution provided a framework for the operationalization of self-managed communities, including local communities. The 1974 Constitution is therefore extensively used as a primary source to discuss how local communities were put into practice, along with secondary sources selected from the existing literature on local communities. The present analysis of how local communities operated is also extensively informed by interviews with former representatives of local authorities and former local community activists, which were conducted by the author in late 2021 and early 2022. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their relevance in terms of involvement in the local communities, municipalities and the City of Belgrade in the 1980s, and their expertise in local governance in socialist Yugoslavia. The City of Belgrade was chosen as the focus of this study due to the significant differences between urban and

rural local communities, the under-representation of urban environments in the secondary literature on local communities and the relevance of large cities for the contemporary literature on participatory democratic practices. The relations between local communities, municipalities and city government are illustrated through a case study of the implementation of the voluntary contribution in the eighties in Belgrade, which is based on interviews and primary sources, including public statements and articles published in the city gazette. The variety of sources and the triangulation of data collected from primary sources, secondary literature and interviews ensures that the findings presented in this study are robust.

Decentralization and the Communal System in Socialist Yugoslavia

The ideologues of the Yugoslav self-management system attached special importance to the commune as the basic unit of the socialist self-managing system.[1] This is clearly visible in the writing and public statements of Edvard Kardelj, who advocated self-managing socialist democracy as a new type of democracy based on the freedom of associated labor. Beyond democratic procedures in political decision-making, this conception of democracy involved the establishment of socioeconomic relations meant to allow for the emancipation of man from every form of economic exploitation and political domination. In line with this, the general goal of socialist self-management was to establish "productive relations through which the working man has the possibility of direct management and decisive influence on the means and conditions of production and the fruits of his labor, from economic policy in the enterprise to the social plan" (Kardelj 1977: 9). Kardelj considered social ownership of means of production a prerequisite for achieving this goal. In his view, only social property that is not the monopoly of any individual subject but the common property of all those who work can ensure that the working class becomes what Marx defined as a free association of producers that have direct influence on the institutions of state power. This influence was to be established and enhanced through the process of 'socialization' of the state: functions belonging to the state would be gradually transferred to independent self-managing communities and organizations. The socialization of the state implied that state power exercised in the name of the people by an alienated authority would be transformed into the power of the people (Milidragović 1977: 15), and the state itself would become a form of social property. In line with the Marxist doctrine of 'withering away of the state,' the state "is no longer an independent force above society nor is it identified with society, but it increasingly becomes one of the functions of a self-managing society" (Kardelj 1977: 36).

Such a transformation of the state involved a radical decentralization of power. Kardelj considered the commune as the 'basic socioeconomic unit of society' that corresponded to Marx's notion of "a political form in which the liberation of labor can materialize" (Kardelj 1981: XVI). The commune was

supposed to gradually become the 'basis and starting point' of the entire political system envisaged as a form of "direct socialist democracy" (Kardelj 1981: 221). The process of decentralization was conducted in two directions: vertically, by transferring jurisdiction from the level of the federal state to the republics and then from the republics to communes, and horizontally, by transferring functions from state institutions to independent self-managed communities and organizations. In this two-way decentralization, Kardelj attached more importance to building internal relations in the commune itself than to transferring jurisdiction to the communes. He considered decentralization as not an end in itself but a means toward democratizing society through the development of an integral system of self-management in all spheres of life. In contrast to Marx's conception of the commune, which was exclusively based on workers' self-management, Kardelj's concept of integral self-management included other forms of self-managing communities and organizations in addition to workers' councils (Kardelj 1981: 550). In line with this vision, the commune was meant to become the basic platform for the articulation of workers' needs and interests. These needs and interests were expressed through different bodies such as workers' councils in Basic Organizations of Associated Labor (BOAL),[2] local communities, self-managed communities of interest[3] and sociopolitical organizations.[4] Workers were thus given the opportunity to decide on how much their BOAL should allocate to public expenditures through workers' councils and to participate in decision-making on how these funds would be spent through local communities and self-managed communities of interest. Hence the importance of the commune as the basic sociopolitical and socioeconomic unit of self-managing socialism. The integration of self-managing processes at the level of the commune allowed for the funds allocated for public consumption by the workers to be directed to the local communities where these workers reside so that they could take part in decision-making on how these funds would be spent. The workers thus had direct control over the fruits of their labor.

Kardelj's concept of integral self-management was reflected in the institutional structure of the municipal government. In the 1974 Constitution, the municipality was defined as "a fundamental self-managed socio-political community, based on the authority and self-management of the working class and all working people" (Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija [SFRJ] 1974: Article 116). As shown in Figure 9.1, on the basis of this Constitution, the municipal assembly was divided into three chambers: the Chamber of Associated Labor, which dealt with "issues of interest to workers and other working people"; the Chamber of Local Communities, which dealt with "issues of interest to working people and citizens in local communities"; and the Chamber of Sociopolitical Organizations, which dealt with issues concerning the "realization, development and protection of the constitutionally established socialist self-managing system" (SFRJ 1974: Article 145). Each of these chambers was composed of delegates elected in the respective self-governing organizations and communities. Although they were not an integral part of the municipal

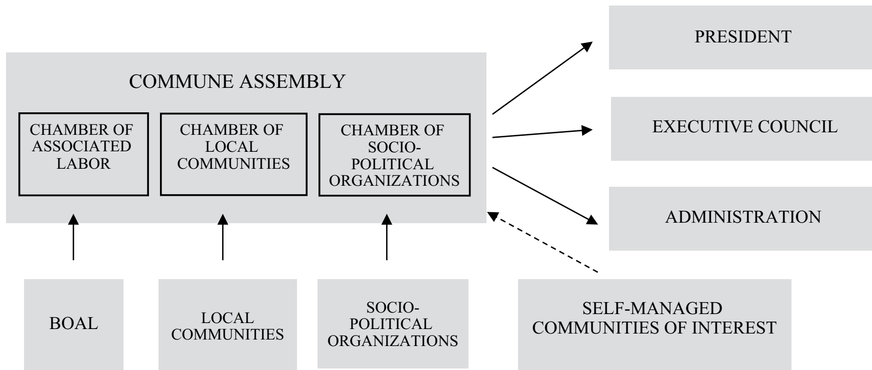

Figure 9.1 The structure of the commune in socialist Yugoslavia according to the 1974 Constitution.

assembly, the self-managed communities of interest were involved in decision-making on issues within their area of competence (education, health, science, culture, social protection) on an equal footing with the chambers of the assembly. In view of their structure, municipal assemblies played an important role in the integration and coordination of self-managing organizations and communities. The structure of the city assembly was similar to the municipal assembly, with the difference that it included a Chamber of Communes (urban municipalities) instead of the Chamber of Local Communities.

The Yugoslav leaders feared that the concentration of power in executive bodies could lead to the centralization and bureaucratization of municipal government, which would be contrary to the principles of self-management. Bearing this in mind, Kardelj considered that everything should be done "so that the executive councils in the municipalities do not become political bodies, that is, they do not gain political power with which they could impose themselves on the assembly" (Kardelj 1981: 564). In order to reduce the political influence of the executive bodies, he proposed that the executive councils be composed of experts who would implement the decisions of the municipal assemblies to whom they would be subordinated. In line with this, the executive bodies of the communes and cities consisted of a president of the assembly and an executive council. Although the function of the president of the assembly was nominally the most influential in the administration of the city/commune, the executive council was under the direct authority of the assembly of the city/commune. This gave the assembly a greater degree of control over the executive bodies, which were designed to be an extension of the assembly.

The Functions and Modus Operandi of Local Communities

Local communities were introduced with the 1963 Constitution and were the result of two decades of development of local self-government in Yugoslavia.

They had their roots in the people's liberation councils that were established in the liberated territories during the Second World War. In the post-war period, the people's liberation councils were transformed into local councils, which became the main form of direct local self-government in rural areas, while in urban areas, this function was performed by residential councils (Tomac 1977: 81–94). In 1963, these two institutions were merged with the introduction of local communities which became the primary self-managing communities aimed at promoting direct decision-making by citizens at the local level. However, according to the 1963 Constitution, citizens did not have the possibility to express their interests and views in the municipal assembly and other decision-making centers through their local communities. As a result, the local community was practically subordinated to the municipal authorities (Tomac 1977: 96).

The 1974 Constitution increased the importance of local communities, which became "an obligatory form of self-managed organizing of working people and citizens" and were thus recognized as "the basis of a unique system of self-management and government of the working class and all working people" (Vujadinović 2010: 7). This Constitution also introduced the delegational system, which created the conditions for citizens to directly influence decision-making in the municipal assembly through the Chamber of Local Communities. It is important to note that local communities were not intended to be an extension of the municipal government nor a counterweight to the central or municipal government. Instead, they were supposed to be a bottom-up type of organization that escaped the logic of state authority exerted in the name of the people. Kardelj defined local communities as a democratic and self-managing form of organizing that allows people to satisfy their immediate interests and needs, about which they independently decide and for which they mobilize material resources (Kardelj 1981: 522).

Although the 1974 Constitution stipulated that working people and citizens had the duty to self-organize in local communities, local communities were often created by municipal assemblies on behalf of citizens who lacked initiative and commitment. In order to promote citizen engagement, the Law on Local Communities passed by the Serbian Parliament in 1982 established that amendment of local community districts and creation of new local communities could only be done with the consent of the majority of citizens of a given area (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: Article 14). While there is not enough evidence to assess the impact of this measure, Đorđe Staničić, a former secretary general of the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities, argues that in most cases, people felt a sense of ownership over their local community:

> People perceived it as something of their own, as something where they can freely say what they want or what they need: whether it is water supply, sewage, public lighting, cleaning. … They even addressed public health issues and needs. Since each municipality had several local communities, all these plans, requests, all of that was coordinated at the

> municipal level as part of some policy, something that comes from the "base," from the field. It was a means for expressing people's interest, for involving them in sociopolitical life.[5]

Bearing in mind that local communities were designed as a forum within which citizens could express their needs and preferences regarding the development of the local environment in which they live, their scope was quite broad. According to the 1974 Constitution, in local communities, working people and citizens decided on the realization of their common interests and needs in the areas of urban planning, housing, communal services, child care and welfare, education, culture, sport, consumer protection, protection and improvement of the environment, national defense and other areas (SFRJ 1974: Article 145). In addition to giving citizens the possibility to express their views on these issues in their place of residence, local communities provided them with the opportunity to participate in decision-making in the municipal assembly and the self-managed communities of interest through delegates who represented local communities in these broader sociopolitical communities. Besides being a decision-making tool, local communities provided citizens with a number of services, such as family and household support services, care for vulnerable families, consumer protection and dispute resolution. These services brought local communities closer to the citizens, many of whom were not interested in participating in sociopolitical life.[6] Finally, the local community was also a meeting point local people used for everyday interaction and socializing. Kardelj himself emphasized this aspect of local communities. He considered one of the main objectives of local communities to bring citizens closer together and connect them in their neighborhoods, with the goal of 'humanizing' social relations and avoiding desocialization, depoliticization and passivity. For this reason, the local community was often referred to as an 'extended family,' whose basic function was to promote "people's welfare and the development of humane socialist relations" (Duda 2020: 739–741). The 1974 Constitution defined the local community as "a real human community in which a new *esprit de corps* is nurtured based on the principles of solidarity, reciprocity and socialist humanism" (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: 6). In this spirit, Kardelj pointed to the need for adding cultural content to local communities so that people "would not be exclusively directed to *kafanas*" (Kardelj 1981: 516). In local communities, people of all ages met to socialize, play chess and other games, and in some cases, the youth were allowed to use local community premises as dance halls.[7] Considering the scarcity of public spaces for socializing, almost exclusively limited to *kafanas*, local communities played an important role in the social life of urban and, even more so, rural settlements. Nebojša Ivković, a former delegate of the local community 'Topčidersko brdo' in the municipality of Savski Venac (Belgrade), summed up the various functions of local communities as "a place where you could go to meet a friend, start an initiative to solve a problem, involve your other friends and bring this issue to the municipality or a higher instance."[8]

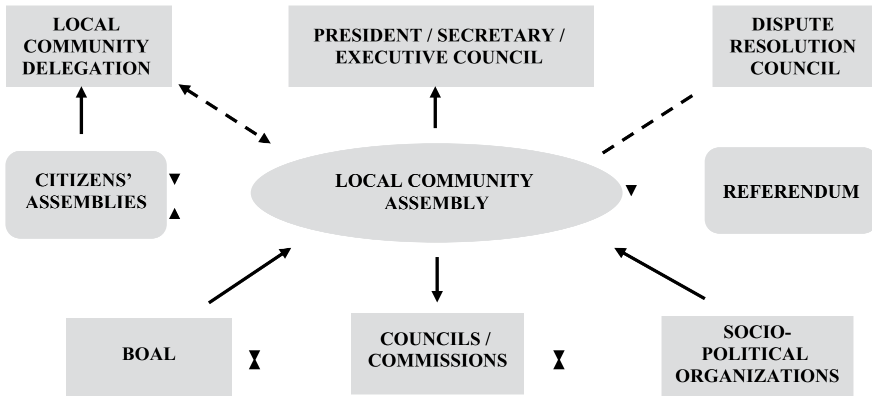

Figure 9.2 The structure of the local community.

The competences, structure and modes of operation of local communities were defined in their statutes, which had to be in line with the statute of the commune. The constituent bodies of the local community and their interactions are shown in Figure 9.2. The central body of the local community was the assembly, which consisted of delegates, half of whom were directly elected by citizens' assemblies, while the other half consisted of delegates of BOALs and sociopolitical organizations based on the territory of the local community (SFRJ, 1974: Articles 132–134). Delegates were elected for a four-year mandate and could not stand for more than two consecutive mandates in the same assembly. Besides electing their delegates in the assembly of the local community, citizens directly elected the delegations that represented the local community in the Chamber of Local Communities of the municipal assembly. Each local community had a quota for delegates in the Chamber of Local Communities based on population size. These delegations played an important role in connecting local communities with municipal assemblies by presenting problems, initiatives and requests of local communities to the municipal assembly, and by providing feedback on the decisions of the municipal assembly to local communities. The assembly of the local community elected a president, a secretary and an executive council as executive bodies of the local community. Although the most important decisions were made in the assembly of the local community, the work of local communities extensively relied on various councils and commissions created around the assembly. Kardelj considered that giving too much power to the assembly would lead to an excessive institutionalization of the local community, which would turn it into a replica of the municipality at the neighborhood level. Instead, he advocated the establishment of various councils and commissions that would deal with specific issues and conclude self-managed agreements with BOALs, self-managed communities of interest and sociopolitical organizations in their areas. In line with this, various councils and commissions were established around the assemblies of

local communities – such as the Council for Consumer Protection and the Council for National Defense – which not only had an advisory role but were also entitled to make decisions based on the agreement of all the parties involved. Sociopolitical organizations – such as the LCY, the Socialist Alliance of Working People, the Confederation of Trade Unions and the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia – had their branches in local communities, which facilitated communication and cooperation between local communities, social-political organizations and BOALs.[9] Local communities also hosted the dispute resolution councils, an outsourced body of the municipal court whose function was to resolve small disputes among citizens.

Citizens had the opportunity to directly participate in decision-making on the most important issues through citizens' assemblies, which were regularly organized. They were also occasionally given the possibility to vote on the most important issues in referenda, which were mainly organized in relation to the introduction of voluntary contribution (*samodoprinos*), a form of voluntary financial contribution collected from citizens for communal purposes. This required that local communities be of appropriate size and based on real communities "in which there is a conscious identification of the population with common interests and the realization that common interests can be successfully achieved through joint actions" (Tomac 1977: 103). This was essential both for the practice of citizens' assemblies and the building of humane social relations. Bearing in mind that socialist Yugoslavia was going through a rapid process of urbanization that entailed large internal migrations, it was suggested that local communities be established in order to create real communities in new urban areas (Tomac 1977: 103). In practice, in some urban centers, local communities had up to 20,000 inhabitants, which corresponded to the size of a smaller commune, and were often created without taking into account some elementary sociological and urban planning considerations (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: 11). The Serbian Law on Local Communities was adopted in 1982 when the number of local communities reached its peak. In that year, there were 527 municipalities and 13,724 local communities in Yugoslavia, of which 3,306 were located on the territory of Serbia without Vojvodina and Kosovo. This means that there were, on average, 26 local communities per municipality and 1,618 inhabitants per local community (Duda 2020: 737; Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: 13).

In order to conduct their operations, local communities had several sources of funding at their disposal. First of all, the commune had the duty to cover the current costs of local communities, which were included in the annual financial plan of the commune (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: Article 28). This included, among other things, utilities and office space in cases where the local community did not hold any real estate. The projects initiated and planned by local communities were primarily financed through voluntary contributions, especially in rural and suburban areas where citizens participated in the construction of infrastructure (local roads, sports fields, electrical networks, water supply, etc.) with their own income and labor (Stojković 2021: 77–78).

These projects were often co-funded by the communes, especially in underprivileged areas where local communities could not mobilize enough funds through voluntary contributions. In addition, local communities could count on the material support of BOALs located on their territory, in which workers set aside part of their income for public investment and with which local communities entered into self-managed agreements. Finally, since they were recognized as legal entities and had property rights, local communities could generate income by renting out space. This was a significant source of income for urban local communities, which rented out property to sociopolitical organizations, cultural institutions and other tenants.[10]

The Role of Sociopolitical Organizations

The running costs of local communities were relatively low considering that almost all the people who were engaged in the work of the local community – except for the secretary, administrative secretary and hygienist/courier – worked on a voluntary basis. Voluntary work was essential to local communities, as it encouraged social responsibility and solidarity while, at the same time, preventing their excessive institutionalization. This means that local communities could not function without proactive individuals who took the initiative and motivated citizens to participate in the work of their local community. The Socialist Alliance of Working People played a key role in engaging people in the work of local communities, as well as in providing them with training and recognition for their work (Duda 2020: 742). The Socialist Alliance was the broadest alliance of sociopolitical organizations that brought together virtually all sociopolitical organizations, including the LCY, which played a leading role in the Socialist Alliance. Kardelj saw the Socialist Alliance as the "political basis of the delegate system" whose mission was to "bring together everything that is creative in the municipality" (Kardelj 1981: 549–559). There was a great fear among the LCY leadership that allowing for spontaneity in the development of self-management would work to the advantage of 'backward forces' and that this would lead to a counter-revolution. Kardelj warned of the danger of "giving in to the belief that self-managing relations, as more progressive, will gain dominance and that everything that acts 'from the base' is inherently progressive and deserves support" (Kovačević 1981: XXXV). He considered that the LCY should play a key role in directing self-managing processes through the Socialist Alliance.

In line with Kardelj's conception, the Socialist Alliance was supposed to be the link between the LCY and self-governing organizations and communities, including local communities, in the commune. In addition to engaging people in the work of local communities, its mission was to ensure "the presence of socialist forces in every element of the delegate system, in all social and self-managing communities, in all social environments" (Kardelj 1981: 550). For this purpose, the 1974 Constitution provided that candidates for local community delegates be put forward by working people in the Socialist Alliance

and that the selection process be conducted by the Socialist Alliance (SFRJ 1974: Article 135). The Socialist Alliance provided organizational support to local communities, including support for the organization of citizens' assemblies, elections, referenda and the negotiation of self-managing agreements with other self-managing communities and organizations. Large urban local communities were subdivided along local branches of the Socialist Alliance, which corresponded to the local bodies of the LCY and constituted the link between the local community councils and the residents' committees established in each building. In addition to preselecting candidates for local community delegates, the Socialist Alliance thus allowed the LCY to exert influence at the lowest level of organization of society and to receive feedback 'from the field' on the needs and expectations of citizens. Dragan Stojković, a former delegate in the assembly of the municipality of Zemun, believes that the Socialist Alliance played the role of a transmission mechanism of the LCY:

> The whole system was a so-called transmission system. The trade union, the youth organization, and the Socialist Alliance were all a transmission [mechanism] of the League of Communists. This can be determined in various ways, including in terms of personnel, how personnel from various structures moved from one structure to another and came to positions of power. But at the level of local self-government, and especially local communities, it was a way and an opportunity for citizens to get involved in politics.[11]

As a mechanism for mobilizing and involving citizens in politics, the Socialist Alliance also served as a lever for recruiting and selecting cadres for the LCY in local communities. Since the delegates in the local community assemblies were limited to two consecutive terms, those activists who showed adequate political skills were promoted in the political structure of the municipality. Staničić points out that local communities and the Socialist Alliance were both platforms for the selection of party cadres:

> The influence of the party was exerted there, at the lowest level of organization of society, this was very interesting. And this was also a step for recruiting politicians, primarily local ones, because they could not have [more than] one or two consecutive mandates in the local community, which meant that those who were OK from the dominant point of view of that time had the possibility, and a recommendation, to be politically promoted in the political structure of the municipality. These were also important levers from that point of view.[12]

This significantly affected the levels of engagement and representation of different segments of the population in the work of local communities. Among the presidents of local communities, there were many "who are at their peak and are trying to boost their careers, including political ones," while pensioners were generally the most represented among local community activists, as they

were the ones with the most spare time for social engagement (Duda 2020: 748–749). Apart from that, the most represented sections of the population in local communities were farmers, men employed in the nonindustrial sector and the youth. In this respect, urban local communities differed significantly from rural ones. In smaller communities, there was a much higher degree of self-organization because people had very concrete needs that required them to work together to improve their living conditions, while in urban local communities, the leading role was played by retired military personnel, retired sociopolitical workers and individuals with political ambitions. To a certain extent, this state of affairs compromised local communities in cities, "where they turned into bureaucratic offices taken over by local party leaders, and therefore represented an obstacle to the development of citizens' initiatives" (Stojković 2021: 78). Also, those researchers who studied the delegational system in Yugoslavia pointed to the emergence of a number of 'universal activists' who monopolized sociopolitical functions by moving from one delegation to another when their mandate expired, thus jeopardizing the representation of less active citizens in the sociopolitical system (Simmie and Hale 1978: 709).

Relations between Local Communities, Urban Municipalities and the City: Voluntary Contribution in Belgrade

As mentioned, local communities were designed to give citizens the possibility to directly decide on the realization of their common interests and the satisfaction of common needs in their place of residence, as well as to participate in decision-making at the levels of municipalities and cities. However, bearing in mind the involvement and influence of sociopolitical organizations in the work of local communities, there needs to be a careful examination of the actual extent of citizens' impact in the decision-making process at the levels of the municipality and the city through their engagement in local communities.

Yugoslav leadership believed that one of the main obstacles to the development of self-government was 'bureaucratic centralism,' which was especially pronounced in cities. Kardelj warned against the danger of primitive bureaucratism,

> which starts from the belief that it would be dangerous to "let things get out of hand," meaning that central authorities – both in municipalities and cities – should "hold everything in their hands" and that the affirmation of broad citizens' initiatives in local communities should not be allowed.
>
> (Kardelj 1981: 399)

Instead, Kardelj advocated the greatest possible involvement of citizens in the decision-making process through local communities:

> People in the city must be organized in such a way that they can directly influence the solving of problems in the city. This is why I think that such a complex structure cannot be avoided in big cities, that is, I don't know

> what could replace a complex organization made up of local communities, municipalities and the city as a whole with appropriate internal relations.
>
> (Kardelj 1981: 520)

In order to bring decision-making closer to the citizens, the 1974 Constitution defined the city as an association of municipalities (SFRJ 1974: Article 119). This entailed a bottom-up governance structure in which the urban municipality has a central role, as opposed to the dominant models of local government in which the city is deconcentrated in urban municipalities (Kovačević 1981: XVII). This further strengthened the importance of the municipality as the basis of self-governing socialism, in which self-managing interests expressed through local communities, BOALs and self-managing communities of interest were integrated. In this context, urban municipalities were essential for structuring the city as a self-managing community and, therefore, had the same status as other municipalities in the country. Nevertheless, there was an awareness that the "management of matters in the city" must be realized at the level of the city and not at the level of municipalities or local communities, depending on the objective needs dictated by technology (Kardelj 1981: 520). This applied not only to infrastructures such as sewage, water supply and transport but also to social services such as education and healthcare.

In this urban governance model, local communities had a direct influence on the municipal assemblies through the delegations that represented them in the Chamber of Local Communities. The delegates had the possibility to raise specific issues, needs and requests of their local community on the agenda of the municipal assembly through the delegate question at the beginning of each session of the municipal assembly.[13] Kardelj emphasized the importance of local community delegations and their influence on wider social structures, but he also pointed out that many delegations were too large and poorly connected to local community structures (Kardelj 1981: 517). Also, it was thought that citizens' interests were insufficiently represented in the municipal assemblies due to a lack of cooperation among local community delegations who acted as autarchic entities (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: 11). In addition to having direct influence on municipal assemblies, local communities played an important role in social planning in municipalities. According to the Law, local communities had the obligation to adopt medium-term plans and an annual work program, and they could also adopt long-term plans (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: Article 21). Since these plans were supposed to connect into a "unified self-managed action all bodies and organizations that meet certain interests and needs of working people and their families in local communities," all relevant self-managing organizations and communities from the territory of the local community had an obligation to submit information and data needed by the local community for the preparation and implementation of these plans (Socijalistička Republika Srbija 1984: Article 23). At the same time, municipalities had the obligation to acknowledge the annual and medium-term plans of

local communities, to take them into account when drafting municipal plans and to make funds available to local communities for the implementation of these plans.[14] Neighboring local communities often made joint plans in order to solve common problems and gain greater influence in the municipal assembly. The citizens' initiative expressed through local communities thus played an important role in social planning at the municipal level and beyond. Finally, municipalities could not make any important decisions without consulting local communities. This opinion was not binding, but it was respected, especially when the local community was led by influential people, which was often the case in Belgrade, where the presidents of local communities were mostly retired military personnel and retired sociopolitical workers.[15] According to a former city official, all these factors contributed to a symbiosis between municipalities and local communities in Belgrade.[16]

Local communities also played a consultative role in some decisions made at the city level. This is best illustrated by the example of the public consultations organized around the adoption of the voluntary contribution in Belgrade in 1982. Although the introduction of voluntary contributions was common in rural and suburban local communities, a voluntary contribution had never been introduced at the level of the City of Belgrade until then. That year, the Executive Council of the City of Belgrade decided for the first time to introduce a voluntary contribution in ten urban municipalities in response to the severe economic crisis that left the city without financial resources for necessary capital investments (Stefanović 2021: 38).[17] The authorities reasoned that, without voluntary contribution, it would be impossible to secure the necessary funds for the construction of municipal facilities, which would "lead to an insufficient supply of water to all citizens and further exacerbate the acute problems related to the transport of workers, students and other users of public transport" (SSRN 1982: 3). An additional motive for the introduction of the voluntary contribution was the belief that "the greatest difficulties can only be overcome by relying on one's own strength" (Akcioni odbor za samodoprinos u Beogradu 1982: 2).

The planning of the voluntary contribution was carried out in several stages. First, the needs and priorities in terms of capital investments were identified on the basis of the development plans drafted at the level of the municipalities and the city for the period 1981–1985 (Grad Beograd 1987: 5). Once this was completed, members of the Executive Council of the city held consultations with representatives of municipalities, the Socialist Alliance and trade unions, as well as with experts from various fields, in order to define projects that would be financed through the voluntary contribution (Stefanović 2021). The agreement reached in these meetings was that the upper limit of the financial burden on citizens would be 2% of net personal income and that priority would be given to the modernization and improvement of the water utility, for which about 50% of the total amount of the voluntary contribution would be set aside. The second priority was public transport, for which slightly more than 30% of the voluntary contribution was allocated. Since there were not enough

funds to build a metro, the participants in the consultations opted for the construction of new trolleybus and tram lines, as well as the reconstruction of streets in different parts of the city so that the voluntary contribution would cover the needs of the population in as many municipalities as possible. The fact that the voluntary contribution had to be voted in a referendum led the city authorities to offer projects that met the needs of different sections of the population to gain more support.[18] In order to gain the support of the older segment of the population, the remaining amount of the voluntary contribution was allocated to the construction of a polyclinic within the University Clinical Center. In this first stage of the consultation process, citizens were informed about plans for the voluntary contribution through the media, in which representatives of the city and the municipalities presented the challenges that Belgrade faced and proposed solutions that could be financed through the voluntary contribution.

After defining the projects to be financed through the voluntary contribution, the city and the municipalities organized public consultations in local communities and BOALs in February and March 1982. At these public hearings, city officials and experts presented projects to citizens who had the opportunity to express their opinions and propose changes. Radoje Stefanović, then president of the Executive Council of Belgrade, recalls how he personally participated in these public consultations in order to inform and convince citizens of the need to introduce the voluntary contribution:

> So, we prepared these three proposals, made the calculations, and then the discussion began and lasted approximately from February to March 1982 with the municipalities and local communities – that we are proposing a voluntary contribution that had never been introduced before, why we are proposing it, what we are proposing. … As the President of the Executive Council, I personally visited a dozen local communities. They come together – 50, 100, 150 of them, as many as they could fit in the space – and now it's an honor for them, the man in charge of Belgrade is coming to see them. And I am going to beg for votes in the referendum, because otherwise it is pointless for me to be in charge. And there were interesting discussions, there were awkward questions, there were all sorts of things.[19]

In order to provide citizens with adequate information on the projects, experts from the communal services participated in the public consultations and answered technical questions. Given that citizens were mostly interested in issues of public transport, most of the discussions in public communities concerned the routes of the new trolleybuses and tram lines, the streets slated for reconstruction, etc.[20] In addition, citizens asked numerous questions and made suggestions regarding the preparation of the referendum, the monitoring of the collection and spending of funds, and the supervision of the construction works financed through the voluntary contribution (Grad Beograd 1987: 5).

Through these public consultations, local communities significantly contributed to selecting what would be done and deciding how it would be done and monitored (Stefanović 2021). On the basis of the predefined projects and the inputs from the public consultations, the representatives of the municipalities and the Socialist Alliance prepared a proposal for the introduction of a voluntary contribution from 1 July 1982 to 30 June 1986. At the referendum held at the end of May 1982 at 4,750 polling stations in BOALs and local communities, 66.15% of voters voted for the introduction of the voluntary contribution, while 12.72% were against it.

The Socialist Alliance played a key role in the planning of the voluntary contribution, the organization of public consultations and the referendum, as well as the implementation of the voluntary contribution. At the beginning of February 1982, the Presidency of the City Conference of the Socialist Alliance in Belgrade launched an initiative for the introduction of the voluntary contribution in local communities and municipalities, through which an Action Committee for the voluntary contribution was formed within the Socialist Alliance (SSRN 1982). This committee was responsible for preparing the voluntary contribution by monitoring public consultations, collecting proposals and suggestions, preparing answers and explanations for citizens and determining the final positions on the basis of which the decision to introduce the voluntary contribution was to be made. The committee was also in charge of monitoring the implementation of the voluntary contribution until the completion of all works funded through this mechanism (Grad Beograd 1987: 7). In addition, the municipal conferences of the Socialist Alliance established coordination committees charged with submitting annual reports to local community assemblies and municipal assemblies on the realization of projects financed through the voluntary contribution. Radoje Stefanović claims that in order to increase the legitimacy of that initiative, the process of adopting and implementing the voluntary contribution relied more on the Socialist Alliance than the government structures of the city, municipalities and local communities:

> We needed them because if [the voluntary contribution] had only been initiated by the city assembly and its executive council, it would have been straightaway [perceived as] a bureaucratic process and might have a priori encountered certain reservations, maybe even some resistance, etc. But when the Socialist Alliance – which is somehow the broadest political organization in the city – is behind it, then there is a greater degree of trust on the part of local communities, citizens, journalists, etc. So, we needed them as guarantors in a way.[21]

In other words, the fear of 'bureaucratic centralism' led the city officials to cede the leading role in the planning and implementation of the voluntary contribution to the Socialist Alliance; as the broadest sociopolitical organization playing a key role in connecting sociopolitical communities, it had the greatest legitimacy in the socialist self-managing system. The implementation of the

voluntary contribution was generally successful, both in terms of an adequate and transparent use of funds and the realization of planned public works. Although not all the infrastructure projects related to water supply were completed by the end of 1986, the total production capacity of the Belgrade water utility was increased by 50% compared to 1980, thanks to works funded through the voluntary contribution. But while citizens welcomed the improvement of water supply and the construction of the Clinical Center, many felt that the solutions put forward for public transport were inadequate. There were sharp criticisms of the fact that funds from the voluntary contribution were directed toward the construction of additional tram and trolleybus lines instead of being used for the construction of a first metro line, which had been planned in the 1970s. The city administration was ridiculed for taking Belgrade "into the twenty-first century by tram," which did not solve chronic traffic problems (Polak 2018). Behind this critique of the solutions envisaged to solve Belgrade's public transport problems, there was a deeper criticism of the decision-making procedure related to the voluntary contribution, which allegedly lacked "a broad democratic deliberation and decision regarding the directions for the long-term development of the city" (Grad Beograd 1987: 11). The planning process was criticized for relying too much on the delegational system embodied in the municipalities and the Socialist Alliance, which did not give enough space for citizens to directly participate in decision-making on strategic matters. The general public was not given the possibility to directly participate in major decisions about which communal and social services would be given priority, what share of the voluntary contribution would be allocated to each of them, and what solutions would be implemented. The public consultations in local communities were based on projects that were predefined by the city authorities in collaboration with key sociopolitical stakeholders, on which citizens had a limited say. For instance, while citizens could express their views and suggest changes to the proposed routes of the new trolleybus and tram lines, the development of alternative forms of transport was not on the table. The city authorities thus drew on local communities to conduct broad public consultations for the finalization of projects they had conceptualized while excluding citizens from strategic decisions.

Conclusion

Socialist Yugoslavia made a radical step toward the decentralization of power through the implementation of self-management and the introduction of the delegational system. Besides the formal transfer of authority from the federal level to the level of the republics, and from the level of the republics to the municipal level, the process of decentralization aimed to bring the management of social affairs as close as possible to the citizens. Guided by the ideal of self-managing socialist democracy, Yugoslav leaders sought to promote direct decision-making by workers at their workplace and by citizens in general in their place of residence. This was to be achieved through the socialization of

the state, that is, the transfer of functions from state authorities to independent self-managing organizations and communities. The commune played a key role in the integration and coordination of self-managing interests expressed through local communities, BOALs and self-managed communities of interest at the local level. In this context, the Yugoslav experience in promoting self-management at the municipal level can be extremely instructive for contemporary initiatives that aim to establish democratic participatory institutions in municipalities and cities.

Local communities resulted from the aspiration to involve citizens in decision-making on local matters in their place of residence. This mechanism also allowed citizens to participate in decision-making at the level of the municipality and the city, as local communities were represented in the municipal assembly and played a major role in social planning. The example of Belgrade's voluntary contribution illustrates the role of local communities in decision-making at the level of the city. The fact that the introduction of the voluntary contribution was conditioned upon the approval of citizens in a referendum led the city authorities to organize public consultations in which local communities played a key role. Through these consultations, the citizens of Belgrade were given the opportunity to express their views on how the voluntary contribution would be implemented and to influence the realization of projects financed through the voluntary contributions in their neighborhoods. However, this example also shows that the influence of local communities in defining public policies at the city level was somewhat limited. Citizens were not given the possibility to participate in making strategic decisions but were only consulted in relation to the design and finalization of project proposals defined by the city authorities in cooperation with representatives of municipalities, sociopolitical organizations and expert bodies. This suggests that municipal authorities resorted to local communities to conduct broad public consultations on practical issues while excluding citizens from strategic decision-making. This observation is corroborated by the view of a local community secretary from that time that "the most important thing that [the local community] did was what it prevented from being done."[22] In this respect, Yugoslav self-management could be subject to the same criticism as Spanish municipalism insofar as it failed to challenge municipal sovereignty and to transform the exercise of power by establishing self-managing institutions and practices as the dominant form of governance. This observation needs to be verified by further research focusing on the relations between local communities and municipal authorities while taking into account the differences between rural and urban contexts.

This research also suggests that sociopolitical organizations played a leading role in local governance in socialist Yugoslavia. Local communities relied on the work of volunteers who benefited from the technical, logistical and moral support of the Socialist Alliance, without which they could have hardly become operational. On the other hand, the overwhelming influence of the Socialist Alliance at different levels of the political system was potentially an impediment to the realization and fulfillment of the needs and interests

expressed by citizens in local communities. The fact that the Socialist Alliance played the most prominent role in the adoption and implementation of the voluntary contribution in Belgrade raises questions about how much influence municipal authorities and local communities had over decision-making. Also, bearing in mind the institutionalized role of the Socialist Alliance in the preselection and election of delegates in local communities, questions arise as to what extent citizens were able to freely express their interests and participate in decision-making in local communities. To what extent did the influence of sociopolitical organizations over self-managing communities contradict the proclaimed goals of direct socialist democracy? These questions require more research focusing on the internal dynamics and power relations within local communities.

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Notes

1 In Socialist Yugoslavia, the terms 'commune' and 'municipality' were interchangeably used to refer to local authorities.
2 Basic Organizations of Associated Labor were the elementary units of socially owned enterprises.
3 Self-managed communities of interest brought together representatives of providers and consumers of public services (education, health, science, culture and social protection) to jointly decide on the allocation of public funding for these services.
4 Sociopolitical organizations included all the organizations, associations and charities that were legally permitted to operate in socialist Yugoslavia.
5 Interview with Đorđe Staničić, former general secretary of the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities. Belgrade, 29 December 2021.
6 Interview with Nenad Simić, secretary of the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' from 1981 to 2013. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.
7 Interview with Đorđe Staničić, former general secretary of the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities. Belgrade, 29 December 2021.
8 Interview with Nebojša Ivković, delegate in the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' in the municipality of Savski Venac in the 1980s. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.
9 Interview with Nenad Simić, secretary of the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' from 1981 to 2013. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.
10 Interview with Nenad Simić, secretary of the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' from 1981 to 2013. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.
11 Interview with Dragan Stojković, delegate in the municipality of Zemun 1974–1982. Belgrade, 28 January 2021.
12 Interview with Đorđe Staničić, former general secretary of the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities. Belgrade, 29 December 2021.

13 Interview with Nenad Simić, secretary of the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' from 1981 to 2013. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.
14 Interview with Đorđe Staničić, former general secretary of the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities. Belgrade, 29 December 2021].
15 Intervju with Nenad Simić, secretary of the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' from 1981 to 2013. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.
16 Interview with Radoje Stefanović, president of the Executive Council of the City of Belgrade 1981–1985. Belgrade, 30 December 2021.
17 The voluntary contribution was introduced in ten central municipalities of Belgrade: Voždovac, Vračar, Zvezdara, Zemun, Novi Beograd, Palilula, Rakovica, Savski Venac, Stari Grad and Čukarica.
18 Interview with Radoje Stefanović, president of the Executive Council of the City of Belgrade 1981–1985. Belgrade, 30 December 2021.
19 Interview with Radoje Stefanović, president of the Executive Council of the City of Belgrade 1981–1985. Belgrade, 30 December 2021.
20 Interview with Radoje Stefanović, president of the Executive Council of the City of Belgrade 1981–1985. Belgrade, 30 December 2021.
21 Interview with Radoje Stefanović, president of the Executive Council of the City of Belgrade 1981–1985. Belgrade, 30 December 2021.
22 Interview with Nenad Simić, secretary of the local community 'Topčidersko Brdo' from 1981 to 2013. Belgrade, 5 January 2022.

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10 Norming Participatory Practices of Movement Parties in Southeast Europe

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Introduction

Mainstream political parties enjoy low confidence levels in almost all European democracies, due to their negative image as self-referential and top-down organizations, insufficiently open to their membership's wider and deeper participation (Mair 2013). Distrust in political parties is also connected with their low mobilization capacities and declining party identification; it is not limited to those exercising power but also to traditional opposition parties, meaning that, overall, the legitimacy of mainstream political parties is decreasing (Ignazi 2021). At the same time, social movement studies emphasize the increasingly important role of social movements in mobilizing citizens for various social and political causes, and high levels of participation of the followers of social movements in social movement activities (della Porta et al. 2017; Giugni and Grasso 2019). Only recently have researchers started to underscore the relevance of movement parties, hybrid forms of organizations based on substantial participation of their membership, that use both protest and electoral mobilization of the citizens (Anria 2016; della Porta et al. 2017; Hutter, Kriesi and Lorenzini 2019). It is assumed that, influenced by the legacy of social movements, movement parties do not adopt a hierarchical organizational structure and strong leadership, typical of mainstream political parties, but instead maintain a more horizontal structure based on broad participation of members and deliberation on political decisions typical of social movements (della Porta and Rucht 2013; della Porta et al. 2017). However, we do not know much about the success of movement parties in maintaining those principles and practices once they enter the institutional arena (Anria 2016) since research on movement parties has focused less on intra-party democracy (IPD) than on their origins (Le Bas, 2011; Glenn 2003). That area of research is even less studied in the Southeast European (SEE) region, where movement parties represent a relatively recent phenomenon (van Biezen 2003). In this chapter, therefore, we look at two movement parties, MOŽEMO! (We can) and Zeleno-levi front (ZLF – Green-Left Front), from two SEE countries, namely, Croatia and Serbia, examining how democratic they are in terms of their internal decision-making practices and distributions of authority. Both parties are

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relatively new on their respective political scenes; both were formed from very vocal bottom-up social movements and claim to be different from traditional, leadership-based, hierarchical political parties. MOŽEMO! won in the municipal elections for Croatia's capital Zagreb, whose mayor consequently is a MOŽEMO! member, in addition to several seats in the national parliament. ZLF was formed more recently (August 2023) as an outgrowth of the social movement Ne da(vi)mo Beograd (Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own), which has held seats in both Serbia's national parliament and the Belgrade Municipal Assembly since the last elections.

In this chapter, we analyze MOŽEMO! and ZLF statutes to see how they conceive and implement intra-party democratic principles in their highest normative acts. This will help us understand to what extent these movement parties have been able to articulate the principles of internal democracy. In the following part of the text, we identify and define the main dimensions of IPD, which we then use to analyze the party statutes of MOŽEMO! and ZLF. The third part of the text traces the evolution of MOŽEMO! and ZLF from social movements to electoral agents, taking into account their differing national contexts, and the fourth section is dedicated to the analysis of the statutes through the lens of IPD main dimensions. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the main findings and their relevance for understanding the IPD of party movements in SEE and beyond.

IPD: Conceptualization and Measurement

IPD is a concept that refers to the internal democratic organization of political parties, focusing, above all, on the rights and possibilities of party constituencies to participate in decision-making processes broadly understood to guarantee the dispersion of power at different levels (Anria 2016; Cross and Katz 2013; Cular 2004; Wolkenstein 2018). While there has been a general agreement among scholars and democracy-promoting organizations[1] that IPD is desirable and necessary, and that if we want to improve democracy at the level of the political system, we need to have truly internally democratic political actors (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Scarrow 2005; but see also the critical view: Bäck 2008; Teorell 1999), there is no single, agreed upon definition of what it means to be internally democratic. However, some key dimensions can be discerned in the literature. Those are, above all, inclusivity and decentralization of decision-making processes (Anria 2016; Cross and Katz 2013; Cular 2004; von dem Berge et al. 2013; Wolkenstein 2018). Following von dem Berge et al. (2013), whose coding scheme for measuring IPD we use in our analysis,[2] we understand inclusiveness as the scope of the party's decision-making circle (also Scarrow 2005). Inclusiveness is operationalized as a continuum where on the one side lie parties with a single leader or small group making the main decisions, while on the other are the most inclusive parties, in which all members of party constituencies have the formal possibility to decide on key decisions (von dem Berge et al. 2013). The second criterion, complementing

inclusiveness in the abovementioned coding scheme, is decentralization, which refers to the role and autonomy of subnational units within a party. The more decentralized the electorate, the more internally democratic the party, according to the criteria of decentralization. However, the authors of the coding scheme acknowledge the possibility for a party to lack internal democracy even when being decentralized, in instances when "control over candidate selection has passed from the national oligarchy to a local oligarchy" (Hazan and Rahat 2006: 112; von dem Berge et al. 2013). Following these broad analytical criteria of inclusiveness and decentralization, and the literature on the topic, von dem Berge et al. (2013) further identify the three main categories of their coding scheme as members' rights, organizational structures and decision-making.

Regarding membership rights, which belong to the dimension of inclusiveness, parties decide the criteria for membership but also whether to limit the participation of members in certain areas of decision-making. Some parties restrict formal influence on long-time activists while others invite all members to take part in their decision-making. Further, solutions could vary within a single party; thus, for instance, one group could have authority over candidate selection, another could choose the leader, while the third could be in charge of defining policy positions (Cross and Katz 2013). In the coding scheme we use, members' rights are defined as general members' rights and minority rights. General members' rights are understood as the rights of all party members regardless of position and operationalized in the coding scheme through questions referring to the rights of members to be informed about party activities, the rights to express their opinions within and outside of the party, the rights to participate in decision-making processes but also the right to present and discuss alternative preferences within the party and to attempt to build alternative majorities. As rights to alternative positions do not equal minority positions, the level of safeguarding of minority rights in intra-party decision-making processes is assessed through the existence of minority quotas (above all gender, age and ethnicity) for intra-party and public office but also through the ex officio membership of minority-group leaders in executive organs of the party. Even though the literature focuses above all on women and youth as the most relevant minorities (Norris 2004; Vuletic 2005), the von dem Berge et al. (2013) coding scheme also assesses the rights of ethnic minorities in ethnically diverse societies that can have great relevance in understanding the level of inclusivity of the party.

A high level of inclusiveness can also be reached through an organizational structure that guarantees the right of decentralized and inclusive bodies, such as member assemblies and the party congress, to overrule decisions of more centralized and less inclusive organs. The basic idea that stands behind this criterion is that the scope of competencies of all political party bodies is derived from the members' will (von dem Berge et al. 2013). An additional criterion is the separation of the judiciary organs from other bodies of the party.

Within the category of organizational structure, the von dem Berge et al. (2013) coding scheme first assesses whether the party congress exists and then

also its competencies, the frequency of its meetings and whether Congress is the highest authority within the party. From an IPD perspective, the Congress should decide about statutory issues, the party program and the party line; it should elect the members for party organs of the organizational level it represents, and it should elect delegates for the Congress of the next organizational level (von dem Berge et al. 2013: 9). The second subcategory assessed under organizational structure regards the existence of conflict-solving agencies or measures and further assesses whether those serve to further guarantee the rights of membership and their protection from the party leadership decisions, corresponding to a high level of IPD. This issue of control over the party executive is further assessed through the third and fourth subcategories that refer to the national executive and to the executive committee. Those categories demonstrate the existence of obligations of executive bodies and the presence of accountability and control mechanisms. Above all, the division and scope of the competencies of all these bodies should be distributed in such a way as to prevent autocratic leadership. The sixth subcategory considers the extent to which the party president has prerogatives over other party organs. From an IPD perspective, this subcategory assesses the degree of the president's power and the possibility to challenge them. The last subcategory that refers to the dimension of organizational structure – the relationship between the national and local levels – considers how much the relations between different levels of a party are decentralized and allows us to understand how much power is concentrated in the leadership and central party organs.

The categories that refer to the decision-making process also assess the level of inclusiveness and decentralization but are focused mainly on the national level, given that offices on the national level are more revealing of the overall level of IPD. The first group of subcategories within the category of recruitment include Recruitment to the National Public Office, Candidate Selection for Parliamentary Office and Candidate Selection for Presidential Elections and Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection. The measures in these subcategories range from those indicating very inclusive to very exclusive recruitment and selection processes, except for the subcategory Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection that focuses on assessing the degree of decentralization in the selection process. The level of IPD in decision-making processes is also measured through the category Recruitment to National Intra-Party Office (Election of the National Executive and Election of the Executive Committee), which focuses on assessing who determines the composition of the party leadership. Because of the high relevance of the president, the measure of inclusiveness of the electorate who can elect them represents a separate subcategory within the category of recruitment. The third category of decision-making procedures focuses on procedures: voting procedures, Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Public Office and

Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Intra-Party Office. While the first subcategory focuses on assessing the level of inclusiveness, the second and third are oriented toward evaluating the level of decentralization of procedures. Finally, the coding scheme shows how inclusive the process of deciding on the adoption of a party manifesto is, although it also assesses the level of decentralization by exploring the role of subnational party units in voting on the manifesto.

Contextualizing MOŽEMO! and ZLF

The decision to put a comparative focus on MOŽEMO! and ZLF had several rationales. They represent some of the most prominent and impactful examples of party movements in a region not typically associated with the strong political engagement of social movements. However, the last ten years have seen a rise in bottom-up social activism: both MOŽEMO! and ZLF are the result of these processes, having evolved from street activism into electoral agents. In addition, the region of SEE is politically dominated by traditional, hierarchical parties, often accused, when in power, of political abuses and of capturing state institutions and broader political processes (Fiket and Pudar Draško 2021; Keil 2018; Richter and Wunsch 2020). In this sense, amid discussions of 'democratic backsliding' in the region (Bieber 2018) and beyond (Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley 2020; Haggard and Kaufman 2021), it would be interesting to investigate the normative outlooks of novel and different political actors claiming the legacy and principles of social movements' progressivism, horizontalism and participation. It would be a research step toward examining their abilities to democratize their respective societies and bring about potential democratic innovations.

To further contextualize MOŽEMO! and ZLF, it is necessary to acknowledge what they have in common and the differences in national and political contexts and their internal developments. The ideological inception of both party movements can be traced to the early 2010s, when a wave of social protests shook the region, echoing global protest. From anti-corruption demonstrations to student blockades to citizens' mobilizations to saving parks and squares, what these various bottom-up mobilizations across countries in the region had in common was the articulation of a need to protect the public good from the increasingly unaccountable political regimes and their strengthening ties with the economic interests of the few (Bieber and Brentin 2019; Fiket et al. 2019; Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020; Vasiljević 2021, 2023). Hitherto, dominant political concerns of progressive civil society, like Europeanization, economic transition and democratization, made space for new ones like the protection of the commons, socioeconomic rights, public good and the protection of the environment. In this context, two municipalist initiatives, Pravo na grad (Right to the City) from Zagreb and Ne da(vi)mo Beograd (Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own)[3] from Belgrade, gained special

prominence in their respective struggles against the usurpation of urban public spaces and 'investor urbanism.' The latter is defined as "a form of spatial development where the investors and the central or local government make decisions regarding the city development without allowing input from citizens or other community representatives" (Penčić and Lazarevski 2021: 526).[4] Both activist initiatives are also closely tied to environmental organizations, insisting on the connectedness of struggles for urban and green commons. They became renowned for their green activism and for advocating greater citizen participation at all levels of political decision-making. Internally, they promoted horizontalism and democratic participation. Right to the City and Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own were the respective nuclei of MOŽEMO! and ZLF. In addition, they influenced each other, were under the similar international influence of other green-left movements, and therefore went through similar evolutionary phases, although nevertheless developed idiosyncratic characteristics, having to conform to different national political circumstances.

The Zagreb movement Right to the City emerged in the mid-2000s from a cooperation between various independent cultural and youth nongovernmental organizations focusing on environmental and urban planning policies (see more in Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević 2017). They gained wider recognition after fiercely opposing – through various public performances, petitions and other actions – a development project in Flower Square, one of the city's central public spaces. The proposed project – which required the urban master plan to be rewritten – envisaged upscale residences, a shopping mall and a parking garage to be built in the historic downtown, reducing public and pedestrian space and demolishing protected buildings. From that moment on, Right to the City became a symbol of civic struggle against the usurpation of public space (while politically standing up to the controversial Zagreb Mayor at the time, Milan Bandić), attracting other progressive and left forces that had started to emerge in Croatia and, for the first time since the dissolution of Yugoslavia, rehabilitating the idea of democratic socialism. As Milan (2022) noted, new municipalist movements in the region took their inspiration not only from similar movements exploding globally but also from the Yugoslav heritage of a decentralized system of self-management and its elements of direct democracy.

In 2017, the initiative joined other green activists and smaller parties, creating a new political party – Zagreb je naš (Zagreb Is Ours). In the municipal elections held in May 2017, the coalition won 7.6% of votes (four seats) in the Zagreb City Assembly. For the 2019 European Union elections, the party further networked with similar grassroots initiatives, establishing a national political platform MOŽEMO! In local elections in 2021, Tomislav Tomašević, the MOŽEMO! candidate won the majority of votes to become the mayor of Zagreb. Today, MOŽEMO! is a national political party, holding a mayoral position in the capital city of Zagreb, with 22 seats in the city assembly and four seats in the national parliament of Croatia.

In Serbia, Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own, or Ne da(vi)mo Beograd (from now on NDMBGD), came into existence in 2014 through active opposition to the execution of the Belgrade Waterfront (BW) project. BW is a multibillion-dollar "urban megaproject" (Perić 2020), covering an expanse of 177 hectares of mostly waterfront property adjacent to the historical core of Serbia's capital, Belgrade. The project is financed by a United Arab Emirates investor, with considerable subsidies from the Serbian government. The dubious legal procedures allowing the project, as well as unlawful demolitions (which perpetrators have yet to be brought to justice) that cleared part of the proposed construction site, sparked controversy and some of the biggest protests Serbia has seen in recent history. Various cultural organizations and associations working in urban and cultural policy and urban development joined the protests and supported NDMBGD. The initiative became emblematic, advocating for sustainable urban development, greater participation of citizens and protection of the commons. In the rather unfavorable political context of 2018 (Kralj 2022), the activist group decided to run in local elections in Belgrade. Although failing to reach the 5% election threshold, it won 3.44% of the votes and thus started to transform into an electoral agent. For the national elections in 2022, NDMBGD was a key partner in the formation of a green-left coalition Moramo (We must).[5] The coalition won 13 seats in the national parliament and the same number of city councilors in the Belgrade city assembly. The coalition remained loose, and the partners involved pursued different political developments, although cooperation continues. NDMBGD went on to network with other local initiatives, and at the moment of writing this chapter, a new political party has been registered – Zeleno-levi front (Green-Left Front) or ZLF – marking the final stages of transformation of NDMBGD from a social movement to a political party.

We can observe many similarities in the paths taken by both party movements in question, but many differences as well, which requires taking into account the national contexts. While both Croatia and Serbia could be considered flawed democracies, the situation is much graver in Serbia. In 2019, Freedom House ranked Serbia no longer as a "semi-consolidated democracy" but as a transitional or hybrid regime (Nations in Transit 2020). Serbia's scores continue to fall, chiefly due to the ruling party's role in significantly eroding political rights and putting pressure on independent media, opposition parties and civil society organizations. A growing body of scholarly analysis points to Serbia's illiberal and authoritarian turn (Bieber 2018; Castaldo 2020; Rogers 2022; Vladisavljević 2020). Given this, it has to be noted that parliamentarian life, the work of the opposition and attempts at improving institutional work meet serious obstacles not comparable to Croatia. One should not doubt that this influences the agency and internal arrangements of any democratic initiative striving to bring about democratic innovation or institutional change.

Methodology

In what follows, we analyze the statutes of the two movement parties with a significant history of action in SEE, particularly in former Yugoslav states. Even though party statutes alone cannot guarantee the life of the participatory principle within parties, their analysis helps understand the envisaged scopes of action and limitations for party members, as well as the general value-based culture. Statues and other norm-prescribing documents are exciting fields of analysis, especially for the case of party movements that have emerged from bottom-up movements advocating a participatory turn in politics.

We have conducted deductive content analysis following the developed model of von dem Berge et al. (2013), including qualitative coding and quantification necessary for building the internal party democracy index.[6] The analysis is based on three main categories of IPD theoretically defined in von dem Berge et al. (2013): members' rights, organizational structure and decision-making. Each of these categories is further developed through subcategories reflecting the importance of the specific category for the overall internal democracy index. These subcategories include individual items, which serve as a scheme for coding through questions about the party statutes. The category of *decision-making* is the most detailed one, as it represents the complex multidimensional aspect of IPD. Decision-making on the party's representation, whether in public institutions or internally, contains more items than other dimensions. However, in order not to allow predominance of those dimensions with numerous aspects, like decision-making, we have calculated the items for each specific subcategory and then within each category. In this way, each of the three main categories bears the same weight.

After coding each item, we used the predefined quantification scheme, which departs from observing implications on IPD regarding inclusiveness or decentralization. The value +1 is given to all answers with positive implications on IPD, the value −1 to all answers with negative implications on IPD and the value 0 is allocated to answers with no specific effects on IPD (von dem Berge et al. 2013: 31).

Empirical Analysis

The analysis was conducted on two statutes adopted *after* the party movements in question entered the national parliaments in Croatia and Serbia. The Statute of MOŽEMO! was adopted in 2021, with amendments adopted in 2022, while the Statute of ZLF has been registered at the time of conducting this analysis (August 2023). Notwithstanding some of the differences in the development of these two party movements, their statutes represent legal milestones in their evolution into national movement parties.

Both parties declare their commitment to the principles of more inclusive democracy in the opening paragraphs of their statutes. Article 6 of the MOŽEMO! Statute sets the objectives of the party, and one of them reads,

Table 10.1 Internal party democracy index for ZLF and MOŽEMO![a]

Code	*Category*	*Mean ZLF*	*Mean MOŽ*
10-00-0-0	Members' rights	0.750	0.333
20-00-0-0	Organizational structure	0.769	0.487
30-00-0-0	Decision-making	0.215	0.125
IPD	**Index**	**0.578**	**0.315**

Notes

a Since the number of observations in our study was one statute per party, it was not possible to express minimum and maximum value, but only the actual mean for each of the categories.

"Strengthening democratic institutions and improving forms of representative and direct democracy." ZLF has a participatory principle explicitly stated in Article 8, which guarantees direct decision-making through party referendum or interpellation. Article 6 sets the organizing principles of ZLF: "[C]ooperation and agreement when making decisions and implementing policies, not imposing decisions, arbitrariness and obedience."

The overall internal party democracy score of the two parties reveals that ZLF stands better than MOŽEMO!, with an IPD index of 0.578 compared to 0.315. ZLF performs better in all three main categories (see Table 10.1).

In the following paragraphs, we elaborate on the three key dimensions and complement the findings with the qualitative analysis of the statutes' content. The analysis is mindful of the (national) contextual factors that have influenced the development of both the party movements themselves and their normative documents.

Members' Rights

In the IPD index dimension tackling rights of the members, ZLF shows a better score compared to MOŽEMO! (see Table 10.2). Reading carefully through the statutes gives us some explanations for the differences.

General members' rights are similarly defined by both parties. Both explicitly mention binding gender quotas within the party organs for greater representativeness and inclusiveness. In Article 6, ZLF emphasizes, as one of the six key organizational principles, "equal participation in the work of the Party and respect for the contributions of all members and all ideas in the discussion

Table 10.2 Comparison of members' rights in the statutes of ZLF and MOŽEMO!

Code	*Category*	*Mean ZLF*	*Mean MOŽ*
10-00-0-0	**Members' rights**	**0.750**	**0.333**
11-00-0-0	General members' rights	0.833	0.333
12-00-0-0	Minority rights	0.667	0.333

and decision-making process." ZLF also declares the right to express divergent opinions without repercussions in Article 12:

> No member may suffer consequences due to a public opinion expressed at the party forum of which he/she is a member, which was in the minority during decision making within the ZLF body, except in cases where it directly contradicts the Statute, the Code of Ethics and the basic values of the ZLF.

ZLF also clearly defines lines of participation for minority groups in the party, as the statute defines autonomous groups that comprise youth, women and elderly among their members ranks.

MOŽEMO! defines only a basic set of rights for its members without further elaborating on inclusiveness and care for minorities in the party. Also, unlike ZLF, MOŽEMO! sets a barrier for becoming a party member in Article 11 of the Statute, declaring that

> in order to become a member of the Party, the interested person must previously be involved in the activities of the party through work in local, thematic or operational groups for *at least six months before submitting the application* for membership.

Generally, we may conclude that ZLF has better developed and embedded the principles of equal participation and has more open admission of the members to the party, compared to MOŽEMO!

Organizational Structure

Organizational structure is significantly simpler with MOŽEMO! than with ZLF (see Table 10.3). MOŽEMO! structure reflects the structure of the movement that was registered as a civic initiative. The General Assembly is the highest body of the party and comprises all party members. Executive bodies are

Table 10.3 Organizational structure of ZLF and MOŽEMO!

Code	*Category*	*Mean ZLF*	*Mean MOŽ*
20-00-0-0	**Organizational structure**	**0.769**	**0.487**
21-00-0-0	Party congress	0.600	/
22-00-0-0	Conflict-solving agencies	0.750	0.250
23-00-0-0	The national executive	1.000	0.667
24-00-0-0	The executive committee	0.667	0.667
25-00-0-0	Party president	0.600	0.600
26-00-0-0	Relationship between the national and subnational levels	1.000	0.250

the Governing Board (executive committee), the Council (national executive) and two co-presidents. All executive body members are voted on in the General Assembly. MOŽEMO! does not have a party congress; therefore, this battery of items was not taken into account for the coding process and analysis. The Council presides over elections and electoral programs, while the Governing Board governs the party between annual General Assemblies.

ZLF's structure resembles the traditional party structures more. The highest organ of the party is the Congress, set to regularly meet every three years. Executive bodies of the ZLF are the Great Council (national executive) and Presidency (executive committee) with two co-presidents and five members. The Presidency is voted on in the Congress, while the Great Council is composed of the party members who perform functions in the party and in the state organs, plus delegates from the minority groups (autonomous units) and territorial units.[7] The Secretariat is an implementing organ of the party, taking care of the administrative and technical operations. ZLF also has advisory organs, the Political Council and the Program Council, which are dedicated to the development and advancement of the party program pillars. Finally, ZLF has a Supervisory Board, Ethics Committee and the Statutory Commission acting as the highest party court.

The MOŽEMO! Statute recognizes only a general disciplinary process that may lead to a warning or exclusion of a member from the party. On the other hand, ZLF dedicated a specific article to disciplinary procedures but also to the mediation of the conflicts within the party by establishing a one-off Mediation Commission through Article 15 of the statute:

> In case of disputes between individual ZLF members that have a negative impact on the proper functioning of the Party and on party discipline, the Grand Council establishes a mediation commission.
>
> All parties to the dispute must agree on the composition of the mediation commission and the number of members must be odd.
>
> The decision on the establishment of the mediation commission determines its composition, duration, method of decision making, the subject of the dispute and other issues of importance for resolving the dispute.

Finally, when it comes to the inclusion of the subnational units and preserving their autonomy, ZLF explicitly defines autonomy of the territorial and also its autonomous units in Article 8: "The principle of participation and immediate autonomous decision making on issues that directly concern territorial organizations, i.e., autonomous organizations, is guaranteed by this statute."

The MOŽEMO! Statute defines subnational units belonging to the coordinating bodies of the party. However, the Governing Board establishes these units, which significantly limits their statutory autonomy.

Overall, we can conclude that ZLF has evolved from a civic movement into a party movement that manages to preserve principles of inclusiveness and deliberation in its key official document. MOŽEMO! still runs its activities

Table 10.4 Decision-making of ZLF and MOŽEMO!

Code	*Category*	*Mean ZLF*	*Mean MOŽ*
30-00-0-0	**Decision-making**	**0.215**	**0.125**
31-00-0-0	Recruitment	0.097	0.083
31-10-0-0	*Public office – national level*	*0.308*	*−0.033*
31-11-0-0	Candidate selection – public office	0.667	−0.500
31-12-0-0	Candidate selection – parliament	0.200	0.200
31-13-0-0	Candidate selection – president	0.167	0.167
31-14-0-0	Relationship between the national level and subnational levels	0.200	0.000
31-20-0-0	*Intra-party office – national level*	*0.067*	*0.533*
31-21-0-0	Election of the national executive	−0.200	0.600
31-22-0-0	Election of the executive committee	0.200	0.600
31-23-0-0	Election of the party president	0.200	0.400
31-30-0-0	*Procedures*	*−0.083*	*−0.250*
31-31-0-0	Voting procedures	−0.750	−0.750
31-32-0-0	Relationship between national and subnational units –subnational public office	0.000	0.000
31-33-0-0	Relationship between national and subnational units –subnational intra-party office	0.500	0.000
32-00-0-0	Programmatic issues	0.333	0.167

much more as a civic movement, which has the advantage in the implementation of direct democracy through the General Assembly. However, it is challenging to think of the mass membership with the normative framework as defined at this moment.

Decision-Making

Decision-making comprises several dimensions: two aspects are procedures of recruitment and procedures of making decisions on program issues. Further, recruitment is observed through the selection of the candidates, selection of leaders and transparency of voting procedures and inclusion (see Table 10.4).

MOŽEMO! has a very modest definition of party procedures for selecting candidates for public functions. The only mention of the procedure is with the competencies of the Council (Article 37), which "makes decisions on the model for selecting the Party's candidates in the elections and confirms the final selection of candidates."

ZLF defines its own procedure through Article 54 of the Statute, which states,

> The list of candidates for deputies in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia is determined by the Great Council, except for candidates for deputies to the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, which is determined by the Vojvodina Regional Committee.

> The lists of candidates for councilors are determined by the ZLF territorial, municipal and city organizations.
>
> Personal proposals for participation in the executive power are made by the competent territorial body for the territory where the executive body, a public company or institution or other body to which the ZLF representative is delegated.

Therefore, neither party's statute clearly defines how the candidates on the list are chosen, i.e., who has the right to propose, how the order of candidates on the lists is formed and whether voting is public or secret. Both parties prescribe the decision-making to an independent body chosen by the membership, but not much else can be concluded from the statutes. However, even if the procedures are not so clear, we can confirm that ZLF explicitly preserves the autonomy of the territorial units with regard to decision-making of candidates becoming officials.

Regarding internal competition and selection of the party officials, ZLF is closer to established parties' principles, with decisions through representative organs like Congress, while MOŽEMO! retains the direct democracy principle by keeping the General Assembly as its highest body with decision-making powers on every aspect of the party's life. The Council of MOŽEMO! has responsibilities exclusively related to the party's electoral activities, while the Governing Board and the two coordinators are directly elected by all members. The General Assembly elects all elective members of the party bodies, while the Council and the Governing Board also have ex officio members, such as representatives of the Territorial, Thematic and Technical coordinating bodies; members of the Coordination for Cooperation with Political Initiatives; and party employees serving in the Croatian Parliament and the European Parliament.

The decision-making structure of the ZLF is much more complex. Its bodies are clearly defined by respecting the inclusiveness of different groups and interests within the party. The Congress and the Great Council have shared control over the appointment of the party's advisory bodies. The Congress decides on the executive committee, i.e., the Presidency, the Supervisory Committee, the Statutory Committee (party court), the Ethics Committee and the coordinator of the Political Council. The Great Council appoints the Secretariat and decides on program groups and territorial units. The Great Council also has the right to propose the impeachment of the Presidency.

Finally, we have analyzed decision-making on how party policies are being developed and implemented. MOŽEMO! defines its party policy at the initiative of the Governing Board and upon adoption at the Party Assembly. The election program of MOŽEMO! is adopted by the Council, which is the supreme authority in election affairs. We can deduce from Article 45 that thematic groups, as a part of advisory bodies, work on certain program areas of interest to the party: they are established by the Governing Board, as we have already mentioned in presenting the structure of MOŽEMO! Since the party program is adopted at the General Assembly, we can assume that the proposals go through the Governing Board and for the final adoption by the Assembly.

ZLF takes an elaborate approach to the creation of the program direction of the party. Article 46, dedicated to the program groups, states that there are "three mandatory program groups: environmental protection and climate change group; a group for the struggle against social and economic inequalities; and a group for democracy."

In addition to the defined priority topics for which program groups are created by default, the Great Council can also form other program groups after the proposal of the Program Council, which consists of coordinators of all existing program groups. Also, the Great Council adopts the electoral program of the party on the proposal of the Program Council (Article 29):

> The Program Council prepares the Electoral Program of the Great Council based on the plans of the program groups and proposes to the Presidency priority programmatic areas of action, but also works on the basis of the instructions and initiatives of the Presidency in connection with the development of the ZLF program and the election program.

In addition to the Program Council, the direction of the party is determined in Article 28 by the Political Council as a "political advisory body of the Party composed of prominent individuals from the political, academic and local community who share the values of the ZLF, support its program and are not members of another political party."

Programmatic issues are key in providing spaces for participatory forums within the party and with its constituents. The analysis of the embeddedness of the potential forums for participation in the party statutes reveals that ZLF has paid attention to defining these spaces, while MOŽEMO! relies on the direct democracy principle by setting the General Assembly as its highest and most inclusive authority.

MOŽEMO! does not define special measures to ensure deliberation within the party. In its statute, the concepts of dialogue, discussion or deliberation are not used, while participation is mentioned only once. ZLF sets the task of inviting and moderating participatory forums to the Program Council, defining this as one of the Council's four activities in Article 29:

> [Program Council] Moderates dialogue within the organization as well as with the general public regarding program initiatives of the membership and program decisions through fora, public hearings or other models of consultation and participation that are designed, such as convening special program conferences, i.e., the Congress program.

Spaces of deliberation also appear indirectly in ZLF through the definition of the duties of co-presidents. They are bound by Article 23 to initiate the development of political, strategic and public policy documents to be discussed at the meetings of the Presidency, the Great Council and the Congress.

Our analysis of the decision-making process shows that ZLF has evolved into a national party that defines its procedures in a way that allows growth and potentially a mass party. ZLF has dedicated considerable efforts to defining and embedding participatory and inclusive principles in its key legal document. MOŽEMO!, on the other hand, retains its direct decision-making as the most important tool of direct democracy. However, it remains to be seen how the party documents will change in light of the potential mass growth of the party, which could make decision-making more difficult.

Conclusion

Given the deepening crisis of the legitimacy of institutional politics and traditional political parties, a growing number of citizens are seeking new, more participatory forms of democracy. Some have argued that social movements, or party movements in particular – as a form that bridges electoral, conventional politics and bottom-up mobilization – can bring about desired democratic innovations, given their focus on participation, horizontality and transparency. Can they perform a different type of electoral politics; can they reform institutions without being co-opted by the existing structures; can they thrive and make a lasting impact without succumbing either to bureaucratization (and moderation) or radicalization (and dissipation) (Tarrow 2011)? Above all, we believe, it is important to examine their ability to preserve, or to (re)build, strengthen and protect internal democratic capacities, based on the values so highly cherished by democratic social movements: participation, equal access to opportunities, democratic decision-making and transparency. That is why we decided to explore the characteristics of internal democracy of the two most prominent party movements in the SEE region, MOŽEMO! and ZLF. Both have started as municipalist movements, and after successfully avoiding "the local trap" (Russell 2019), have evolved into national electoral agents.

Their national contexts have many shared features but also many differences, especially concerning the overall quality of democracy. Both party movements emerged from green activism, with a strong demand for greater citizen participation at all levels of politics. Their internal practices are therefore also reliant upon values of horizontal and inclusive decision-making. Both parties evolved by joining forces with other cultural, urban and environmental movements, and were finally registered as national parties after entering national parliaments.

Our analysis shows that, despite strong mutual influence and transfer of experience, the two party movements exhibit significant differences in their normative frameworks. Although both parties declare their commitment to more inclusive democracy, detailed analysis reveals that ZLF has embedded these principles much better in all three main domains of IPD: members' rights, organizational structure and decision-making. ZLF has designed its structure to accommodate the demands of a mass party, while MOŽEMO! has

de facto remained a social movement, now in the legal status of a political party. ZLF paid much more attention to the inclusion of the subnational and thematic units and to preserving their autonomy. The structure is designed in such a way as to prevent presidentialization and centralization of power in the one-party body.

The weakest aspect of the IPD in the normative frameworks of both movement parties is the decision-making process: it is inclusive and participatory but lacks a definition of how it is organized, which contributes to poor transparency of procedures and provides fertile ground for manipulation and potential creation of power centers. In this respect, the programmatic profiling of the ZLF is somewhat more elaborate, with efforts to foster a participatory and inclusive deliberative forum for program design. Finally, the issue of the barrier to membership that exists in MOŽEMO! compared to ZLF indicates a different logic of party growth – a lack of available human resources for political action is, apparently, much more severe in Serbia than in Croatia.

The key difference between these two movement parties' normative documents points to the fact that MOŽEMO! relies on participatory democracy performed by carefully selected members, while ZLF is attempting to become a democratic party, open to new membership, with carefully balanced power centers. Such a structure will enable ZLF to grow faster but also poses a challenge for putting the defined norms into practice – in other words, to keep participatory practices alive. Nevertheless, both MOŽEMO! and ZLF represent true trailblazers in the region regarding internal party democracy and participatory politics. As such, it is certainly worth further following and researching their future electoral and political struggles but also challenges in the implementation of their statutes' IPD principles.

Notes

1 See the 'Venice Commission' Code of Good Practice in the Field of Political Parties, https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)002-e; the Third Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy, http://www.wmd.org/assemblies/third-assembly/workshops/political-parties-and-finance/how-strengthen-internal-party-demo, IDEA, http://www.idea.int/parties/internal_democracy07.cfm USAID, http://serbia-montenegro.usaid.gov/code/navigate.php?Id=23.

2 Here, we only briefly describe all the categories of the coding scheme; a detailed explanation of the coding scheme and procedure can be found in the guide for the content analysis of party statutes for measuring intra-party democracy (IPD) published in the *Guide for the Content Analysis of Party Statutes with Examples from Hungary, Slovakia and Romania* (von dem Berge et al. 2013).

3 Its sister organization was also called *Right to the City*. The name was chosen as a direct reference to the famous banner of Henri Lefebvre (1968) and to signal the link with critical urban theory and other struggles against neoliberal urbanisation taking place globally at the time.

4 For a discussion on democratization of urban planning using participatory innovations, see Chapter 5 in this volume.

5 The name is a nod to the Croatian counterpart MOŽEMO!, We Can. Over the years, activists from the two movements have cooperated and exchanged ideas, given not only their similar political contexts but, above all, sharing a Yugoslav legacy and the same language.

6 It must be disclosed that two of the three co-authors are members of NDMBGD, the movement that initiated the formation of ZLF, and they currently served as Belgrade city councilors until December 2023. Because of their personal involvement with one of the party movements under the study, the third co-author conducted the coding process.

7 Article 20 of the Statute defines that Great Council consists of members of the Party Presidency, National Parliament and Government, mayors, coordinators of the Political Council, the Supervisory Board, the Ethics Committee and the Statutory Commission; members of the Program Council in a number not exceeding 10%; two delegated representatives of autonomous organizations (youth, women and elderly); and two co-presidents of each municipal/city committee, of whom at least one must be female.

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11 Democratic Innovations in an Illiberal Landscape

Three Ideas from Hungary

Eszter Kovács Szitkay, Dániel Oross and Boldizsár Szentgáli-Tóth

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how democratic innovations can work but also how such legal institutions can become hollow in an illiberal environment. Hungary is an excellent example of this process, where political actors have taken the initiative to introduce democratic innovations from three different directions. In none of these cases, however, despite the efforts devoted to these mechanisms, did they have a demonstrable substantive impact. In such (hybrid) regimes, even the adverse effects of participatory innovations could be hypothesized, compared to stable democracies, where the produced effects are beneficial for democracy (Fiket, Ilić and Pudar Draško 2022: 51, 66).[1] What can be observed is that the governing parties favor national consultation; for their part, opposition parties in Hungary have organized primaries, and different municipalities have held citizens' assemblies for the umpteenth time. Nevertheless, despite seemingly fulfilling all the formal requirements, these innovative solutions have not enhanced inclusiveness of democratic discourse in any substantive way – that is, they have failed to have a meaningful impact on policy and decision-making.

In a broader context, the voices of crisis about Western-style democracies have been growing in recent years, and deliberative and participative practices are presented as an antidote to the democratic malaise (Geissel and Newton 2012). There is a tendency for citizens of Western states to become increasingly critical of their political leaders, government institutions and democratic systems, and for many of them to be more skeptical about their own democracy, feeling alienated from political parties, having less trust in political leaders and being less supportive of their own governments and political institutions (Newton 2012: 3). At the same time, citizens have created additional expectations from their democracies: more participation, greater political accountability and transparency, more consultation, less corruption, more equal treatment of minorities – more open and accountable features of the government (Newton 2012: 4). What is clear among these many undermining ideas is that in Western-style democracies, the majority still believes that democracy is the best form

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of governance, and although they see its functional problems, the solution to these problems is establishing an even better democracy (Newton 2012: 4).

Hungary does not constitute an exception to these paramount issues and challenges. To be able to see through them, we need to provide insight into the local context. After the collapse of the communist regimes in central and eastern Europe in the early 1990s, Hungary was at the forefront of the democratization process while at the same time being one of the region's leaders toward European Union (EU) accession (Szente 2022: 13). Since 2010, however, the reverse trend has emerged: the quality of democracy has deteriorated, while the checks and balances have weakened (Hajnal and Boda 2021: 77). In 2010, Viktor Orbán's center-right party, FIDESZ, won a landslide victory in the national elections, winning more than two-thirds of the seats in Parliament – holding a constitution-making majority – followed by further victories not just in national elections but at local, regional and European levels as well (Hajnal and Boda 2021: 78). Many of the institutional changes made during this period point in two directions: a weakening of the checks and balances on the government, and increasing control by the government over society and independent actors.[2] In the past decade, Hungary under the premiership of Viktor Orbán has habitually been portrayed as a plebiscitary leader democracy (Körösényi, Illés and Gyulai 2020), a poster child for *democraduras* or illiberal regimes (Pap 2022), and is also an outstanding example for what the literature terms "democratic backsliding" or "illiberal regression" (Hajnal and Boda 2021: 76).

In contrast to all this, in recent decades, we have witnessed a burst of democratic innovation not only in the "old" Western democracies but also in new ones (Newton 2012: 4), including Hungary. For the time being, there is little consensus as to what could be included in this definition, and the fact that the definition itself does not yet have precise and clear contours does not make the situation any easier (Elstub and Escobar 2019: 11). To provide a framework of interpretation for the rest of this chapter, we adopt the often quoted Elstub and Escobar's (2019: 11) definition: "Democratic innovations are processes or institutions that are new to a policy issue, policy role, or level of governance, and developed to reimagine and deepen the role of citizens in governance processes by increasing opportunities for participation and influence."

After the political transition in Hungary, we can speak of the primacy of representative democracy, along with direct democracy as a complementary feature, but we cannot speak of a participatory turn.[3] One consequence of this is that social science has been focusing on the challenges that representative democracy faces. However, a relevant change is the emergence of Hungarian examples of institutional solutions to involve citizens in decision-making (Oross 2020: 105) – even if their input remained limited (Oross 2020: 106). Besides these Hungarian examples, the literature has already identified some good practices from the region as well (Damnjanović 2019; Fiket and Đorđević 2022; Gherghina, Ekman and Podolian 2019; Gherghina and Silagadze 2019; Mișcoiu 2019; Nemčok, Spáč and Voda 2019; Pállinger 2019; Schiffbeck 2019; Volodin 2019). Regarding the examples presented in this chapter, these

democratic innovations are initiated from three different directions, which constitute three different legal institutions. What should also be highlighted is that these are not just experimental tools; they are in-progress practices, of which the chapter shares 'snapshots.' And although we are talking about 'snapshots,' they can serve as further experience for other countries with similar backgrounds.

Based on these assumptions, the following sections discuss the situation and opportunities for democratic innovation in the Hungarian context. For this purpose, the authors have chosen to present three instruments that draw on the toolbox of different conceptions of democracy. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into the following sections: the first presents a national example of direct democracy initiated by the government, that is, the national consultations; the second example of reforming representative democracy presents the primaries, including the primaries for the opposition candidate for prime minister; and, finally, drawing on the tools of deliberative democracy, the last section focuses on the Hungarian citizens' assemblies held by municipalities, followed by some conclusions.

National Consultation

In spite of the fact that Fidesz is considered a populist party that supports the idea of citizens participating actively in political processes, its actions resemble more of a top-down approach, in which all decision-making is placed in the hands of a strong government. In other words, the participatory processes issued for the citizens (e.g., referenda) are tightly controlled by the authorities and used to gain formal legitimacy for their actions (Enyedi 2016). Fidesz accumulated advantage in the 2004, 2008 and 2016 referenda to attain specific goals (van Eden 2018). Taking advantage of certain social realities (i.e., the financial or migrant crisis) and the sensitive subjects of the referenda, Fidesz held extensive campaigns promoting the answers sought from the citizens, all the while emphasizing how important these practices are for citizens' political empowerment. Instrumentalizing the referenda, Fidesz managed to gain electoral success and secure its position in the political arena (van Eden 2018).

National Consultation was born in a context where Fidesz faced low levels of party identification. Therefore, Viktor Orbán offered deliberative forums to send a signal that his party learned from earlier mistakes and made changes (Greskovits 2020). In his February 2005 State of the Nation annual address, he announced that a national consultation process would be organized to bring citizens back to politics and ensure that public life is about the will of the people. The original aim behind the consultation process was to reinvigorate activism of Fidesz supporters and to reshape public perception of the party. The body responsible for national consultation was a Consultative Board that was (officially) not linked to the party. It consisted of eight well-known and respected people, including scientists, a doctor, a writer, an architect and the spokesperson was a former TV reporter. On 28 April 2005, a questionnaire was

presented to the press that presented seven questions[4] about citizens' perceptions of Hungary's democratic transition. The deadline for filling out and sending the questionnaire was 30 July. The initiative was original because prior to that, political parties in Hungary did not ask for citizens' opinions on policy issues directly; indeed, policy issues in general were neglected in public discourse. On 18 May the National Consultation Center was opened for citizens who wanted to talk about public life, to consult members of the Board, or wanted to submit a consultation questionnaire. On 17 June, four national consultancy buses started their one-month trip, visiting nearly 700 towns and villages. The results of the consultation were presented on the Conclusion Day (16 October) by members of the Consultative Board.[5] A large outdoor event was held where board members responded to participants' questions, and the event ended with a concert. Despite all its efforts to mobilize its voter camp, Fidesz lost the 2006 elections and remained in the opposition for another four years.

National consultations drastically changed after 2010. Fidesz won the 2010 parliamentary elections with 53% of the overall vote, but due to Hungary's electoral system, the party's share of seats in Parliament was an unprecedented two-thirds majority (68%). Fidesz's victory institutionalized national consultation. It became a political communication tool of the prime minister (using 'push polls': attempts to manipulate voters' views/beliefs under the guise of consultation), in which questions were posed about the government's policies. The questionnaire asks about citizens' opinions on various topics without any further assistance, balanced information materials or trained moderation of the discussions. Since 2010, each consultation has had a specific topic. Given the nature of these letters and questionnaires, it is safe to conclude that as instruments of top-down rule, they serve as an agenda-setting tool for the government to influence public opinion. The format of the questionnaire was simplified over the years, and the process has lost its deliberative character (see Table 11.1).

Analyzing the 'strategic turn' in the history of the national consultations by using a normative framework, we present how the *deliberative* character of the national consultations got lost over the years.

Within the analytical framework of *deliberative democracy*, democratic decision-making procedures should be legitimate in their input, throughput and output phases: there needs to be certainty that the opinions and needs of ordinary citizens are translated through deliberative procedures into positive political outcomes. For the national consultations, recent analysis (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015; Eerola and Reuchamps 2016; Geissel and Gherghina 2016; Reuchamps and Suiter 2016) has established the normative aspects of the process and can be summarized as follows (see Table 11.2).

National consultations gradually lost their deliberative character and lacked a normative input and throughput legitimacy (Pócza and Oross 2022). The 2011 national consultation on the Fundamental Law of Hungary was much more constrained in its normative legitimacy than the 2005 consultation, but

Table 11.1 Topics and questions of national consultations

Title (Year)	*Number of Questions*	*Type of Questions*	*Number of Responses**
National Consultation (2005)	10	9 multiple-choice questions, 1 open-ended question	1,600,000
National Consultation about the Pension System (2010)	5	4 multiple-choice questions, 1 open-ended question	200,000
National Consultation about the New Constitution (2011)	12	12 multiple-choice questions (4 options)	920,000
National Consultation about Social Policy (2011)	10	10 multiple-choice questions (4 options)	1,000,000
National Consultation about the Economy (2012)	16	16 multiple-choice questions (3 options)	700,000
National Consultation about Immigration and Terrorism (2015)	12	12 multiple-choice questions (3 options)	1,000,000
National Consultation 'Let's stop Brussels!' (2017)	6	6 dichotomous questions (yes/no)	1,700,000
National Consultation about the Soros Plan (2017)	7	7 dichotomous questions (yes/no)	2,300,000
National Consultation about the Protection of Families (2018)	10	10 dichotomous questions (yes/no)	1,300,000
National Consultation about the COVID-19 virus (2020)	9	9 dichotomous questions (yes/no)	1,796,988
National Consultation about Life after the Pandemic	14	14 dichotomous questions (yes/no)	1,191,000

Source: www.nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu

* Numbers given by the government and not available for verification.

Table 11.2 Transformation of national consultation from deliberative practice to plebiscitary instrument

		2005	*2011*	*2015*
Input legitimacy	Quality of representation	High	Very Low	Very low
	Agenda setting	Limited	Low	No
	Epistemic completeness	Limited	Low	No
Throughput legitimacy	Inclusiveness	High	Low	Low
	Quality of decision-making	Limited	Low	No
	Contextual independence	Limited	Low	No
Output legitimacy	Public endorsement	High	Low	Limited
	Weight of the results	Medium	Limited	No
	Responsiveness and accountability	Medium	Low	Limited

Source: Our estimation based on Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015), Reuchamps and Suiter (2016) and Eerola and Reuchamps (2016: 321).

some controversial questions were still included in the questionnaire. An advisory body was appointed by the prime minister to draft the principles and guidelines of the new Fundamental Law of Hungary. The National Consultation Committee prepared the formula and the questionnaire for public consultations, and as debates about the text of the new constitution were organized among the members of the body, *agenda setting* was completely restricted. When the draft constitution was announced in late February/early March 2011, a questionnaire with 12 questions was sent out to citizens, but no events were held to reach out to the public. Thus, the participatory dimension (*quality of representation*) was completely limited to sending back the answered questionnaires by mail. Since it was returned mostly by voters of Fidesz, the self-selection of respondents might have distorted the results. Further, the reliability of the results is rather limited due to a lack of transparency and public control over the process. The options which gained an overwhelming majority were more or less accurately included in the new constitution. Nevertheless, diminishing legitimacy and increasingly strategic effects are characteristics of the 2011 national consultation.

By 2015, the consultations had transformed into a strategic instrument for mobilizing supporters in political struggles against EU migration policies (external strategic use of consultations and referendum) and for political campaigning in both the 2016 referendum and the 2018 general elections. In May 2015, a questionnaire "on immigration and terrorism" was sent to the Hungarian citizens: the questionnaire contained 12 questions related to terrorism, refugees and immigrants without any open-ended questions; thus, the *agenda-setting* power was once again exclusively in the hands of the government. By the 2015 consultation and 2016 referendum, they almost completely lacked deliberative dimensions and served almost exclusively the strategic aims of the party (advancing legislative agenda, consolidating power and gaining additional legitimacy in international negotiations).

Primary Elections

Among the recently implemented democratic innovations, primary elections constitute an element promoted both at the national and municipal levels in Hungary. After having experienced some primary elections for Hungarian communities living abroad (Rixer 2021), the first primary elections took place within Hungary as a preparatory step for opposition parties in selecting the new mayor of Budapest in the Autumn of 2019. The candidate that won the primaries later also participated successfully in the municipal elections, winning a five-year mandate in the capital (Kovarek and Littvay 2022). This outcome convinced several opposition stakeholders of the necessity of primaries prior to the 2022 parliamentary elections. The preselection process was bolstered by other factors: crucially, the previous victories of the current governmental parties, as well as the fragmented structure of the opposition parties, as well as the preference for stronger stakeholders in the electoral framework.

Despite huge expectations and the relatively high voter turnout in the primaries, the contest resulted in an emphatic failure for the united opposition. The process highlighted the fact that despite the well-established regulatory background behind primaries and the commendable endeavors of civil stakeholders to organize a feasible electoral process without any participation of state actors, the illiberal context imposed a considerable limit on the societal and political impact of democratic innovations in Hungary.

If one were to classify the primary elections of six Hungarian allied opposition parties within internationally acknowledged models of primaries, the 2021 oppositional primary would be considered a deliberative instrument of direct democracy of an open character, in which not only members of the organizing parties but also all interested voters could take part (Ő rsi 2022). The process introduced a double-ballot voting system: if no candidate won a clear majority in the first round, a second round was to be held between the three candidates who acquired the greatest number of votes. Separate electoral commissions were set up by the participating political parties either on the national level or in each of the 106 constituencies to manage the elections (Karácsony 2022). The primaries must comply with the Hungarian tax laws and the regulatory framework for political parties. However, the electoral act is not binding for the organizers; nevertheless, the main principles of the Hungarian electoral framework were accepted by the participating six political parties based on their mutual agreement.

One could describe the 2021 Hungarian opposition primary as a major milestone for the development of Hungarian democracy, which brought several crucial innovative elements into the Hungarian electoral framework (Ferenci 2021). Three main novelties of the primaries are noteworthy as electoral developments for Hungary but also internationally (Tóka and Popescu 2021). First, the Hungarian opposition primary aimed not only to pre-select a political candidate but also to choose the joint parliamentary candidates of the six allied political parties in all 106 districts.[6] Second, the possibility of electronic voting constituted an unprecedented step toward a more flexible and complex electoral framework, where citizens may choose between different ways to cast their votes (Kis-Benedek 2021: 40–41). Although several difficulties were reported regarding the functioning of the E-voting process, the electoral innovation should be seen as a major step forward, especially in light of public health concerns, which will likely influence the landscape of future elections.

Third, the opposition primary was the first occasion for some people under the age of 18 to vote. Those young people, who were younger than 18 at the moment the primaries were held but would turn 18 for the parliamentary elections (3 April 2022), could also submit their votes (Karácsony 2022). However, one should also bear in mind that the framework of the primary elections not only expanded, but also restricted the circle of voters in comparison with the current electoral laws of the country. In the parliamentary elections, Hungarian citizens without permanent Hungarian residence are allowed to vote (at

least for the lists of political parties), which they were not in the primaries, as it required permanent Hungarian residence.

Apart from the aforementioned innovative elements, the primaries can also be considered a success of societal self-regulation as far as voter turnout is concerned. Around 850,000 people participated in the elections (Átlátszó 2021), which is a participation rate of 10.5% of the voting population. The organizers expected a voter turnout of around 7%–8%, while international observations estimated the usual voter turnout in a primary election between 9% and 12% (Republicon Intézet 2021). Either way, the primaries were a major achievement, given that they were an initiative of exclusively private stakeholders who were able to mobilize a considerable number of voters.

Thus, primary elections were supposed to provide impetus for revitalizing Hungarian democracy; the new legal instrument was a popular initiative even among those who did not share the views of any of the six participating political parties. However, political developments beyond the primaries demonstrated clearly that although all formal criteria were fulfilled, the Hungarian model still lacks legal, political and societal traction, and is, therefore, far from being an influential component of the Hungarian democratic framework. The six allied parties were motivated to cooperate by a series of unsuccessful attempts to challenge the current government, but their forcibly concluded agreements remained fragile and ill-founded. The preselection of prime minister candidates was won by a provincial mayor coming from outside all six allied political parties (Financial Times 2021), and none of the participating political forces showed a clear willingness to support his campaign (Gosling 2022). Moreover, the united opposition managed to elaborate a joint electoral framework, but the common electoral program was published just before the parliamentary elections, and the communication of the allied parties remained contentious. Before the primaries, the only requirement from each candidate was to sign the joint statement of common values drafted by the representatives of all attending political factions (Előválasztás2021 n.d.). After the completion of the primaries, it turned out that the outcome of the preselection was only formally respected by the political parties behind it; the inherently divisive character of the opposition remained unchanged. The six parties failed to appear in the campaign period as a united front that might challenge the ruling party's ambitions for reelection (Daily News Hungary 2021). The external communication of the six political parties and their joint prime minister candidate as a seventh actor was conspicuous, meaning that the will of the voters participating in the primaries was almost entirely neglected.

One side of the complex puzzle constitutes the migration of democratic innovations into various official legal and political frameworks. The preselection of opposition candidates met all the formal requirements set for primaries and did indeed invigorate the discussion on potential alternative instruments of democracy. The other side of the coin is the facade of Hungarian primaries: despite the construction of a seemingly well-functioning model, primary elections failed to increase the deliberative and direct character of Hungarian

democracy. Instead of the will of the people, key policies and preferences of the united opposition in the campaign were determined by the leadership of the political parties. Launching primary elections was a great opportunity to foster inclusivity in the political processes, but due to a lack of serious intentions, the initially promising project remained mainly fruitless (Fazekas et al. 2022: 170–175). Nevertheless, the innovative elements of primaries and their mobilizing ability show that with a greater political culture and support from the organizing parties, further perspectives could be opened for (Hungarian) primary elections in the future.

Citizens' Assemblies

In the following section, we turn to another example of democratic innovations: citizens' assemblies. It is worth mentioning that in addition to citizens' assemblies, a second innovation was introduced for the district of Budapest and other municipalities, that of participatory budgeting.[7]

Drawing on the tools of deliberative democracy, citizens' assemblies aim to involve citizens concerned with public affairs to substantively participate in a deliberation process until a decision is made. Citizens' assemblies are usually defined as "[…] a form of deliberative mini publics that include a randomly selected body of citizens to reason together about an issue of public concern" (Oross, Mátyás and Gherghina 2021: 2). They draw their initiative from a different level than the previous examples: citizens' assemblies can be organized by municipalities or nongovernmental organizations. Despite their rather short history, several examples can be found to prove their significance: they can be a suitable tool for a wide range of debated issues. The very first one was held in 2004 in British Columbia and aimed to address the questions around electoral reform (Fournier et al. 2011). Further, the Irish Citizens' Assembly in 2016–2018 focused on politically and socially problematic areas unresolved for years: same-sex marriage and abortion (Farrell et al. 2018). Moreover, the French Citizens' Convention in 2019–2020 focused on climate change, which proved to be a strong mobilizing factor (Česnulaitytė 2020: 36; Delooz 2021). An important element of this deliberative tool is that the participants are also involved in a process of learning about the issues through presentations given by experts.

There is no direct tradition of citizens' assemblies in Hungary, with only a few similar precedents (Oross 2020: 113–14); only cases outside of Hungary could be analyzed. Hungary had to wait until 2020 for its first citizen's assembly, and for now, a professional network is also present, which aims not just at raising awareness of the instruments of participatory democracy, in particular citizens' assemblies, but also promoting and helping with organizing them.[8] Four have been held so far, all of which have been met with extremely limited press coverage.

Of the four, we will here present the first three citizens' assemblies. They were held in Budapest in 2020, Miskolc in 2021 and again Budapest in 2022.[9,10] All three followed a fixed schedule of two weekends, divided into the following

stages: learning, consultation (optional), deliberation and decision-making (Česnulaitytė 2020, 36–37). In this section, we will present briefly these citizens' assemblies, with particular emphasis on the initiation process and general experiences. Our analysis is based on the reports prepared after each citizens' assembly.[11]

The 2020 Budapest[12] citizens' assembly was organized around an initiative launched in the spring of 2019. This project included volunteers and civil society organizations with the aim of establishing the very first citizens' assembly in Hungary, and the Municipality of Budapest took up the idea. The topic of debate was similar to the French citizens' assembly: *There is a climate emergency – What should Budapest do?*

At the beginning of the preparatory work for the citizens' assembly in Miskolc,[13] three collaborating organizations, DemNet,[14] Dialóg Egyesület (Dialogue Association)[15] and the Miskolc Municipality, held several consultations and reviewed the challenges facing the city, the experiences of the residents and the goals set by the administration. This process resulted in the establishment of the topic of the community meeting: *Air! We pollute it, we breathe it. What can we do together to improve air quality in Miskolc?*

Unlike the previous two, the 2022 Budapest citizens' assembly, convened by the Municipality of Budapest, was not focused only on local issues but was part of the Conference on the Future of Europe.[16] Entitled *Budapest in Europe*, the idea of this assembly was for citizens of the EU to express their views and suggestions on the future of the EU so that competent EU bodies can act on them.

Following good practices from other countries, participants were selected using a two-stage random selection method.[17] The first step was to send invitations to 10,000 (10,100 for 2022 Budapest) randomly selected residents of Miskolc and Budapest, representative of the age, gender and population of the city (aged over 18), inviting them to register for the community meeting. During the registration period, 420 valid registrations were received in Miskolc, 333 in Budapest in 2020 and 314 in 2022. At this point, registrants were also required to indicate their educational qualifications. From these registrants, an open-source software was used to select (in a representative manner) 50 members for the citizens' assembly (40 for the 2022 Budapest assembly) – some of whom declined to participate, leaving a total of 46 participants in Miskolc, 39 in 2020 Budapest and 32 in 2022 Budapest. With these numbers, the assembly could be conducted over two weekends, ensuring representativeness and diversity. The 2022 Budapest citizens' assembly took place during the peak of a COVID-19 wave, so it was held in a hybrid manner without any disruptions.

The organizers provided remuneration of HUF 40,000 (approx. €100) and HUF 32,000 (approx. €80) in Miskolc for the work of the participants, and it is important to underline that professionally trained coordinators, i.e., facilitators, assisted the work throughout.

The citizens' assembly started with the learning phase, the aim of which was to provide participants with the knowledge background they needed to make

decisions at the end of the assembly. After listening to a number of individual speakers, members discussed in smaller groups what they had heard and then raised questions for the speakers.

The next stage was about formulating proposals. A fruitful discussion was launched on the details of possible sets of recommendations for the municipalities. These processes resulted in the formulation of concrete suggestions. Following this phase, participants evaluated these proposals, and the ones with the highest support were selected for the final round.

In the next step, participants developed and discussed the content of the proposals. The adopted recommendations were summarized in the order the participants ranked them, with a description and indication of advantages and disadvantages.

After all three citizens' assemblies, the organizers asked participants to fill out short questionnaires to gauge their experiences.[18] The following can be gleaned from these reports: for 2020 Budapest, participants' sense of knowledge about the discussed issue increased after the assembly, and they felt they had access to all the information they needed to learn about the topic. The outcomes also showed that this method can improve the quality of the dialogue between people and that the assemblies increase mutual trust. Perhaps one of the most important bits of feedback is that the support for the final package of proposals was very high, i.e., "using the right methodology, a consensus opinion can be built and the participants feel that the decision taken together is acceptable to them" (DemNet 2020, 40).

In Miskolc, also by using questionnaires, the organizers explored the experiences of the participating stakeholders. This shows that participants were clearly driven by local patriotic feelings, indicating a desire to have a say in public affairs. Participants reported an increase in their knowledge of the theme of the assembly, and overall, they had a good opinion of the organization and the assembly itself. Many respondents to the questionnaires reported a strong feeling that their voices counted and their views were taken seriously.

In 2022 Budapest again, questionnaires were used to gauge participants' experiences.[19] They showed that participants were engaged in the process of deliberation without external pressure and that participants not only listened to each other during the deliberation but were also empathetic and open to each other's views. Overall, the majority were satisfied with the deliberation, but this conclusion is (at present) based on the reports published from the event by the municipality itself. Beyond the questionnaire, participants said that they were pleasantly surprised with the institution of the assembly and that it was pleasant to see that people wanted to hear each other's views and find common solutions.

Regarding the impact on policymaking, on the one hand, it is worth pointing out that these cities are good indicators that it is not only the capital with potential but with active and engaged residents. Smaller cities also have the ability and willingness to hold such assemblies. As can be seen, it is not only strictly local issues that can be addressed through citizens' assemblies. On the

other hand, when it comes to impact on politics, although the readiness of municipal governments should be highlighted, the real question is: what happens to the proposals that emerge from the citizens' assembly? The basic expectation is that decision-makers promise to respond publicly to the final proposals and to be clear about what they can and cannot implement. We know that following the 2020 Budapest citizens' assembly, the municipality incorporated the proposals into its 2021 climate strategy, as originally committed, but the implementation of it is not clear yet (Csendes-Erdei 2022). Following the 2021 Miskolc citizens' assembly, the municipality continues to work with some members of the assembly on the implementation of the proposals (Csendes-Erdei 2022). An important step from the municipality is that 17 members of the assembly have since become climate ambassadors in the city (Demnet 2021). As for the 2022 Budapest citizens' assembly, the municipality's staff has uploaded the package of proposals to the digital platform of the conference series (Budapest Közösségi Gyűlés n.d.).

One could assume that while the institutional framework for the citizens' assemblies is largely in place, the citizens' assemblies have not yet left a significant imprint on policymaking (for an illustration of how far they fall short of a successful outcome, see the example of Irish Citizens' Assemblies, which went all the way to deliberating on constitutional questions and gave citizens a real decision-making position (Farrell et al. 2018)). Additionally, it would be good to cautiously presume that a national-level citizens' assembly would have a more substantial impact.

Concluding Remarks

The chapter presented the kind of efforts coming from three different political directions to renew democracy in Hungary. As presented earlier, all these efforts faced similar obstacles, namely the nature of the illiberal environment and a lack of political culture. The chapter presented these aspirations in three subsections. We can conclude that political actors are currently at the stage where they are able to implement the elements of such constructs; they can create them, but if we look deeper into each case, we see that beyond creating the formal framework, they fail to have a meaningful impact on policy and decision-making.

As regards the national consultations, the promising aspect is that it appeals to the opinion of citizens, as it is a poll-like, aggregated type of instrument, applied as a reflection on policy issues. Nevertheless, over the years, it has demonstrably lost its deliberative character, and by 2015, it had regressed.

In terms of the primaries, we can say that political actors were able to organize and create the conditions for such events; they provided citizens with various methods to vote – including remotely online – they mobilized voters for a campaign with their own tools. All these could be considered as meaningful developments, especially from the democratic innovation and self-organizational point of view. On the other hand, it also shows a lack of political culture,

as at the same time these actors ignored the outcomes. There is no cohesion, and at the end, it is they who contribute to the lack of impact on politics.

The citizens' assemblies considered were successful in bringing about fruitful conversation between participants and municipalities and raising awareness. Nevertheless, what we noted, on the other hand, is that, ultimately, there is little tangible impact on politics and policymaking, nor is there meaningful commitment from stakeholders to implement the results of the assemblies. However, the 'process nature' of the citizens' assemblies should be highlighted, i.e., we need to allow time for it to develop, and criticisms need to be formulated with caution.

As a final remark, the chapter presented initiatives to renew democracy in an illiberal framework, not only at a national but also at a local level. The examples detailed in this chapter – including all their advantageous and problematic features – can be taken as preliminary mapping of how democratic innovations can establish, operate and have an impact in such a challenging political environment.

Notes

1. For a non-Western society, see the example of China: He (2014).
2. Hajnal and Boda (2021: 79) refer to Pap (2017).
3. Oross (2020: 105) refers to Enyedi (2009).
4. What did Hungary do for you? What are the reasons of your disappointment? How did you find life before 1990? What are you afraid of? What decisions would you like to influence? What should be changed? What should be our common goal?
5. The National Consultation Foundation published a book (Kindert and Palatinus Woth 2005) about the results of the consultation, providing not only the stories of the board members and the main results of the questionnaire but also a statistical analysis of the preferences of participants (*public endorsement*).
6. Lessons from the Hungarian Opposition Primaries. Interview with Andrea Virág, director of strategy at Republikon Institute (Hungary) (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom 2021).
7. For the Hungarian perspective, see Oross and Kiss (2023); Kiss, Oross and Csukás (2023).
8. Közösségi Gyűlés (Citizens' Assembly): https://www.kozossegigyules.hu.
9. The first weekend of this citizens' assembly was held in December 2021, but for reasons of simplicity, we will refer to it as the 2022 Budapest citizens' assembly (Budapest Közösségi Gyűlés (Budapest Citizens' Assembly) https://kozossegigyules.budapest.hu/).
10. The fourth was held in 2022 in Érd, but a report has not yet been prepared (Demnet n.d.). Registration is also underway for the next Budapest citizens' assembly.
11. 2020 Budapest (Demnet 2020); 2021 Miskolc (Demnet 2021); 2022 Budapest (Budapest Közösségi Gyűlés n.d.).
12. Budapest is the capital of Hungary, consisting of 23 districts and home to more than 1.7 million people. Its mayor since 2019 is a member of the Hungarian green party (Dialogue for Hungary).
13. Miskolc is a city in the north, with a population of more than 150,000. It has had an independent mayor since 2019.
14. https://demnet.hu
15. http://www.dialogegyesulet.hu/
16. Konferencia Európa Jövőjéről, https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en
17. On the random selection algorithm, see Flanigan, Gölz and Gupta (2021).

18 For further analysis on participants' attitudes and knowledge about climate change, see Oross (2021).
19 Parallel, through an online survey, selected participants were asked to what extent populist attitudes are influenced by participating in deliberative democracy (Oross and Boda 2022).

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