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Manchester Metropolitan University

Understanding developments in Participatory Governance

A report on findings from a scoping review of the literature and expert interviews

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1. Introduction

The following report presents findings from a scoping review of the literature and a series of expert interviews carried out between April and December 2021. The purpose of both the scoping review and the interviews was to gain an overview of recent practice in participatory governance, looking at initiatives across Europe over the past decade. By participatory governance, we refer to participatory forms of political decision-making used to improve the quality of democracy (Geißel 2009, cited in Heinelt 2019). More specifically, we were interested in understanding whether and how efforts at institutionalisation and rapid digitalisation are facilitating deeper embedding of participatory governance within politics and policymaking, by identifying and analysing innovations, new insights, and persistent barriers. Furthermore, we examined what efforts are being made to include disempowered people within analogue and digital spaces, how certain groups continue to be excluded, and which strategies are being adopted to deepen inclusion.

Both the scoping review and expert interviews were guided by three overarching research questions:

1. How are developments in participatory and deliberative designs, at different scales of government, facilitating embedding of (empowered) public participation?
2. How are digital technologies being used to facilitate public participation?
3. How are under-represented groups and marginalised voices/ interests being included?

The report builds on previous work by Bussu et al. (2022) on "Embedding Participatory Governance" to distinguish between embeddedness and institutionalisation.

> Embeddedness of participatory governance is different from institutionalisation, even if the literature often uses the two terms interchangeably. Institutionalisation "can hinder […] embedding if it is designed to bypass engaged civil society actors in "an attempt to tame radical energy" (Blaug, 2002:107). Similarly, it might prevent embedding if participation is designed to have a low-impact on policy-making (Pogrebinschi and Ryan 2017; Tejado 2012), only providing a democratic veneer to legitimate policy that has already been decided elsewhere." (Bussu et al. 2022 : 5).

Embeddedness also entails *rootedness*. Embedded institutions, such as elections or the right to protest, would be "difficult to abolish or bypass", unlike most democratic

innovations, which are easily side-lined and ignored by policymakers whenever they do not fit their agenda (Bussu et al. 2022 : 5). To say that participation is “embedded” requires us to think of participation as being in a dynamic, active, productive relationship to other institutions.

As Bussu et al. (2022) point out, “Policymakers often require a policy ‘product’, but the process itself is central for actors engaged in meaningful participatory learning and action. Thus, dynamics of embedding often develop through social experimentation to capture local knowledge and context-specific priorities and definitions of participation” (p.11). In other words, participation is embedded when it imbricates with an existing culture, and it is continually being realised and reworked. The formation of a participatory culture is a process of ongoing learning on the part of all actors in the system; it is through participatory learning that culture is reshaped. Embeddedness is also facilitated by, and expressed in, the informal practices adopted by actors working within formal institutions to connect the latter with civil society. This is a continuing process of political work that involves contesting informal rules in use and organisational self-understanding (Blanco et al. 2022; Escobar 2022).

This report is structured into five main sections. Following this introduction, the next section describes the methodological choices informing the scoping review and describes how the expert interviews were carried out. Section 3 explores recent practice reflecting on the limits of institutionalisation in achieving empowered participation and assessing the persistent barriers that hinder embedding of participatory governance. Section 4 looks at participatory governance processes with a focus on inclusivity: we examine barriers to inclusive participation and methods and designs that can help strengthen intersectional inclusivity. Section 5 assesses developments in digital participation, reviewing recent innovations and exploring analogue/ digital interactions within hybrid processes. Finally, the last section offers some concluding remarks and proposes a future research agenda.

This report puts in conversation literatures on participatory governance, deliberative democracy, coproduction, community engagement and civic tech, which rarely speak but would greatly benefit from each other’s insights. We review several innovations to foster public participation online and in person, reflecting on how empowering and

inclusive they are. The report has a strong practical orientation and aims to encourage new thinking and practice that conceptualise participation as an ecology of different spaces, approaches, and actors, with an emphasis on social justice and redistribution of political and economic power, and paying attention to everyday practices.

2. Methods

2.1 Scoping Review

The methodology for this review was guided by recommendations for conducting scoping reviews outlined in Levac et al. (2010) and Arksey & O'Malley (2005), as well by the structure of Campbell et al.'s (2018) scoping review of literature on the impact of participatory budgeting on health and wellbeing.

Because the questions aim to provide an overview of the field, we sought to strike a balance between theory and empirical work, capturing some items containing case studies and rigorous empirical evaluations, some theoretical papers, and some ethnographic work. As the review seeks to ascertain the direction in which participatory governance may be headed, we thought it important to include a) studies exploring innovations that serialise and couple participatory deliberative processes and representative institutions to help strengthen citizen input on policy decisions; b) studies of grassroots practice of participatory governance; and c) studies of practitioners' experience as gatekeepers and facilitators of participation. We acknowledge the difficulties of tracing the impact of participation, given the complexity of policymaking, as economic and political decisions are hardwired in laws, regulations, fiscal arrangements, customs, practices that are all but invisible to outsiders. We have therefore included several articles focusing on public officials, and issues of organisational culture are of particular relevance to the concept of 'embeddedness' outlined above. The practices (both formal and informal) and working routines of public officials and administrators are central to the question of embedding participation, but so are public officials' own beliefs surrounding participation and collaboration, their identities, their perception of their own roles within the democratic system, and their expectations about citizens' role.

The review covers literature published between 2010-2022. There are several reasons for focusing on this time-period. Firstly, the past decade saw renewed emphasis on public participation, following the emergence of social movements such as Occupy or the Indignados movement in Spain, in response to the 2008 financial crash and the austerity politics that ensued, and later the rise of movements like Extinction Rebellion

as a reaction to the deepening climate crisis. Within a context of growing populist tendencies on both the left and the right of the political spectrum and increased polarisation, processes of participatory governance are perceived as a possible antidote both among public officials and civil society, and attention from the media, policymakers and the general public towards democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting and randomly selected mini-publics is growing at different scales of government (see: Jacquet 2018, Fishkin et al. 2021, Suiter et al. 2021)

Secondly, the publication in 2012 of Mansbridge et al.'s 'A systemic approach to deliberative democracy' represents a turning point in the literature and marks a 'systemic turn' in the field. Whereas literature on deliberative and participatory processes published pre-2010 tended to focus on isolated initiatives, this latter period has seen a shift towards thinking in terms of democratic systems and interactions across different spaces of representative, deliberative, participatory, or direct democracy, to enhance overall epistemic value and democratic goods.

We initially conducted a number of literature searches guided by the three research questions outlined in the introduction to this report and centred around the terms 'participatory governance', 'democratic innovations', 'participatory democracy' and 'civic participation', in combination with numerous other terms.[1] We restricted the search to peer-reviewed articles, books and grey literature examining European cases from a broad range of disciplines and written in English. Initial search results yielded 1,314 items; these were screened by title and abstract. The next stage entailed reading the full text of selected articles to assess suitability; 44 articles were first selected for final coding and one item from 2009 (Karpowitz et al., 2009) was also

[1] Search strings: String 1: "democratic innovations" OR "participatory governance" OR "participatory democracy" OR "civic participation" AND Institutional* OR embed*; String 2: "democratic innovations" OR "deliberative" AND "transmission mechanisms" OR coupling OR serialization; String 3: "democratic innovations" OR "participatory governance" OR "participatory democracy" OR "civic participation" OR "deliberative democracy" AND digital* OR "digital technolog*"

included due to its theoretical uniqueness and high relevance to the project. The final selection excluded 10 items that, after in-depth reading, were not deemed sufficiently relevant to our research questions. Following the initial coding process, we tapped into the collective knowledge of the wide network of scholars of democratic innovation supporting this project to address gaps in the review. We identified 31 more items, including a few forthcoming articles and book chapters. In total, 66 items were included in the scoping review.

2.2 Interviews

We integrated findings from the scoping review with nine expert interviews carried out by co-authors of this report. Interviewees include a balanced mix of academics, practitioners, policymakers, and community activists, who either were involved in or delivered, designed, or evaluated recent experiences of participatory governance. Interviews were on average one hour long. They were all conducted online (via Teams or Zoom), recorded and software transcribed. Transcriptions were proofread by the interviewer and coded by the project lead (Bussu) using NVivo software of qualitative analysis.

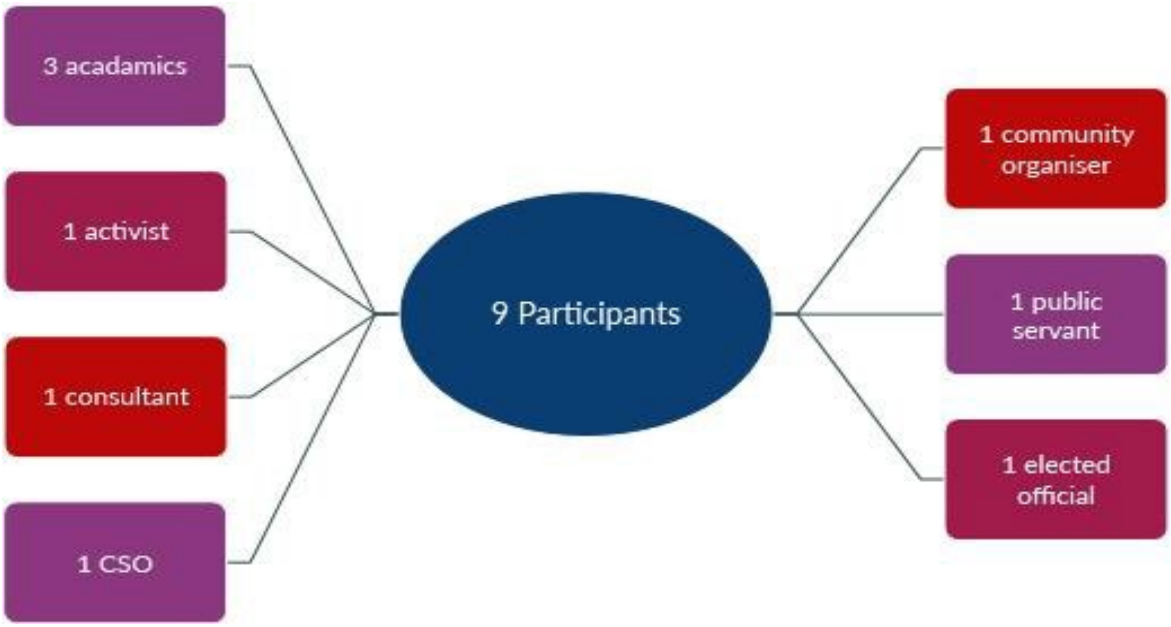

Figure 2.2 Interviewees' different roles in participatory governance

Data was analysed thematically. Codes were developed to identify patterns within the data and incorporated into themes. Thematic maps aided the generation of themes and helped the researchers consider the links and relationships between different themes. Thematic analysis generated similar themes as those identified through the scoping review. In the following sections, we present findings from both the scoping review and expert interviews under thematic sections, organised into three macro-sections on *Empowered Participation*; *Inclusive Participation*; and *Digital Participation.*

3. Empowered Participation

For participation to be truly embedded, it must be empowered. This is a recurrent theme within the literature. What does empowerment mean, however? As della Porta, Reiter & Alarcon (2014) point out, the term is used in two accessions. First, in Archon Fung's (2003) take of the word, empowerment is the "expectation that citizens' participation and deliberation will directly affect public action" (della Porta, Reiter & Alarcon, 2014: 103). This entails that for a process or mechanism to be considered empowered, it must have a demonstrable link to policymaking, rendering participation 'meaningful'. Secondly, empowerment refers to "citizens' empowerment in terms of skills and capacities" (ibid.).

The perception of empowerment (or lack thereof) is central to the experience of participants and, therefore, to long-term embedding of a participatory culture. Historically, the issue of limited follow-up on citizens' ideas and recommendations has been one of the main challenges hindering the practice of participatory governance. Recent literature continues to report cases of limited engagement with citizen input, which inevitably fuels distrust. It is not uncommon to find examples in the literature of officials being accused of making unilateral decisions and side-lining the outcomes of participatory exercises (Escobar, 2014: 11; Bennett et al, 2021: 17). Participants in Community Councils (CC) in Scotland, for instance, complained of a lack of meaningful participation and transparent decision-making. As a solution, CC participants proposed providing better resources to promote engagement and support for CCs in monitoring and scrutinising decisions, including training in legislation, finance, etc. (Escobar, 2014: 13).[2] Empowerment of both the mechanisms and individual participants is closely enmeshed, with individual training being identified as

[2] The authors followed up on the initial demands of the CCs five years on - see findings here http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/strengthening-community-councils-and-democratic-renewal-in-scotland/

integral to the empowerment of the process, strengthening participants' capacity to engage with and follow up on decisions.

The literature has paid increasing attention to strengthening impact through coupling of participatory spaces and centres of power (Hendriks 2016). Coupling can be too loose, as in the above case of CCs in Scotland, or too tight as in the case of the Irish Climate Citizens Assembly (Harris, 2021a) or the recent UK Climate Assembly (Elstub et al. 2021), where the government framed the parameters of the initiative, thus constricting the scope of its recommendations in advance. As with loose coupling, tight coupling can disempower participation.

Several interviewees also reflected on the dilemmas of using participatory and deliberative processes to open issue framing and agenda-setting, at the risk of a process becoming irrelevant to government (loose coupling), versus tightly controlling the process and deliberation to respond to specific government and bureaucratic needs, prioritising functionalistic goals vis-à-vis democratic potential (tight coupling).

> So, you know the correct thing to do would be to have that discussion with citizens about the extent to which a kind of system change framework is needed or not. The trouble is that, you know, one important thing about these processes is they have to be meaningful and usable for the commissioning, organization, and so that you know, it's, it's, you know, sort of the more, the more you throw up in the air, the harder it is for that commissioning organization to use the results. [Academic 1]

What are then the factors that increase the impact of participatory processes? In Spain and Italy, della Porta, Reiter & Alarcon (2014) find that the most empowered participatory initiatives tend to be the ones oriented towards cultural matters, followed by public budgeting, political participation, and new technologies. In contrast, participatory arenas that had limited impact related to more "heavyweight" policy issues, such as immigration, urban planning, and economic development.

> [T]he data seem to partially justify the criticism linking empowerment with trivial public matters, at least from the perspective of public administration, if we take into account that local governments usually consider urban planning and economic development more strategically relevant than cultural matters or political participation (della Porta, Reiter & Alarcon, 2014: 108).

The degree of bottom-up drive also correlates with empowerment. In general, the stronger the push from civil society, the more empowered experiments tend to be. As for why this is,

> it may be easier [for governments] to promote empowerment when civil society is more structured and present throughout the participatory process. Additionally, the fact that civil society has collaborated with local government in the promotion of a participatory process could be related to a higher degree of understanding or support between these actors (della Porta, Reiter & Alarcon, 2014: 109).

The importance of linking participatory processes to the wider public sphere to increase media attention and public support was often mentioned by our interviewees, who have complained, for instance, of weak links between mini-publics and maxi-publics.

Moves towards institutionalisation and away from participation understood as *ad hoc* initiatives are often advocated for to increase opportunities for impact. There are increasing cases of municipal and regional governments across Europe implementing permanent citizen assemblies (OECD 2020). The Ostbelgien Model, in the German speaking region of Belgium, has become a paradigmatic case of the systemic approach to citizen assemblies. Ostbelgien creates a quasi-institutional connection to parliament, giving substantive autonomy to a new permanent Citizen Council to set the agenda and institute three citizen assemblies each year to deliberate and propose recommendations (Niessen and Reuchamps 2021). This is an example of recent efforts at broadening the scope of invited spaces, as agenda-setting is opened up and opportunities for oversight and follow up are strengthened, through ongoing, back-and-forth dialogue between citizens and policymakers (Bussu and Fleuß, forthcoming).

Institutionalisation does not necessarily translate into greater citizen empowerment. Della Porta et al. (2014: 109) found that in Italy and Spain the more participation in a given region is institutionalised, the less empowered the initiatives tend to be. Furthermore, centralisation and institutionalisation also pose potential obstacles to the embedding of participatory initiatives. As Allegretti et al. (2021: 31-32) have found,

attempts to institutionalise some participatory practices that had emerged organically over time ended up

> subordinat[ing] them into a stiff series of electoral rules, projecting the centrality of the party system on the pre-existing fluid system of civic engagement (Vandelli L., 2015), almost paralysing all the benefits of previous practices, and reinforcing the ambiguity of the relations of autonomy and dependence between the structures of social self-organisation and the hyper-formalised institutional politics.

Institutionalisation might contribute to dis-embedding participatory practices when it bypasses or stifles existing bottom-up participation. Recent literature has found that new state-led participatory processes that are perceived to bypass civil society by placing the emphasis on non-organised participation on an individual basis, often encounter resistance and might risk depoliticising participation (see Borge et al., 2022; Mota and Herranz, forthcoming). Mota and Herranz (forthcoming) find that the movement party Ahora Madrid, whilst displaying strong political will to make citizen participation more inclusive through various participatory mechanisms (e.g., participatory budgeting, citizen initiatives and public consultations), by favouring participation on an individual basis and by lot over associational democracy, eventually understood participation as an end in itself, instead of a mean to transform the political status quo. Inclusive and widespread individual engagement in participatory mechanisms became the main goal, side-lining the ambitions of making genuine changes to the power relations underpinning a neoliberal economy, which had inspired the Indignados movement in Spain in the first place. We might therefore argue that an embedded participatory process will influence how a democratic system reproduces itself and evolves.

A coproduction approach that facilitates closer collaboration between government and civil society actors might help create more inclusive and embedded spaces that bridge the gap between institutions and grassroots. Bennett et al. (2021) reach this conclusion in their study of Scottish Participation Requests, which like many other instances of top-down participatory designs risk taming the critical energy of citizen participation. Participation Requests, under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, allow communities across Scotland to participate in certain decisions carried out by public bodies and local councils. The goal is to create opportunities for people

and groups to have more direct say in their community. Bennett et al. (2021: 18) argue that coproduction "could provide a participatory corrective to temper the technocratic logics that prevailed in the inception and design of Participation Requests in Scotland".

3.1 Barriers and Enablers of Empowered Participation

The role of institutional support in empowering participatory initiatives has long been a key theme in the literature. Geißel & Heß (2018), however, turn the argument on its head by distinguishing between 'institutional support' and 'institutional commitment'. Their study of Local Agenda 21 initiatives shows that, in contrast with previous research, the support and ideological leaning of mayors or city council members in favour of a participatory process correlates very weakly with its degree of empowerment (i.e., impact on policies). Instead, their data shows that institutional commitment (as opposed to institutional support) is a statistically significant explanatory factor. By 'commitment', they refer to the presence of

> comprehensive financial and structural commitments for participatory governance within the municipality as well as former participatory governance procedures: If municipalities foster participatory procedures by spending money on well-conceived participatory plans and special staff, participatory forms of governance are more likely to succeed (Geißel & Heß, 2018: 257-258).

Furthermore, as well as commitment, a history of citizen participation plays a crucial role. Municipalities that have prior experience of participatory procedures appear to adopt citizens' proposals more readily into policy, in a path-dependent process. A "tradition" of participation appears to be transformative: "an enhancement of political efficacy can be observed in these communities" (Geißel & Heß, 2018: 260). In a virtuous cycle, this tradition of public participation empowers people and produces further participatory consciousness amongst citizens.

Expert interviews identified several persistent barriers to, and facilitators of, participatory governance often described in the literature, as illustrated in figure 3.1. Vulnerability of these processes to the political cycle and political interests was often cited as a barrier to the sustainability of participatory governance. However, some

interviewees note that even when there is a clear political champion, issues of administrative capacity to engage with and incorporate citizen input and existing legal and constitutional frameworks can reduce impact.

Public professionals might feel frustrated by citizens' lack of understanding of administrative procedures or the limits of a council's powers, with citizens regularly trying to submit proposals that cannot legally be implemented or that do not fall within the council's remit. This can lead to public professionals feeling exasperated and demotivated to support more citizen participation (Simon et al. 2017: 45; Curry, 2012: 358-9). As a result, many proposals can be rejected without explanation, making these processes cosmetic and exacerbating citizens' feelings of distrust and disengagement.

Interviewees also identified issues of administrative resistance:

> [I] had an interview afterwards with some guy from the economics department, and he told me that the suggestions of the citizens [...] are not good enough and he will not refer to them. [Academic 2]

However, this resistance might also depend on different departments that might be more or less familiar with participatory approaches, as well as policy areas that might be perceived as more or less technical. One interviewee commented:

> Planning engagements are proactive and respond to all feedback that comes in through an institutional process, whereas a new road behind someone's backdoor will get different feedback from impacted residents, whereas youth feedback to, say, new youth facilities is very much sought after. [Elected official]

Problems of political legitimacy were also raised:

> [I]f you're working in politics now, the political pressures are to get things done to produce things that you can present to the electorate in order to get voted in again. And this has a cycle of four years or so. So, there's a big struggle between the desire to work with democracy and participation in democracy and the political necessity if you like, as perceived by the politicians, to get things done. And of course, the minute the politicians act in that way, they act in their role as representatives, you know. And when the pressure is on I've often heard them turn around to me and say, "Well, we

> represent the people, you know," because it justifies their actions. So, I think this is quite a struggle. [Academic 2]

Several studies included in the scoping review are concerned with understanding the attitudes of public professionals. Aschhoff & Vogel's (2019) study of community engagement projects in Germany reveals a 'protective' (one might say possessive) and hierarchical approach to public administration that is still dominant among many public officials. When questioned further, their views appeared grounded in a 'classical' understanding of the duty and obligations of civil servants – the belief that there are rules and legal requirements within which policy decisions must be carried out, and that it is the role of the civil servant to ensure that things are implemented correctly (Aschhoff & Vogel, 2019: 712). This attitude is not limited to Germany or to the civil service but is in fact found across different countries and levels of government (Bennett et al., 2021; Blijleven and van Hulst, 2021; Blijleven et al, 2019; Curry, 2012; Escobar, 2014; Hertting and Kugelberg, 2018), including instances of parliamentarians stating that they simply have nothing to learn from citizens' input (Jonsson, 2015: 15; Simon et al., 2017: 38).

It is perhaps unsurprising that participation led by existing empowered institutions falls short of challenging the status quo and when it does it is met with resistance. Some of our interviewees referred to cultural change as a necessary enabler.

> So I think it is really lame to say that it needs a change in culture of the way we do policymaking […] But, actually it's true in the case of deliberation, you know, it needs… I think it needs the policymaking community to have enough humility, to think that people can contribute meaningfully to the process and that there will be better outcomes if you do engage people. [Academic 1]

Over the past 30 years, the practice of participatory governance has been dominated by top-down, *ad hoc* initiatives with the main purpose of strengthening legitimacy and epistemic outputs of existing institutions (Warren 2014). The redistributive ambitions of participatory democracy, of power and resources, and the ideal of social justice have often been side-lined, as participatory processes have comfortably coexisted with liberal democracy and the neoliberal economy that underpins it, in a context of growing inequality and reduced democratic space. As Lee (2013) explains,

> participation must be properly understood as not only a form of participatory inclusion, but also as a struggle for redistribution of power. To promote meaningful participation by marginalized stakeholders is therefore to promote a shift in power. (p.435)

The most innovative recent practice is therefore aiming at anchoring participation in the community, to support embedding of a participatory culture, through democratisation of political institutions as well as of the political economy.

> [We] built a model of governance that involves not only the City Council of Barcelona, but other institutions that are […] contributing to the platform but not only public institutions or civic organisations [CSO]

> […] The increase of participation from local businesses and, therefore, local people in a positive cultural change fashion, so that those local businesses, simply by the fact of participating more in the local economy, have a sense of being involved in a changing environment. [Academic 3]

In the sections below we discuss further what anchoring participation entails and how coproduction can help bridge the gap between bottom-up democratisation ambitions and bureaucratic functionalistic needs.

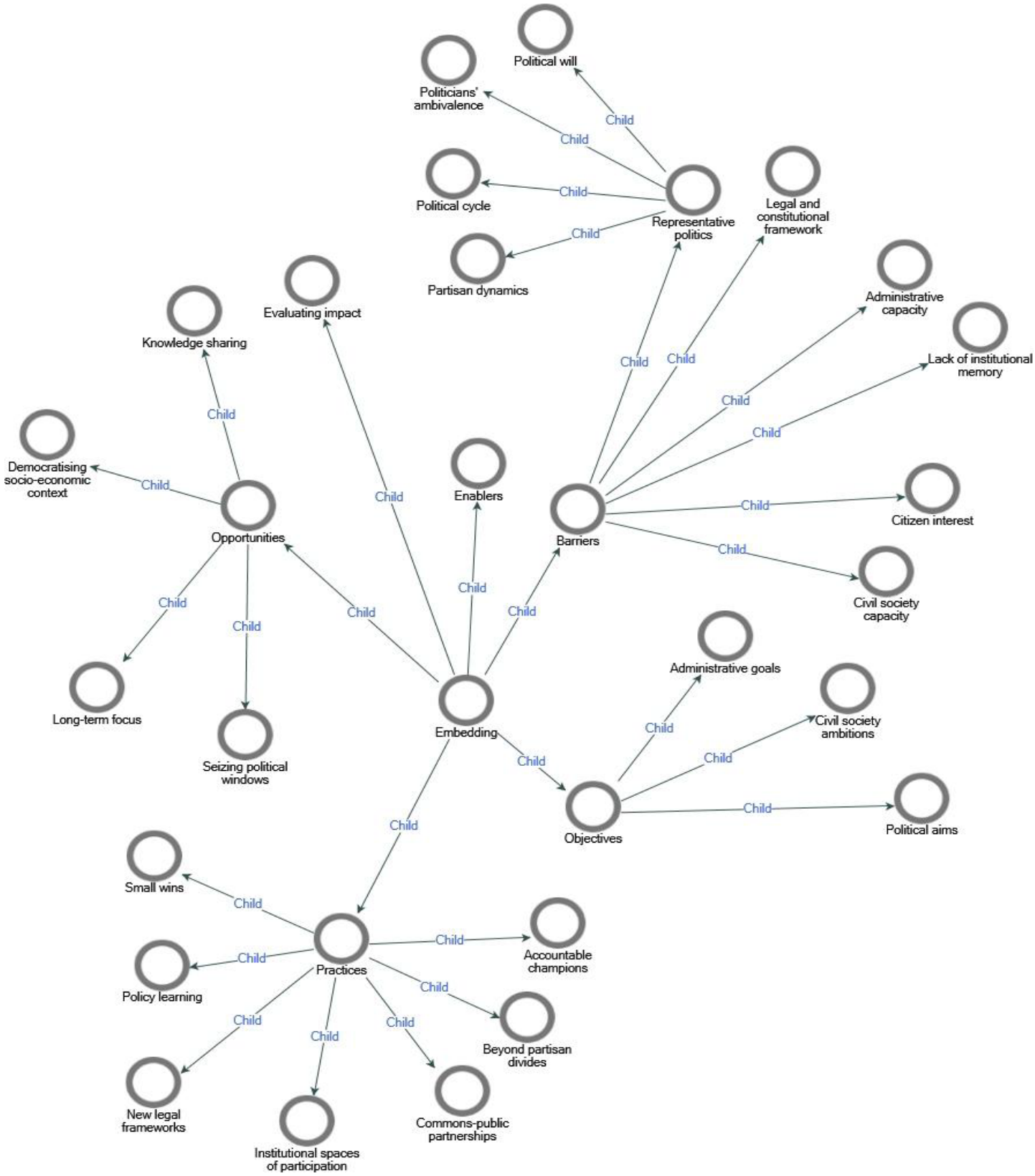

Figure 3.1. Embedding participatory governance – thematic analysis of expert interviews

3.2 Anchoring Participation in Institutions and Communities through Coproduction

Although coproduction (Durose and Richardson 2015) is normally understood as a separate field to participatory governance, it can be viewed as *a means* to embedding participation. Coproduction can broadly be intended as a way of developing policies and knowledge and providing services through the active involvement of professionals, affected groups and other members of the community. Embeddedness, as defined above, relies on culture change, both within institutions and the wider society; coproduction entails building a common language and practice across different groups and cultures. It can help us move beyond the dichotomy of invented/invited spaces, in which initiatives are either top-down or bottom-up, as it requires different actors to collaborate and be transformed through interaction and co-operation (Bussu 2019).

Coproduction acknowledges and utilises the context-specific or situated nature of embeddedness and places the emphasis on different ways of participating, beyond just rational talk, which has been the preferred participatory medium of participatory and deliberative democratic innovations but can often exacerbate existing inequalities in participatory capabilities.

Participation has to respond to and take root in the local culture. As Davidson & Elstub (2013: 368) explain, the rationalist-universalist approach to participation and deliberation no longer holds water:

> [I]n theory it has been suggested that deliberative democracy is universal, that the transposition of deliberation from one polity to another is unproblematic and that institutions and processes designed to enhance deliberation and participation can follow a standardised format in all countries. However, the raft of empirical evidence now available indicates that in practice there may be considerable context-specific barriers to the widespread use of deliberative techniques and thereby the development of a deliberative system, with institutions being employed differently depending on the political system.

The thinking and practice of democratic innovations can also learn from the rich history of community engagement (Ledwith 2020). Community engagement entails an ongoing engagement process, whereby government institutions work with residents as a regular feature of their everyday operations. Agger (2012: 35) writes about participatory urban renewal in Copenhagen as

> characterised by being oriented towards involving local citizens and stake-holders in face-to-face deliberations. The subject of the dialogues varied from being about project goals to being about strategic policy considerations concerning the neighbourhood. Citizen involvement in the two case studies took various forms, from attending single events to more continuous forms of participation in diverse working committees, community meetings, to being part of steering boards and the operations of the programmes.

This approach to participation is not limited to one particular event but is embedded into the workings of the council across different strata and loci. In England, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a Statutory 'duty for local authorities to involve' the community, embracing "citizen involvement in all local decision-making and service provision within the purview of the local authority (and health authorities)". The purpose of the Duty is to 'embed a culture of engagement and empowerment' in local communities (DCLG 2008a, cited in Curry 2012: 347). Of course, it should be emphasised how in a context of punitive austerity measures and cuts to local government, community engagement and coproduction have also become at times a disingenuous strategy to offload onto communities the burden of plugging the gaps in local public services left by a retrenching state (Bussu and Galanti 2018).

More embedded approaches to participation have resulted in new opportunities as well as tensions, as emerged from both the scoping review and the interviews. Whilst giving rise to a new, 'collaborative' type of public official, citizen participation inevitably also triggers resistance as it challenges existing working practices and deep-seated interests, as discussed in the previous section.

Whereas this resistance is also grounded in a complex web of organisational culture and self-identity, there are already significant changes afoot in the field, with the emergence of a more collaborative attitude, driven both by civil society and public

professionals often acting as knowledge brokers and boundary spanners (Bartels 2020; Escobar 2022). The literature points to growing appreciation of the merits of collaboration, both among citizens and some public officials. Blijleven et al. (2019) identify different types of community workers and public officials that have emerged in recent years to foster a new collaborative mindset that understands citizens as partners. Through collaboration and coproduction methods they are forging relationships with communities, with a flexible approach to delivering projects. Because citizen participation is necessarily experimental, public professionals need to become orchestrators and facilitators, building and maintaining relationships between different stakeholders and having to adapt to constantly changing circumstances. Unlike the classical 'top-down' model of civil service, this new type of street-level bureaucrat is characterised by an approach that involves listening, creating an informal atmosphere, connecting with people at a personal level and helping them feel like equal partners (Blijleven & van Hulst, 2021: 283). These collaborative public officials may provide citizens with relevant technical knowledge, skills, strategic advice, or they might reach out to marginalised and excluded groups to increase awareness of the resources and services that are available to them. Fundamentally, they do not understand their role as that of experts but view themselves as connectors and enablers, pulling together different nodes across a complex and fluid network of actors. A key aspect of the new collaborative professionals is their understanding of the importance of situated knowledge problem-solving in specific contexts. They may use enabling strategies to help community groups build the skills, capacities and confidence required to make the most of their situated knowledge (Blijleven et al. 2019: 211).

Interviewees described several initiatives and new practices that can encourage collaboration, through digital and analogue spaces, between state institutions, civil society, and non-organised citizens, reflecting on the tensions between the interests and expectations of these different stakeholders. One example is the Decidim participatory platform.

> DECIDIM is not an institutional project. It started under the institution of the City Council of Barcelona, but currently is governed by an association. [It tries] to build a model of governance that involves not only the City Council of Barcelona, but other

> institutions that are deploying and contributing to the platform, but not only public institutions or civic organisations. […] Social movements are deploying DECIDIM not to move into the institutions but to help us organise political participation in different kinds of spaces. [CSO]

Collaborative practice can support the democratisation of the economy, for instance through community-wealth building, where through public procurement anchor institutions such as the local council, hospital or university can incentivise local cooperatives and common-public partnerships:

> Now by bringing local people into the local economy, and by doing it in ways which are positive such as “the reason you're working with us is because your carbon footprint is very small”, or “the reason you're working with this is because you've created ten new quality jobs locally”. The fact that you're doing that, in that way, creates a culture of participation, I think, and I think that that's, that's a vital thing. […] The increase of participation from local businesses, and therefore, local people in a positive cultural change fashion, so that those local businesses, simply by the fact of participating more in the local economy, have a sense of being involved in a changing environment. [...] One of the things the Preston model encourages is an attention to local needs and local circumstances. [Academic 3]

New practice also requires new legal and institutional frameworks.

> So currently to institutionalise public participation, to develop those pieces of work would need skills, planning, clear direction from the Government [but also] legislation covering institutionalisation of public participation [Elected official]

> We need legal frameworks with continuous changes. The legal framework must be a tool and as such its effectiveness depends on how it is managed. For example, there are municipal regulations to be permanently adjusted to accompany the evolution of processes. [CSO]

This is important to achieve small wins in the short term that can keep momentum for participation.

> Because, if you want to make big change you're going to give people a sense of […] winning small things as we work towards the big things. [Community Activist]

3.3 Grassroots Social Innovation

Grassroots social innovation (GSI) is a particular conception of innovation that can be found across the literature on participatory governance and which, we would argue, is essential to embeddedness and empowered participation.

In recent years, the terms 'innovation' and 'empowerment' have been heavily appropriated by neoliberal discourses. However, GSI is a substantially different concept. Neoliberal thought conceives of 'empowerment' in terms of entrepreneurialism. In this conceptualisation, empowerment is presented as a strategy to untether people from dependency on the state, as a means of stimulating an entrepreneurial, profit-driven form of 'innovation'. On the other hand, GSI is driven by democratic goods. As Boni et al. (2019: 170) explain, this body of theory

> …centres on the relevance of social innovation occurring outside the state and the market. This is the innovation that emerges from below, promoted by citizens themselves, to meet their own needs and fulfil their own desires and objectives. [These] processes… are not always visible, recognised, or valued, [and] are promoted by networks of people and organisations that generate new solutions from the bottom-up for sustainable development; solutions that respond to local situations and the interests and values of the communities involved.

Theories of social innovation hold that innovation requires the cultivation of a supportive culture grounded in richly interconnected networks, through which a form of collective intelligence can emerge and innovate in a socially useful way. Boni et al.'s (2019: 174) examine digital GSI across several Spanish cities, showing how grassroots organisations help deepen democracy by empowering citizens (e.g., open-door sessions; public courses; neighbourhood workshops); disseminating knowledge and information to citizens; and creating fertile mutual aid networks. In the cases of Barcelona and Madrid, methods were used that ensured the open flow of information across entire activist networks rather than through a unidirectional space. Documentation was made transparent, codes and tools were freely accessible and open source, and spaces for open reflection, debate and decision-making were created and maintained (Smith & Martin, 2021: 320).

As pointed out by Smith & Martin (2021), successful participatory initiatives are not created in a vacuum. They germinate over a long period of grassroots activity and as a result of an organic culture of democratic exchange and experimentation. GSI regularly produces output that ends up being mainstreamed and adopted by large-scale administrative institutions, and many participatory digital platforms emerged first within these invented spaces (Russon-Gilman & Peixoto, 2019: 110). Loomio, for example, which is now popular with both private companies and activist organisations, was developed by people involved in the Occupy movement. Decidim was the brainchild of digital activists involved in the Indignados movement in Spain, and it is now used across different countries and by EU institutions.

Whilst grassroots innovations frequently end up being picked up by the state, the relationship between GSI and the state is often ambiguous and even antagonistic. Boni et al. (2019: 174-175) find that attitudes within activist organisations may be mixed, with some activists viewing themselves as operating outside of the state through forms of counter-governance (e.g., by developing tools that help hold city councils accountable), whilst others interact with local councils on selected projects and try to have some input into local government, even if they do not see their principles as aligned to state institutions. Finally, other grassroots organisations openly aim to increase growth and visibility by establishing relationships with a multitude of actors, including local government, in order to achieve impact and social change (Boni et al., 2019: 170).

GSI can be viewed as the petri dish in which a participatory culture germinates. It is in and of itself participatory and networked, it empowers, builds civil society, and helps trapped situated knowledge rise to the surface. In this respect, grassroots activity, a culture of innovation and of mutual learning are the bedrock of embedded participation. Boni et al. (2019: 180) refer to it as an ecosystem, one whose value to the participatory vision must be recognised, protected and strengthened:

> A democratic and comprehensive participatory vision should recognise the importance of innovation processes coming from below, driven by citizens' initiative […] and it should consider citizen participation and democracy not only as a means, but also as ends in themselves […] [Ecosystems] of DGIs can be found within these territories. That is, there are communities and groups of actors that maintain various types of

relationships, which are always changing and are constantly evolving. Consequently, we recommend that the City Councils should recognise these ecosystems and try to understand them in a way that protects them and encourages their evolution. Once again, being aware of the strategies and demands of the actors is fundamental in this regard.

3.4 Section Summary

This section has covered some of the key developments, challenges and opportunities in the field of participatory governance related to the theme of empowerment. Participatory governance often continues to be conceived as ancillary and ad hoc initiatives, although the most recent practice is experimenting with permanent spaces and a more systemic approach, attempting to link different arenas of digital and in-person participation. Participatory governance continues to trigger resistance, both from the bureaucracy on grounds of citizens' perceived lack of competence and from representatives who struggle to justify the legitimacy of empowered participation; however, different departments will have different levels of experience of citizen engagement, and some will show greater awareness of its benefits and the diverse mechanisms to facilitate it.

The review of the literature and analysis of the interviews highlight how, even when participation is institutionalised, it remains vulnerable to political cycles and political interests. Institutionalisation can even hinder embedding of a participatory culture if it is designed to tame or bypass existing participatory practice among grassroots and civil society, or to constrain genuine impact on policymaking, or if empowerment is granted only to mechanisms concerned with more trivial policy decisions. Some of the findings even suggest that the more institutionalised participation is, the less empowered it tends to be. Indeed, public officials can at times protect their power by using their knowledge of institutional language and procedures to exclude citizens. Path-dependence and a history of participation might be stronger explanatory variables of impact than political support. All of this suggests that institutionalisation is not enough to secure empowered citizen participation and may even weaken it at times.

This begs the question: how can we institutionalise participation without blunting empowerment? Though training and increased resources are cited as partial solutions by practitioners, what emerges from the literature is a growing understanding that coproduction might help achieve deeper and more sustainable culture change, as it builds participatory capacities in both citizens and public officials, tapping into context-specific and situated knowledge in meaningful rather than instrumental ways. The last few decades have seen the emergence of a more collaborative understanding of public policy among many public professionals. A new generation of community workers and public officials is helping to promote a collaborative mindset, which embraces the role of citizens as partners and recognises the importance of situated knowledge.

It may be necessary to gain a better understanding of the underlying reasons behind institutional resistance, by developing knowledge of public officials' culture and working routines and how these might clash with citizen participation. Public officials require the capacity and expertise to collaborate with citizens. Yet empirical data from Agger (2012: 34) indicates that many lack the necessary facilitation or mediation skills and feel ill-equipped when confronted with stalemates or personal conflicts during public engagement. This situation can lead to failed initiatives and a loss of faith on all sides.

Another obstacle to embedding participation at the local level is the effect of centralisation. The importance of local knowledge and personal relationships within participatory processes requires public professionals to be adaptable and able to improvise. Yet we find repeated examples of public professionals bemoaning the imposition of technocratic knowledge 'from above' in the form of national guidelines and regional strategies, which can thwart local needs because of their rigid inadaptability (Curry, 2012: 354; Escobar, 2014: 11 & 15).

Davidson & Elstub (2013: 378-379) argue that some participatory and deliberative mechanisms, such as mini-publics and participatory budgeting, operate most effectively at a local level, where issues are more immediate. As such, if citizens participating at this level are to influence decision-making a decentralised political system is required. Thus, more work is needed to understand the intricate balance

and relationship between the need for institutionalisation on the one hand, and decentralisation on the other.

The role played by grassroots activity in driving social innovation and empowering civil society is crucial in deepening democracy, through its inherently participatory nature and its tendency to favour knowledge-sharing and mutual capacity-building. In fact, many participatory technologies (and, arguably, participatory/collaborative mindsets) are developed through grassroots activity, making it a potentially invaluable factor in cultivating and embedding a participatory culture. As such, there is a need for greater understanding of the role played by grassroots democracy, how it can be nourished and whether it can be brought into a more positive and productive relationship with the state and mainstream politics, or whether its function is primarily a disruptive one. If grassroots innovation relies on knowledge-sharing and open participation, then activists' greatest challenge is to figure out how to retain the spirit of knowledge-sharing once they enter government and how to strengthen links between grassroots activists and government, so that situated knowledge can influence policy- and decision-making, without their most radical objectives of social justice and redistribution of power being co-opted and/ or tamed.

Future research might help identify the conditions that foster grassroots innovation, whereby a degree of decommodification might prove crucial.

4. Inclusive Participation

The aim of this section is to identify who is being excluded from participatory governance processes, how and why. Karpowitz et al. (2009: 579) define as 'disempowered' those identifiable groups that are "more difficult to organise, articulate, mobilise, and integrate into policy discussions." These may be formally excluded from aspects of the political system (e.g., because they are denied voting rights or legal standing in administrative arenas) or may lack resources for effective organisation and action. The authors further point out that "policy makers serve these groups' interests less well when they conflict with the interests of better organised groups possessing greater resources to press their case." (ibid.)

The analysis of interviews revealed several themes that resonate with the wider literature and help explain some of the barriers to inclusive participation, from issues of institutional awareness to the perceived lack of legitimacy of invited participatory

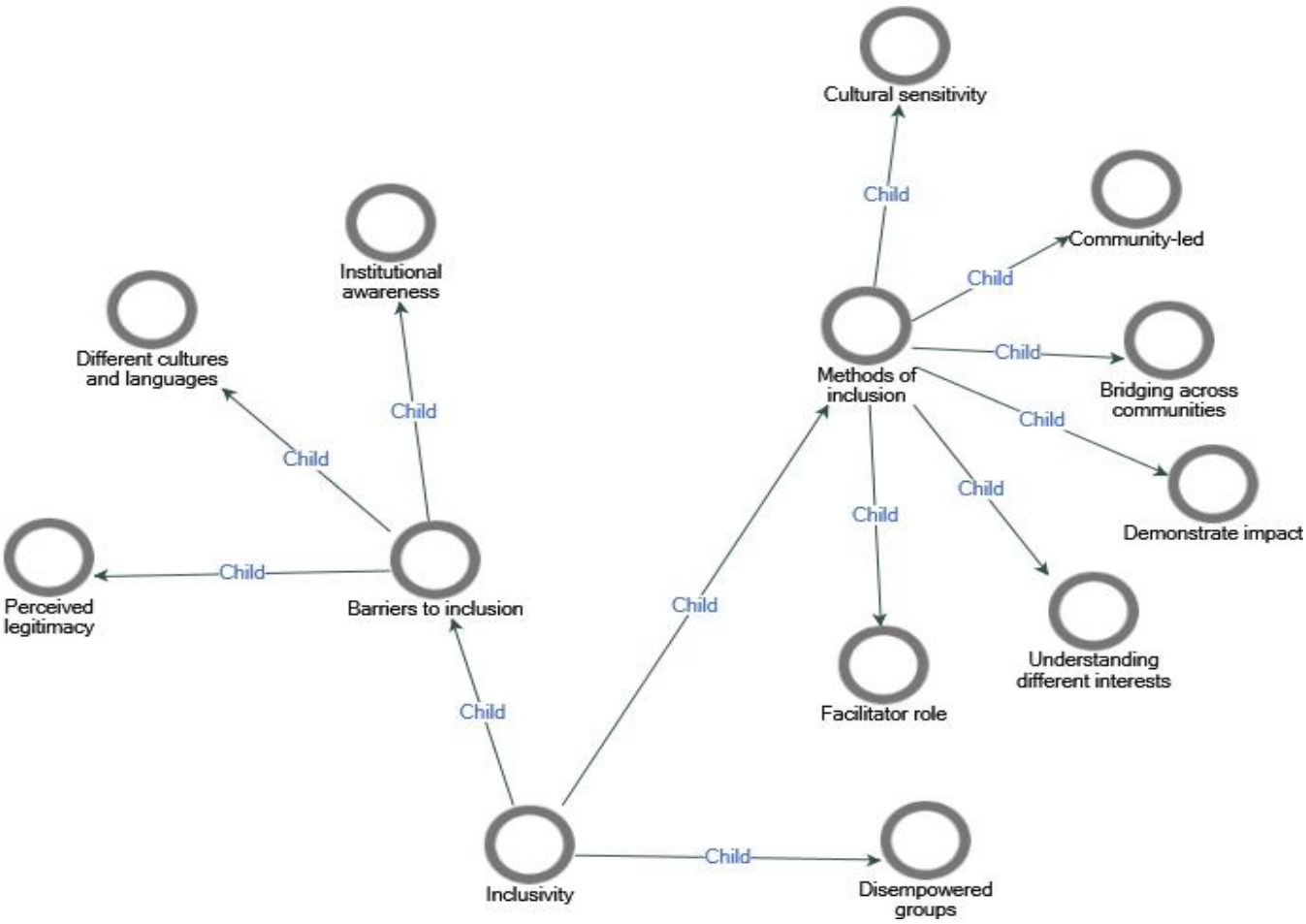

Figure 4. Participatory governance and inclusivity – thematic analysis of expert interviews

spaces among certain disempowered groups. Interviewees also reflected on innovative approaches to bring in marginalised voices (see Figure 4).

This section thus examines participation biases against disempowered groups and reflects on the barriers preventing or discouraging these groups from participating. We finally identify efforts and novel approaches to strengthen intersectional inclusion in participatory governance.

4.1 Barriers to Inclusion

4.1.1 Socio-economic Factors

The literature identifies one indicator of exclusion that remains constant across different contexts: socioeconomic status. In every example, the lowest socioeconomic cohorts proved the hardest to involve (della Porta, Reiter & Alarcon., 2014: 76), and it is notoriously difficult to obtain hard data on those who choose not to participate, as was the case with the Irish Climate Citizens' Assembly, which failed to secure participants from the lowest socioeconomic cohorts and from the Connacht/Ulster region, historically one of the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland (Harris, 2021a: 227). Whilst random selection may provide every citizen with an equal chance of being invited (and even this is debatable), it appears to do little to remove many of the barriers to participation that stand in the way of lower socioeconomic cohorts (ibid.). Many recent deliberative initiatives consider remuneration of participants. Whilst this is certainly positive, there is an assumption that lower-socio-economic cohorts are reached in the first place. There may be a host of factors that alienate them before they have a chance to join the process (e.g., a sense of self-inefficacy, distrust, cynicism).

One of the expert interviewees noted that disempowered groups might not even read a letter of invitation to a participatory process.

> What I learned there was that if a certain group of disadvantaged people receive a formal letter from the German government, they throw it in the trash immediately

> because nothing good ever comes from the […] government. [...] So which means that you couldn't rely on formal channels to include [...] these people. [Academic 2]

Participatory governance designs have too often only paid lip service to economic inequality and limited attention has been given to the socio-economic factors that condition and inhibit participation. Stronger and better organised segments of the population that are traditionally well-resourced, such as the middle-classes, will have a tendency to capitalise on the new political space, as they enjoy greater human and financial resources. In this respect extending governance might weaken democracy insofar as the interests of those who have the time and the inclination to participate will be prioritised. Pro-poor institutional arrangements can be built into participatory structures to help offset some of these biases, as in the celebrated case of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil. However, no amount of facilitation and institutional design will succeed in budging certain socio-economic differences between participants. If the objective is to empower marginalised groups, participatory governance cannot become a substitute for transformative redistributive strategies. Social movement theorists such as **Sidney Tarrow** and **Donatella della Porta** have argued that only social mobilisation can push for redistribution of power and resources. The literature on participatory governance and democratic innovations is also waking up to the fact that participatory democracy and political economy cannot be decoupled if the goal is social justice (Bua and Bussu 2021). The literature on the commons, which is beyond the scope of this report, provides rich insights on ways of democratising the economy as a precondition for substantive and embedded participatory governance.

4.1.2 Adult-Centric, Hetero-Centric, and Ableist Design

When considering the case of non-adults and non-heteronormative actors, research indicates the exclusion occurs at the planning stage. That is to say, initiatives that are often planned and designed from the perspective of adult, heteronormative actors tend not to consider the perspective of every excluded individual, because of a lack of first-hand experience of these exclusions. For example, in her article on queer participatory planning, Broto (2021) argues that heteronormative assumptions can exclude those whose identity does not fit into the preconceived fixed identities decided at the

planning stage. People whose self-identity is more fluid are at risk of being excluded by planning processes that seek to address specific identity-based exclusions (particularly where gender is concerned). Wojciechowska (2019) argues that democratic processes and fora will likely exclude people with fluid identity at the stage of recruitment, during the event, but also at the stage of arriving at a recommendation.

Harris (2021b) shows how an adult-centred approach to participatory planning excludes children and young people. In the case of the Irish Climate Citizens' Assembly, for example, the eligibility criteria and the timing of the call for submissions indirectly prevented the views of children and young people from being incorporated into the process. Whilst children were allowed to submit proposals to the CA, only 3 percent of submissions came from children. Harris suggests that the timing of the call was not friendly to children and young people due to school commitments (Harris, 2021b: 6). She notes that:

> the framing of the question, the eligibility criteria, the timing of the public call for submissions and the limited time allocated to the CA deliberations on the matter, limited the scope of the deliberations and indirectly prevented the views of children, young people and future generations from securing a foothold in the process (ibid.:9).

Similar assumptions can result in the exclusion of the cognitively disabled. According to Afsahi (2020: 753), cognitive disability "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". Social and cultural assumptions are often made regarding what constitutes a rational, autonomous citizen capable of participating in rational deliberation and decision-making that in fact exclude those deemed cognitively disabled.[3] She goes on to propose both a reframing

[3] The first ever citizens' jury with people with learning disabilities was recently organised in Scotland. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has also recently established a Disability Advisory Committee to advise on Ireland's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006). The Disability Advisory Committee is exclusively made up of people with lived experience of disability.

of rational autonomy and measures for the inclusion of those currently considered cognitively disabled. She argues that our definitions of rational agents tend to be talk-centric. Thus, one could expand the scope of 'speech acts' to include non-verbal contributions.

> Embodied participation or the physical presence of disabled bodies [and minds] can [provoke] new conversations similar to rational speech acts. This expansion also encompasses partial and assisted speech and takes into account the importance of the role that may be played by caregivers by supporting or, in some cases, even contributing in place of those with disabilities. Under these circumstances participation may rely on "collaborative speech" that coordinates speech and actions among differently situated individuals. In doing so, it [integrates] the political needs of individuals who have little ability to articulate their own demands (Afsahi, 2020: 761).

4.1.4 Cultural and Normative Barriers

When we try to ascertain who participates, the picture can be different across different contexts. Whilst participants in Estonia tend to be predominantly right-wing (Jonsson, 2015; Simon et al., 2017), in Spain it is predominantly left-wing people who participate, often through the rich associational fabric, and who receive the training and opportunities to cultivate the skills and confidence required to participate effectively (Navarro & Font, 2013).

The picture becomes even more complicated when we compare digital with in-person participation. For example, in the Estonian Rahvaalgatus, not only were participants predominantly right-wing and highly educated, but they were also predominantly male (Simon et al., 2017: 32). Men were also more likely to participate in the Open Ministry's digital platform in Finland, which enabled citizens to propose ideas for legislation and to collaborate on the drafting of new bills or amend existing bills. (Simon et al., 2017: 34-35). In the Basque region's participatory budgeting initiatives blending digital and in-person participation, women largely avoided contributing via the digital platform, yet they outnumbered men in in-person participation (Luna et al., 2018). As examined in greater depth in the section on digital participation, digital platforms exclude certain cohorts, such as older people or rural communities with limited access to fast broadband. Nevertheless, they also include cohorts that tend to be excluded from

other forms of participation. For example, digital platforms appear to reach younger demographics more easily (Simon et al., 2017: 81). The average age of participants in Open Ministry was 21-40 – a younger demographic than participants in many traditional participatory processes. In Cap Collectif's Digital Republic the largest demographics was 25-34, and in Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods 36-55.[4]

Different contexts also present us with different traditions and normative barriers to participation. For example, some Southern Italian cultures allow men to represent entire families in public spaces (Allegretti & Falanga, 2015: 42). Furthermore, planners have to be mindful of and negotiate issues concerning different migrant groups, as "some religions forbid women and men from sitting together or, in some instances, working on certain days of the week" (Allegretti & Falanga, 2015: 43). Some cultures do not permit members to express dissent or criticise higher authorities in public meetings. In others, young people are prevented from opposing the views of their elders.[5]

Interviewees also reflected on these barriers and ways to navigate them.

> We had to set up a Cafe just for Muslim women so they could talk [...among themselves]. And then we had to come up with ideas on how to sum up the debates there and bring them into the general debate. [Academic 2]

Homophobia and transphobia may also exclude people, including individual attacks, organised abuse and institutionalised violence (Broto, 2021: 322).

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[4] A short description of these and other cases mentioned in this report can be found in Appendix 2.

[5] UN Habitat's *The Training Companion for Participatory Budgeting* (2008) provides more details on normative and traditional barriers.

4.2 Addressing Exclusions

Embeddedness within communities is increasingly recognised as an essential approach to reach lower socioeconomic cohorts and other disempowered groups. Engagement with communities through brokers and gatekeepers has been explored, for instance with youth being engaged through schools and university activities (Simon et al., 2017: 72-73), or the use of "ethnic ambassadors" to reach out to specific community groups (Agger 2012). As examined in section 3, this requires a new kind of public professionals that adopt increasingly improvisational, creative and informal approaches to facilitate citizen engagement. They do so by not only seeing themselves as working on behalf of institutions, but by embedding themselves in communities and building long-term relationships based on trust and openness (Escobar 2022).

The scoping review has revealed several innovative measures to tackle the challenge of reaching out to excluded groups. Teele Pehk, CEO of the Estonian Co-operation Assembly, describes how his organisation maps and targets pre-existing networks of civil society organisations to include more young people:

> We have a strategy to first map the organisations, active spokespersons, networks of all three groups, then get to know their activities where we could fit in with our messages (citizens rights and participation channels) and then make a detailed plan of action with different events, media appearances and consultations towards the target groups … For example, the Union of Youth Organisations is raising awareness about the newly acquired election rights for 16 and 17 year olds, and we got our messages to their lectures (cited in Simon et al., 2017: 72-73).

Similarly, the organisers of Leaving Lockdown promoted their initiative through mutual aid groups and local community organisations (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020: 11). Potential participants were asked to complete a short demographics form to enable organisers to select the most diverse sample available. After reviewing the initial demographics, a second round of more targeted recruitment was carried out, contacting additional local groups, and inviting those who had expressed an interest to share the invitations, particularly with male participants who were underrepresented.

A public professional working for the Paris municipality explained how he physically visited places and organisations that he thought would be interested in the city's upcoming participatory budgeting initiative:

> Last year we tried to target the networks through ideas. So, for instance, I would go to this place that is very into recycling to ask people to put some ideas on this very political project… (Simon et al., 2017: 72-73).

In some cases, the use of 'ethnic ambassadors' has proved useful in involving ethnic groups that are traditionally hardly reached. Agger (2012) describes a case in which ethnic minority women were contacted directly to act as environmental ambassadors in their own social networks:

> The ambassadors came from the same culture as the target group, and were thereby able to act as translators and bridge-builders between the ethnic minorities and the planning authorities. The ambassadors had much better access to networks and groups from their own culture than the planners, and in this way they could reach groups that were hard to reach for the public planners (Agger, 2012: 40-41).

A similar approach was employed in *Valore Lavoro* (Labour Value), an action research project involving Roma people in Italy. Here, researchers and Lombardy Region representatives worked in constant collaboration with Roma associations and NGOs that were embedded in Roma networks and whose deep knowledge of Roma culture and needs formed the basis for policy decisions affecting the Roma community.

Harris (2021a) extends the need for inclusion to young people, children, and future generations. For example, in the 2021 Scottish Climate Assembly, to ensure that the views of children under 16 were included, the Assembly used children-friendly methods such as videos, drawings and games, to help children articulate their views, experiences and ideas.

Interviewees mentioned relying on community leaders and ethnic ambassadors to act as gatekeepers.

> Usually we had some kind of, let's say, high prestige person – an Imam or so. And [...] usually [...] they did not just articulate the results of the debate before, but they were

> acting as stakeholders and as stakeholders had manifest interest in the debate. [Academic 2]

> We have community leaders who are keen to get and to give more opportunities to the people who live on those estates, to create businesses and cooperative businesses and move on in life. [Academic 3]

Genuine efforts are being made to strengthen the voice of disempowered groups through grounding participatory initiatives in the local community.

> For example in our local [community] I would consider young people to be underrepresented and seldom heard in the political process and in the development of facilities or plans that affect them. We have set up a stakeholder group. We did our mapping; we set up a stakeholder group of youth representatives – teachers, parents, local community people. They are going to take the lead on the youth facility, where it goes, what the young people want. [Elected official]

These different experiences show that for participatory initiatives to include the most underrepresented cohorts, serious efforts must be made to reach deep into community networks. Whilst mapping out civil society organisational networks is an effective way of reaching certain excluded groups, these methods rely on the existence of associations and organisations that represent specific identities or interest-groups in the first place. As such, it still does not solve the problem of how to reach those who are not associated with or represented by any organisations.

The following subsections reflect on ways of facilitating participation of disempowered groups to ensure as far as possible a level playing field and draw out learning from recent practice.

4.2.1 Enclave Deliberation

Dominant citizens, those who have more confidence and well-defined views due in part to their higher cultural capital and socio-economic status, can make less empowered individuals feel pushed out and disincentivised. Enclave deliberation allows members of a disempowered group to deliberate amongst themselves before joining the wider group. This provides participants with a space in which to deliberate comfortably without experiencing the many exclusions that disempowered groups might be subjected to within a more demographically representative forum. Within

enclave deliberation these groups can “develop their own voice and unique perspectives, highlight their interests and needs, and create [and comment on] joint experiences.” (Afsahi, 2020: 762; see also Wojciechowska, 2019). The purpose of enclave deliberation, however, is not to isolate the group from the wider discussion, but rather to help include it. It is merely the first step in a larger deliberation. Harris (2021a: 10) further adds that enclave deliberations provide excluded groups with a supportive space in which they can “[clarify] their common aims, [strengthen] their arguments and [develop] recommendations. They can also help build capacity within a cohort”.

Whether enclave deliberation facilitates or obstructs learning is a key question in the literature, and more research is needed. Some fear that enclave deliberation may increase polarisation and entrenchment of views. However, the literature reviewed here suggests the opposite is true. Participants in enclave deliberation in the case study covered in Karpowitz et al. (2009) showed increased knowledge of the subject (p.590-591). Understanding of the subject was particularly augmented by discussion with peers rather than by absorbing information from sheets or expert presentations. Participants experienced positive changes in their civic attitudes, as well as in their sense of self-efficacy (Karpowitz et al., 2009: 593-595). Further, experimental data demonstrates that even polarising deliberative events increase participants' knowledge and levels of empathy (Lindell et al. 2017).

4.2.2 Gender-Responsive Participatory Budgeting

Gender-Responsive Participatory Budgeting (GRPB) refers to policies and practical features designed to be applied in the planning of participatory budgeting initiatives, with the aim of removing barriers to women’s participation and creating preconditions for increasing women’s capacity for involvement in PB initiatives (Allegretti & Falanga, 2015: 41-42). Measures may include repeating public meetings at a time that is likely to be more convenient for women. For example, in 2004 in Pieve Emanuele, Italy, as women represented only 20 percent of participants, the municipality succeeded in re-balancing gender involvement by duplicating public meetings, repeating them on the same day at 5pm and providing childcare to allow mothers to take part (Allegretti & Falanga, 2015). European examples are sparse, though similarly effective GRPB

initiatives have been implemented across Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the UK, as well as other measures, such as webcasting of public assemblies.

Though undeniably an important step forward, GRPB also has marked limitations. For one, as Allegretti & Falanga (2015) point out, it overlooks other exclusionary factors with which gender intersects, such as race, socio-economic conditions, age and education. Many inequalities further relate to housing and access to basic services, and, without addressing these, there is a danger of GRPB, like many other democratic innovations, being a merely cosmetic endeavour. There have been several instances in which GRPB has been expanded to target not only women, but other marginalised groups. In the UK, the PB Unit provided training spaces for migrant women, working on capacity-building rather than focusing solely on policy design. Similarly, in Seville, whilst PB was explicitly linked to the Vice Mayor's Office for Women, it also provided specific support to LGBT groups and migrant communities.

4.2.3 Queer Participatory Planning

If it aims to be truly inclusive, participatory governance should become 'margin-responsive', encompassing all marginalised individuals, including women, migrants, LGBTQIA+ groups, children, and any group that may find itself pushed to the margins. Broto (2021) seeks to address this challenge by developing the concept of queer participatory planning (QPP). The aim of QPP is to move beyond an understanding of marginalisation in terms of specific identities or interest groups. To Broto, queerness is in and of itself inclusive and participatory. This is because, rather than being an identity as such, queerness needs to be understood as fluid, "changing through the life course and in specific situations, and depending on the relationships between individuals and social groups" (Broto, 2021: 315). Therefore, overly focusing on identity markers (such as gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) as a means for community participation could prevent "the practical implementation of intersectional approaches to address the multiple, overlapping layers of marginalization that affect communities".

To address these challenges, Broto recommends:

a**. Coproduction**, by collaborating with community members in the production and design of participatory processes, to avoid many of the heteronormative assumptions that arise when a participatory initiative is targeted at a specific identity or interest group. This is because the exclusions that affect each and every individual cannot be known *a priori*, especially by those who do not suffer those exclusions;

b. **Creation of safe spaces and provision of safety training** to allow marginalised individuals to negotiate and navigate the nature of their marginalisation in a safe and constructive environment;

c. **Intersectional thinking** beyond fixed identities and interest groups, adopting an intersectional perspective that addresses the layered structures of oppression and discrimination shaping human lives.

QPP is not without its problems. The erasure of all identity means that we can sometimes overlook very real exclusions that stem from real-world identities, be they gender, religious, national, etc., and related cultural traditions. For example, in a society in which women are not allowed to participate, there is little point in maintaining that gender identity is fluid, regardless of how true it may be. The fact is that more powerful individuals impose exclusions on others based on what they see as a fixed gender identity. Therefore, whilst we may want to maintain the nature of identity as fluid as possible, it is also important to acknowledge and address specific exclusions as and when they occur. This requires awareness of, and responsiveness to, local and cultural contexts, perhaps combining a queer approach (i.e., the use of coproduction, and the creation of safe spaces in which identity parameters are not predetermined) with more targeted, culturally specific approaches. In other words, a flexible framework will take a multitude of approaches to reach those at the margins, which can be understood as ‘margin-responsive’.

4.3 Coproduction as a Method of Inclusion

QPP asserts that there is no way of anticipating every exclusion in a universally replicable manner. Rather, new exclusions are constantly being created in ever-changing cultural, social, and economic contexts. Thus, the most effective way to account for barriers to exclusion is to involve all stakeholders in the production and design of participatory processes as much as possible. A great example of a successful initiative working through a coproduction approach is *Valore Lavoro*, the action research project mentioned above, which sought to help integrate Roma people in Italy into the labour market (Marcaletti & Riniolo, 2015). Marcaletti & Riniolo point out, "Involving Roma people in the project was key to its success. A top-down approach wouldn't have worked because Roma people follow other norms and traditions that would not have fitted with institutionally-imposed specifications". Whereas top-down approaches to impose institutional decrees on Roma people have repeatedly failed, this project was not a bottom-up project, but rather was both "invited" and co-produced. This approach "allowed the project to tap into the unique knowledge of the target population itself such that they were able to propose effective paths of action based on their own needs and unique situations…" (Marcaletti & Riniolo, 2015: 8). Rather than "proposing already existing paths… [shown] to be ineffective with Roma people, e.g., Job Center protocols – [the project started] from the already existing activities that Roma are carrying out, from their needs and also from their abilities…" Thereby, the logic of coproduction "brought about a real added value to the decision-making process and gave effective scope to the aim of empowering people" (Marcaletti & Riniolo, 2015: 12).

Thus, coproduction accounts for what Jaime Lee refers to as the "learning by doing" aspect of participatory governance. "Learning-by-doing couples experimentation with monitoring, and is meant to create a continuously "self-improving" system, in contrast to command-and-control rules that remain largely static" (Lee, 2013: 409-410**).** If deliberation is, as often argued, a "school of democracy" that has the potential to change citizens' political attitudes, then coproduction could be viewed as a way for people to develop their own participatory capabilities and participate on their own terms, creating an environment where a participatory culture can develop and embed.

4.4 Section Summary

This section has described how, whilst the features of participation bias are different from context to context and method to method, the lowest socioeconomic cohorts are consistently excluded, and it is difficult to foresee genuinely inclusive participation without addressing socio-economic inequality in the wider society. Participatory governance cannot be decoupled from the political economy. Whilst inclusion methods such as random selection and remuneration attempt to bring in voices often left at the margins, they do not address deeper issues of capabilities to participate and self-confidence, as well as feelings of distrust towards government. Public engagement professionals are developing innovative approaches to connect with, and anchor participation in, the community, with local organisations and community leaders often acting as gatekeepers, and boundary spanners emerging from among public officials to promote more collaborative ways of working. The most marginalised also tend to be the least organised whilst dealing with lower material and time resources to participate. This requires addressing structural inequalities that hinder participation.

Intersectional exclusions from participatory spaces often occur already at the planning stage, as a result of adult-centric, heteronormative and ableist assumptions, as well as a lack of awareness of specific traditions or cultural idiosyncrasies that can affect participation. What these barriers show is that models for citizen participation cannot be universalised, replicated or imposed from above.

Throughout the literature, we find time and again that radically inclusive coproduction that views participants as equal co-designers from the start, during the planning process of a participatory process, might provide an alternative approach. One of the paradoxes of the practice of democratic innovations is that whilst it advocates citizen voice and influence in policymaking, its format often relies on blueprint top-down designs, where knowledge might be discussed by everyday people, but it is not produced by them. Although there is an ever-increasing multiplicity of public engagements, they often “close down forms of inclusion, representation and transformation” (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2020: 351). To realise the aspirations of an inclusive participatory culture we might need to leave behind the interventionist approach that has dominated the field and embrace co-creation of participatory spaces

and the knowledge underpinning them. This might require being genuinely flexible and open to new conceptions of what a participatory space is or could be. It does not mean doing away with established designs such as participatory budgeting or mini-publics but recognise their limit in anchoring participation in the community, particularly when our focus is on those that are hardly reached by political institutions. We can then start imagining ecologies of multiple participatory spaces (Chilvers and Kearnes 2020). By taking an approach to participation that is based on open and plural experimentation and that is margin-responsive (Broto 2021) we might move from a normative and linear understanding of participation towards conceiving participation as multiple, overlapping, co-created and re-created spaces and practices (Chilvers and Kearnes 2020).

Such a radically inclusive approach demands a more reflective, *care-full* approach to participation and participatory design. A mixture of designs and options may thus be needed (Davidson & Stark, 2011). Intersectional thinking provides a means of moving beyond specific interest groups and noticing more complex and overlapping exclusions, focusing on participants as agents (Wojciechowska 2019).

5. Digital Participation

The term ‘digital democracy’ has numerous definitions in the literature. As a report by NESTA neatly explains,

> [for] some it refers to the use of digital tools to provide information and promote transparency, for others it describes the ways in which information and communications technologies (ICTs) can broaden and deepen participation, whilst others talk of promoting empowerment by enabling citizens to make decisions directly through online tools (Simon et al, 2017: 11).

In this report we have tried to cover all these aspects to develop understanding of how digital technologies are being used to facilitate citizen participation.

Opportunities for substantive citizen participation are today strengthened by technological developments and rapid digitalisation that might support greater inclusiveness and scaling-up to achieve goals of mass participation (Aragon et al 2017; Russon-Gilman & Peixoto 2019). However, increasing reliance on digital can exacerbate existing inequalities and create new divides. Although we have already dedicated an entire section to the question of inclusion, some issues around inclusivity are unique to digital participation.

It is important to reflect on the so-called digital divide - a term that refers to the gaps in access to information and communication technology (ICT). The digital divide threatens the ICT "have-nots", whether individuals, groups or entire countries. Education and learning lie at the heart of these issues and their solutions. The gaps that define the "learning digital divide" are thus as important as the more obvious gaps in access to the technology itself. The digital gap often reproduces existing social, economic, political, and cultural inequalities, which are likely to influence the quality of democratic participation. It is worth mentioning here the gender digital gap, also noting the lack of data and studies on the inclusion of dissident gender identities in digital participation. Digital skills are those that allow us to use, appropriate and participate in the design and development of new technologies. In this sense, unequal access to such skills - digital literacy – often conditions women's and ethnic minorities’ position in the digital world, and they are often relegated to the role of mere recipients.

We do not yet know the consequences of rapid digitalization and the impact this will have on citizen deliberation and participation. Whilst there is a burgeoning literature on the quality of online deliberation (Strandberg and Grönlund 2018; Elstub et al, 2021), we still have limited understanding of how hybrid processes work and how interactions affect and change the initial characteristics and functions of either the digital or the analogue elements.

Thematic analysis of the expert interviews identified several issues that once again resonate with the wider literature – see figure 5 here below.

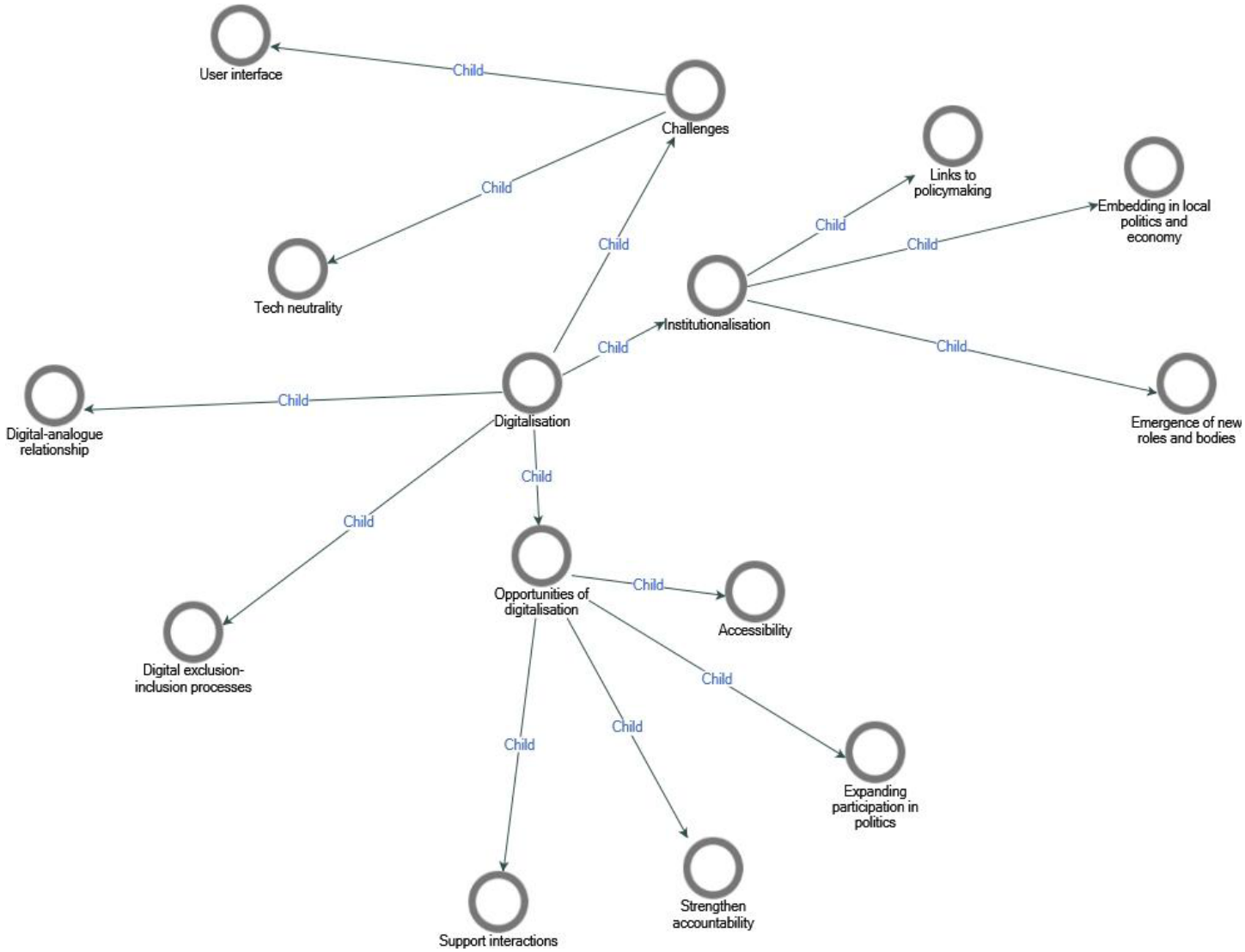

Figure 5. Opportunities and challenges of digital participation – thematic analysis of expert interviews

This section reflects on the digital divide and exclusion patterns we must pay attention to in the context of rapid digitalisation. The section also considers opportunities opened by digital participation and hybrid (digital/ analogue) spaces which can help scale up participation and widen the reach of participatory governance processes.

5.1 Exclusion and Inclusion in Digital Democracy

A prominent factor in digital participation bias is the so-called 'digital divide', the most obvious aspect of which being access to the internet (Alonso & Lippez-de Castro, 2016: 340). Those who are without access to the internet, be it due to their economic situation or their location, are de facto excluded from initiatives that rely exclusively on digital participation. Furthermore, there is also the matter of citizens' technological skills. Without the knowledge required to operate digital platforms, individuals cannot participate (Alonso & Lippez-de Castro, 2016: 340), as was evident in Finland's Virtual Polity experiment in online deliberation, where older participants struggled with setting up their webcams and microphones. The issue of a digital divide was often raised in expert interviews.

> So, you've got at least 800,000 elderly people [in Ireland] who just don't use the Internet, so that's a challenge. [Elected official]

Even when citizens have access to the internet and are able to use platforms effectively, there may be disparities in broadband speed that may exclude certain users (Strandberg & Gronlund, 2013: 412). This was an issue in both Virtual Polity and Leaving Lockdown (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020). Equitable digital participation entails that provisions are made to help those who require technical support. This was also recognised by interviewees:

> We have to be cognizant of the digital divide that exists, and particularly on class terms and allowing people to participate at the level of which they feel comfortable. [Community Activist]

Not only do digital skills allow people to use technologies but also to participate in their development. In this sense, unequal access to such skills - digital literacy – hinders

participation of certain groups – e.g., women; ethnic minorities - in the digital world. In the article "Digital gender gap: women and new technologies" Monica Arenas affirms that "not only does inequality break with equal access to knowledge, but it is necessary to position women in the process of creating it […] it is necessary that women become users, creators and transmitters of information and knowledge through new technologies" (Arenas, 2011, cited in **Does the digital participation gap have gender**?).

The pandemic may be generating new forms of "public sphere resilience" (Trenz et al., 2021) that encourages experimentation, innovation and adaptation of Civic Tech, as participation is increasingly relocated online. However, this process demands a reflection on important issues that have at times being taken for granted, from data ownership to tech neutrality, and which might fuel new forms of discrimination and profiling. There exists an assumption that technology is somehow "neutral", immune from human bias, and that therefore technological bias cannot constitute a factor of exclusion. However, there is increasingly a recognition among developers that "technology, and the processes constructed around technology development, [contain in-built] assumptions, values, inclusions, and exclusions" (Smith & Martin, 2021: 326). It is therefore essential for codes to be open, transparent and available for scrutiny (ibid.: 326). Even when a platform is designed merely to collect proposals from citizens, assumptions and biases are still present, in that council officials largely get to pre-define the parameters and implications of proposals. This privileges certain kinds of knowledge over others in the evaluation of proposals. Knowledge that adheres to institutional norms and terminology is likely to be privileged over the situated knowledge of citizens and neighbourhoods. For digital participation to be truly meaningful, these assumptions must be challenged, which can be best achieved when a platform is co-produced and open source. A potential solution to the problem of tech neutrality, and one fostered by activist developers in Barcelona, has been to use free and open-source software (FOSS), making platforms open, transparent, and available to scrutiny (ibid.: 319-320).

Digital technologies certainly hold potential to increase the scale of participation, as we have experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Practitioners have found that some individuals who might lack the confidence to speak up in face-to-face

discussions feel more confident contributing in Zoom sessions, particularly through the 'chat' function, which allows participants to share their thoughts in writing (Allan, 2020; Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020: 6 & 12). Digital participation also helps involve those for whom travel or distance might be a barrier (Allan, 2020; Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020: 12), which may include people with childcare responsibilities, physical disabilities, financial barriers, and even those whose profession might prevent them from attending.[6] Although not covered in the literature, we may need to consider how individuals who suffer from social anxiety or other mental and emotional challenges may feel unable to attend a meeting or an assembly in person. In such cases, having the option of attending online can be empowering.

5.2 Digital Deliberation and Enhancing Participants' Learning Experience

The quality of deliberation is a crucial measure of success of a participatory process. Participating digitally creates new challenges and opportunities, but both the scoping review and the interviews show a marked preference for in-person participation. Indeed, most of the participants questioned in Allan (2020) stated that in-person participation was "easier, freer, more in-depth and more nuanced". Interviewees in our study pointed out the importance of what happens outside of formal sessions – for example, interactions during lunch or coffee breaks can alter the dynamics during formal discussions and thus form an indelible part of the overall deliberative experience.

> [T]here's no substitute for having people in a room meeting each other, and it was definitely the case with the climate assembly; you could see the conversations going

[6] For example, the Irish Climate Citizens' Assembly completely failed to include any farmers, who were probably prevented from attending by dint of their job requiring them to always stay on site.

> on in the breaks and in the bar and, you know, that was a really important part of it. [Academic 1]

Despite the inherent challenges, Strandberg & Gronlund (2013) point out that the deliberative quality of online democratic innovations can be improved through specific platform design decisions. In Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods, the Your Priorities platform's interface was designed in such a way as to encourage collaboration, such as preventing participants from replying directly to a proposal they disagree with, and instead encouraging them to post more positive arguments aimed at the whole group, as well as to provide counterpoints that stand on their own (Simon et al., 2017: 43 & 80). Some design features can help stamp out abuse and encourage more considered responses and thus better deliberation (Simon 2017: 43, 79-80). Pol.is, for example, is designed to encourage people to work through the group's disagreements, with participants being asked to react to one another's statements one at a time (Simon 2017: 79). Another solution is 'gamification' or encouraging positive deliberation by employing game-like incentives (Gastil & Broghammer, 2020).

Much like in in-person deliberation, digital initiatives can benefit from thoughtful moderation and facilitation. Online processes such as Parlement et Citoyen were moderated and facilitated to deter abusive comments and steer the discussion in a direction conducive to high deliberative quality. Of particular importance was the fact that the moderation was open and transparent, with decisions explained to participants (Simon et al., 2017: 71). According to both the literature and our interviewees, participants take longer to "warm up" online compared with in-person sessions. At the same time, long sessions online are harder to sustain. To address these concerns, when in 2020 the UK Citizen Assembly on Climate Change had to transition online to follow new social distancing regulations, the organisers decided to turn what had initially been planned as a one weekend session into a series of shorter online meetings over several weeks (Elstub et al. 2021).

Jaime Lee described 'learning by doing' as being the essence of participatory governance (Lee, 2013: 405-406). Unless a platform is designed to facilitate learning, participants may struggle to make informed decisions or to reassess their beliefs and attitudes. In one initiative that consisted partly of expert presentations and Q&As, the

majority of participants stated that they learnt more from being able to question experts in real time than from leaving questions on the online platform's chat forum (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020). Similarly, participants stated a preference for group discussion over chatting on the forum. Real-time deliberation appears to be key to learning on digital platforms. Whilst the quality of online deliberation can be high with adequate facilitation, the evaluation commissioned by the UK Parliament on the UK Climate Assembly observed that it is preferable when online deliberation happens later in the process, when assembly members already know each other and have developed good levels of deliberation skills (Elstub et al. 2021).

One challenge that emerged from experiences of online deliberation is the difficulty to check in on participants' understanding of the subject matter. Facilitators usually do this during in-person sessions by being attuned to participants' non-verbal cues, but this is harder to do online (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020), leaving some participants at risk of falling behind the rest of the group. Those participants who already struggle to speak up may be less inclined to ask for help. To tackle this, some literature highlights the importance of sharing information in advance of the sessions, whilst also suggesting the creation of short informative videos, quizzes, and simple activities to regularly check in on participants' understanding and engagement (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020).

5.3 Scale and Institutional Capacity

Strandberg & Gronlund (2013) argue that ICTs are a potential solution to the problem of scale in deliberative discussions, by allowing a large number of citizens to participate and making participation more accessible. A variety of inexpensive and user-friendly digital deliberation software has emerged in recent years that are specifically designed to scale up deliberation (e.g., Decidim; Loomio; Pol.is; Consider.it; Deliberatorium, liquid feedback) (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020; Russon-Gilman & Peixoto, 2019: 111). Alonso & Lippez-de Castro (2016) go a step further, arguing that as well as enabling deliberation on a larger scale, digital can connect

different spaces, citizens and communities to form a participatory network, as well as enabling coupling with decision-making spaces.

However, in many cases digital tools have not been made sufficiently available to the public to maximise the potential of digital participation (Alonso & Lippez-de Castro, 2016: 442). Uptake of digital participation is generally low, with most citizens either unaware or uninterested (Strandberg & Gronlund, 2018: 412). Whether citizens choose to participate digitally may depend on the type and aims of the initiative – digital participation may be suitable for some mechanisms (e.g., crowdsourcing ideas), but they may be unappealing for others. For example, in a participatory budgeting initiative in the Basque Country, only 8 percent chose to make contributions through the available online platform, with citizens citing “the complex and difficult task of reaching a budget balance through the online simulator, opting for direct participation” (Luna et al., 2018: 9). As such, administrators and practitioners still need to figure out when digital participation is appropriate, which processes it is not suitable for, and which technologies are suited to which types of processes. This will be further explored in the sections on digital-analogue hybrids.

Even where technologies have been successfully implemented, there have been issues with the slow pace of implementation of projects decided on by citizens, which can fuel disengagement and participation fatigue (Smith & Martin, 2021: 321). When uptake is high there are issues of institutional capacity (or lack thereof) of assessing and implementing large numbers of proposals. For instance, the development of Barcelona's 2016–2019 municipal plan involved input from 40,000 citizens through the participatory platform Decidim. Bua and Bussu (2021:725) note that “by December 2018, Decidim had initiated 35 participatory initiatives, co-ordinated 1,141 public meetings and collected 13,927 proposals, which have become public policies that can be monitored by citizens through the platform in 9,196 different cases.” Institutional capacity is also a challenge and source of frustration across non-digital mechanisms, but the problem can become even more pronounced in digital participation because of the sheer scale of input that it makes possible, as pointed out by some interviewees:

> These technologies scale participation, but they do not scale all the capacity of policy institutions. So sometimes they create a tension because when there is massive

> participation, there are not enough resources to review all the contribution from the citizenry, from public servants and that creates a conflict. [CSO]

More research is needed on how these participatory platforms are being used by citizens, civil society and policymakers. Borge et al.'s (2022) research on the use of Decidim across Catalan municipalities shows elements of what the authors describe as managerial continuity. Whilst these platforms are effective at bringing in new publics that might not participate otherwise, administrations tend to prioritise functions that strengthen transparency, organisation of information and gathering of citizen proposals rather than deliberation and transfer of power to citizens. By the same token, in a context of push-and-pull dynamics, networks of tech activists continue to work on the platform to use it as a space of counter-power.

5.4 Blending Online and In-Person Participation

A majority of the articles on digitalisation point out that digital platforms are most useful and successful when employed as part of a broader process of engagement and in combination with in-person participation. As we mentioned above, the literature generally finds that, when given the option, participants tend to favour in-person participation (Simon et al. 2017: 52). As part of 'Madame Mayor, I have an idea', a participatory budgeting initiative that blended online and offline participation, only 60 percent of people chose to vote online in the first round, decreasing to less than 1/3 of votes by the later stages. The online activity was supplemented with in-person workshops and civil society-led activity, which appear to have galvanised participation at a local level much more than online platforms (Simon et al., 2017: 52). In Allan (2020), however, just over half of the participants stated that they prefer a mixture of in-person and online participation to meeting solely in-person.

Interviewees across different sectors all agreed that digital participation on its own does not have the same positive impact on participants' experience.

> If you're running participatory processes online only, they should probably be supplemented by the [offline] activities as well […] nothing replaces that human interaction. [Public Servant]

> Community does need place, so I think you can't ever replace the importance of place-based meeting. [Community activist]

> It opens up a lot of possibility, but I still think it's no substitute. [Academic 1]

> I also see that the platforms tend to replicate how we function or think offline. So, we tend to talk or think in politics in a polarised way and social media only amplifies that. [Elected official]

Digital and analogue participation can be combined in numerous ways. For example, ICTs can be used to facilitate face-to-face conversations (Russon-Gilman & Peixoto, 2019). 'Text Talk Act' used SMS to support face-to-face deliberation, with participants receiving discussion and polling questions after deliberating over relevant policy issues (Russon-Gilman & Peixoto, 2019: 111). The Icelandic Pirate Party implemented an initiative that allowed participants to first make proposals during in-person meetings, which were later uploaded to the platform. The digital platform added an additional layer of transparency and scrutiny on the way to ratifying policies, as well as providing a useful way to summarise and solidify offline debates into a clear output before the final debate and vote (Simon et al., 2017: 57). In Barcelona, digital participation is encouraged by connecting digital platforms to citizens' lived experience and linking these platforms to in-person engagement processes, such as participatory planning, as well as training provided for neighbourhood facilitators (Smith & Martin, 2021: 323).

5.5 Fostering Collective Intelligence

The concept of 'collective intelligence' is not limited to the digital sphere, but it is in relation to digital technology that it receives the most attention in the literature. Davies & Procter (2020: 2) define collective intelligence as "a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time and resulting in the effective mobilisation of skills and the general ability of a group to perform a wide variety of tasks". In its most basic sense, everyone knows something and there is no end point to this intelligence or knowledge transfer. Digital participation theorists are hopeful that designing digital platforms with collective intelligence in mind will allow

members of a community “to coordinate their interactions by identifying their diverse skills allowing for the coproduction of ideas (Davies & Proctor, 2020: 2-3).

Enabling large-scale coproduction and a more efficient management of skills and personal resources can be conducive to solving more complex problems. The type and complexity of issues tackled by participatory mechanisms is an ever-present concern, with digital initiatives sometimes dismissed as incapable of solving “wicked problems” (i.e., problems that require thinking around systemic and structural issues) and only being suitable for tackling simple or trivial issues. Proponents of the idea of collective intelligence argue that by taking it into account in the design of platforms, this distributed networking can facilitate the collective intelligence of a community as a “complex, adaptive, self-organising and emerging system” capable of solving complex problems (Davies & Proctor, 2020: 2).

Digital has primarily been used in an instrumental and extractive way, as user data informs solutions “from above”, often geared towards profit-making. However, efforts are being made to reconceptualise digital engagement along more socially beneficial lines and towards deepening democracy through concepts such as ‘civic tech’ and ‘technopolitics’.

Russon-Gilman & Peixoto (2019) define 'civic tech' as technology that is specifically meant to deepen democratic participation. This distinguishes certain technologies from platforms that purport to be participatory, but which are in fact driven by private interest, such as Uber and Airbnb, or various Smart City initiatives. Whether or not a given technology can be described as ‘civic’ does not depend on its specific design, but rather the values that underpin the way it is used. Russon-Gilman & Peixoto (2019: 105-118) describe technology as ‘civic’ if it is used for “enhancing public participation in governance decision making [and] explicitly designed and leveraged to increase and deepen democratic participation." To measure this, they link their definition to Graham Smith's notion of **'democratic goods'** (i.e. inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement, and transparency). A truly 'civic' tech is one that fulfils Smith’s democratic goods criteria, including ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘popular control’.

‘Technopolitics’ is a similar concept. Like ‘civic tech’, it is concerned with driving ‘empowered’ participation rather than ‘instrumental’ participation (Smith & Martin,

2021: 318; Boni et al, 2019: 169), and it seeks to understand innovations as a democratic, disruptive, bottom-up process. In the words of one grassroots activist:

> The role of the organisations that embrace the maker movement is to show that technology is a tool that, by learning with others, you can use […] and make it accessible. We ask ourselves what would happen if we suddenly put industrial technology, or technology that is not normally for everyone, in the hands of the public.

Alonso & Lippez-de Castro (2016: 442) argue that digital technologies, and particularly Web 2.0,

> offer an opportunity to… forge closer alliances and partnerships between diverse communities of interest, practice, expertise, conviction, and interdependence. Using the network as a fundamental organizational model, the individual can establish collaboration routines although they are not often aware of this collaborative process. From this point of view, the first task that cities must address is the creation of applications enabling data collection and processing, web-based collaboration, and actualization of the collective intelligence of citizens.

A 'technopolitical' approach to digital participation re-orders the sequencing of dialogues between diverse citizen and professional knowledges and makes possible "[new] encounters and connections… across different spheres of knowledge production" (Smith & Martin, 2021: 325-326). Grassroots innovation and digital technologies can, when oriented towards social and technopolitical ends and guided by a practice of coproduction, result in the kind of collective intelligence suitable for complex problem-solving.

5.6 Section Summary

The section has reviewed opportunities and challenges of digital participation, reflecting on recent practice to illuminate inclusion/ exclusion patterns. Whilst digital technologies can help address some exclusions, they also exacerbate existing inequalities between the digital have and have nots, which often overlap other divides along class, gender, race, and geographical lines. The digital divide is evident not only in terms of participation as users of technology but also in terms of production of

technology, where women and ethnic minorities experience disadvantages, demanding greater attention to issues of digital learning.

Nevertheless, digitalisation can also present significant opportunities for more inclusive participation. It can help by reaching out to younger demographics that tend to participate less in in-person initiatives and in traditional democratic institutions more broadly. Remote participation can help include individuals with mobility issues, those who cannot afford to travel, or who have responsibilities that prevent them from travelling (such as work or care responsibilities). Indeed, the examples reviewed demonstrate that some individuals feel less intimidated and more able to contribute within online discussions.

Of particular interest is the way in which some political parties have adopted these technologies, such as the German Pirate Party's adoption of 'liquid feedback', or the Italian Democratic Party's use of Deliberatorium (Russon-Gilman & Peixoto, 2019: 111). Even more pertinently, Barcelona and Madrid have implemented digital participation platforms that were forged years earlier in grassroots activity. The manifestos for both Ahora Madrid and Barcelona en Comú were developed through participatory processes and reflected their roots in grassroots initiatives associated with the Indignados movement (Smith & Martin, 2021: 319).

When assessing the quality of learning through digital participation, most participants appear to benefit from real-time interaction with presenters; providing a mixture of options for real-time and out-of-session discussion on message fora appears to make the most of the potential of digital technologies. As for the sessions themselves, ample time ought to be given to participants to "warm up" and settle into the discussion, whilst care should be taken to regularly check in on participants' understanding and ensure that nobody falls behind the rest of the group. When information is provided in advance of sessions, participants have the chance to familiarise themselves with the subject matter, which can help them to feel more confident during the deliberation. More research is needed into what design features would facilitate the best learning experience. Overall combining digital and analogue processes of participation can help strengthen reach and inclusiveness by providing different channels for people to participate depending on their different circumstances.

Digital technology can help scale up participation, but this creates potential problems with institutional capacity to incorporate citizen input, given the increased volume of proposals; this might exacerbate perceptions of participation as tokenistic. There is however a growing body of literature exploring the potential of digital technologies to foster greater collective intelligence and complex problem-solving when guided by the principles of technopolitics and civic tech.

There are important issues linked to digital participation concerning data sovereignty and tech neutrality that this review only touched upon. Digital is already the new battleground against the rise of algorithmic capitalism and a focus on strengthening the digital commons will be vital. Whilst some programmers already use free and open-source software (FOSS) to address tech neutrality, more research is needed into how successful the use of FOSS is in removing barriers to participation, how it is used and by whom, particularly in the transition from the grassroots activist sphere to mainstream government.

6. Conclusion

The thinking and practice of participatory governance is developing fast amid pushes for institutionalisation, rapid digitalisation and ever innovative designs that couple spaces of participatory deliberative democracy and representative institutions. The scoping review and interviews that informed this report helped to identify much innovation but also to reflect on persistent barriers. Whereas the rhetoric on participation and deliberation is increasingly powerful and participatory governance is presented as an antidote to growing populistic tendencies and decreasing legitimacy of elected representatives and traditional institutions, we see public officials at different scales of government, from the local to the EU level, paying more attention to these processes, and in many cases act as champions and supporters.

Despite growing institutional innovation, participatory processes continue to struggle to embed as they are often perceived by public officials as ancillary at best and a nuisance at worst. A new generation of public officials that see the value of collaboration with citizens and communities continues to confront the challenge of navigating existing norms and established ways of working hardwired in laws, regulations, fiscal arrangements, customs, and practices. In the face of increasing numbers of public engagement initiatives, many of these processes are vulnerable to political cycles or co-optation, and they can face deep resistance from bureaucracies, not necessarily on ideological grounds, but because they challenge existing practices and working routines.

After decades of practice of participatory governance, we can be confident that citizens' perspectives and lived experience provide valuable and alternative knowledge that can inform better and fairer policies. Understanding how we can engender and embed a participatory culture within policymaking remains a crucial challenge, which might also require scholars of participatory and deliberative democracy to engage with theories of public policy, public administration, and organisational change.

Participatory governance and democratic innovations still suffer from limited visibility in the media and with the general public. Without widespread public awareness and

support, it will be difficult to genuinely embed a participatory culture and hence transfer meaningful power to citizens. To generate public awareness participatory governance has to be meaningfully anchored in the community. This might entail moving away from top-down designs led by academics and policymakers, which might not respond to the needs of participants and gloss over different capabilities to participate. By coproducing participatory spaces with people, we might strengthen democratic goods such as inclusivity, fostering participation that is margin-responsive.

In a context of increasing socio-economic inequalities and global market dynamics that seem to have reduced the space for democratic decision-making, state-led participatory governance can be perceived as tokenistic, fuelling more disengagement and distrust. As a reaction, we are witnessing increasing efforts from social movements and grassroots politics to reclaim participatory methods and work with, within and beyond state institutions to invent new ones to democratise not just the political sphere but also the economic and social spheres, as richly described in the literature on the commons.

Further research could explore how participatory practices embed in ways that disrupt the state's role in reproducing capitalism. The political economy question is not only about addressing socio-economic inequalities and building people's capacities to participate; it is also about explaining how participatory governance can generate political space where existing state institutions and the ideational paradigms informing policymaking can be challenged.

The wealth of grassroots innovations, digital and analogue, is inspiring. The thinking and practice of democratic innovations should build on, strengthen and support these participatory networks, connecting them to institutions and the wider society, to reshape the boundaries across a participatory ecology.

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Appendix: Description of Select Case Studies Examined in the literature reviewed

Basque Country's Open Participation initiative, Gipuzkoa Province, Basque Country, Spain, 2017

Selection method: Open to all

Level of government: Regional

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Institutionalised

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Top-down drive, yet collaborative

Empowered/ Unempowered: Empowered

Digital/Analogue: Digital-Analogue hybrid

Details: An open participatory initiative developed by the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa to develop a digital platform Public Budgeting. Open to regional citizens to co-decide on the key socioeconomic challenges of the province for public finance allocation in 2018. The process was framed as part of a wider Strategic Management Plan for 2015–2019, which is based on a new Open and Collaborative Governance Model. The Strategic Management Plan for 2015–2019 establishes the foundations for the development of a series of projects, including a "Good Governance Strategy and a Programme for Political Culture and Deepening Democracy".

Citizens' Jury for people with disabilities, Finland, 2011 (from Afsahi, 2020)

Selection method: Invitation only

Level of government: Regional

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Ad-hoc

Top-down/ Bottom-up: N/A

Empowered/ Unempowered: Unempowered

Digital/Analogue: Analogue

Details: An example of **enclave deliberation.** Implemented by the National Development Programme for Services for People with Disabilities. The purpose of the Citizens' Jury was to strengthen the voice of people with disabilities and to offer a new way of influencing societal decision-making, especially related to disability policies.

Estonian Citizens' Assembly - ECA (in Jonsson, 2015)

Selection method: self-selected and randomly selected participants.

Level of government: National

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Ad-hoc

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Top-Down

Empowered/ Unempowered: Unempowered

Digital/Analogue: Hybrid

Details: Provides an interesting case through which to examine how various arenas offer different strengths and weaknesses within the democratic system, as well as how the complementary functions which the public sphere, democratic innovations and representative institutions provide helps create a deliberative system.

Irish Climate Citizens Assembly, 2016-2018 (in Harris, 2021a & 2021b)

Selection method: Participants were selected using stratified random sampling, and chosen by a polling company that had base targets to meet across the following categories; sex, age, socioeconomic cohorts and region.

Level of government: National

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: N/A

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Top-Down

Empowered/ Unempowered: Empowered, but too tightly coupled

Digital/Analogue: Analogue

Details: Had some influence over climate policy. Yet the 'empowered space' [i.e. the government] framed how the CA's recommendations would be considered. Limited time was allocated for deliberations, restricting the framing of the deliberations.

Leaving Lockdown Public Debate, 2020 (in Ada Lovelace Institute, 2020)

Selection method: By invitation. Promoted via mutual aid groups and local community organisations.

Level of government: N/A

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Civil Society-led

Empowered/ Unempowered: Unempowered

Digital/Analogue: Digital

Details: Rapid, online deliberation on COVID-19 technologies, carried out over Zoom, with a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities.

Participation requests (in Bennett et al., 2021)

Selection method: Open to all

Level of government: Local

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Institutionalised

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Top-Down

Empowered/ Unempowered: Not empowered – decision-making powers ultimately lay in the hands of public officials, who often resist the process.

Digital/Analogue: N/A

Details: Introduced in 2017 by the Scottish Government as part of a wider "Community Empowerment" legislative agenda, in an effort to change state–citizen relations. Participation Requests are a legal tool allowing certain organizations and groups the right to request to participate in decision-making processes in Public Service Authorities (PSAs), such as local government, police and fire authorities, health boards, and other national agencies.

Valore Lavoro, Lombardy, Italy (in Marcaletti & Riniolo, 2015)

Type of process: Action Research / Coproduction

Level of government: Regional

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Ad-hoc

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Researcher-driven, but participants treated as equal partners and co-produced

Empowered / Unempowered: N/A

Digital/Analogue: Analogue

Details: Promoted and coordinated by the Lombardy Region Authority, between 2009 and 2010. The project pursued the active involvement of Roma people as promoters of their paths toward labour integration through a governance model inspired by a bottom-up approach.

Better Reykjavik (in Simon et al., 2017)

Selection method: Open to all

Level of government: Local

Institutionalised / Ad-hoc: Institutionalised

Top-down / Bottom-up: Top-Down

Empowered/ Unempowered: Unempowered, though as of 2017, around 1/3 of proposals have been approved and implemented by the council.

Digital/Analogue: Digital

Details: An idea-generation platform for local neighbourhoods and the city as a whole, as well as for annual participatory budgeting in districts across the city. These platforms enable citizens to suggest, debate, and rank ideas for improving their city.

Decide Madrid (in Davies & Procter, 2020)

Selection method: Open to all

Level of government: Local

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Institutionalised

Top-down / Bottom-up: Bottom-up. Implemented by the council, but developed through the activities of the 15M movement.

Empowered/ Unempowered: N/A

Digital/Analogue: Digital

Details: A proposal-submission and PB platform

‘Madame Mayor, I have an idea’ Paris, France (in Simon et al., 2017)

Selection method: Open to all

Level of government: Local

Institutionalised / Ad-hoc: Ad-hoc

Top-down / Bottom-up: Initially top-down. Ideas were submitted to citizens, who then voted on their preferences. However, now proposals are submitted by citizens, and legislation is co-created between citizens and representatives.

Empowered / Unempowered: Empowered

Digital/Analogue: Digital

Details: Participatory Budgeting process

Parlement et Citoyens, France, 2013 (in Simon et al., 2017)

Selection method: Open to all

Level of government: National

Institutionalised / Ad-hoc: N/A

Top-down / Bottom-up: Civil society-driven, in collaboration with elected politicians

Empowered / Unempowered: Not fully empowered. However, the site goes beyond traditional consultation since citizen contributions inform and shape legislation which is put before Parliament.

Digital/Analogue: Digital

Details: A website which brings together representatives and citizens to discuss policy issues and collaboratively draft legislation. As of 2017, has hosted ten consultations – on issues as diverse as the collaborative economy, criminal justice, open data, the use of pesticides and constitutional reform - and has attracted 10,000 participant contributions (proposals, amendments, and comments), 85,000 registered votes and 23,000 registered users.

Virtual Polity, Finland, 2008 (in Strandberg & Gronlund, 2013)

Selection method: The experiment used random group allocation into treatment groups and a control group. A random sample of 6,000 Finnish adult citizens was invited to participate. The participants were promised free technical equipment and a voucher as compensation for their participation. Eventually, merely 147 citizens volunteered for the experiment, of which 79 completed the deliberative sessions.

Level of government: N/A

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: N/A

Top-down/ Bottom-up: N/A

Empowered / Unempowered: Unempowered

Digital/Analogue: Digital

Details: Experiment in online deliberation, focused on nuclear energy and energy policy**,** with the aim of testing how online deliberation works in practice and the effects of deliberating on participating citizens. Consisted of a mixture of online discussions and surveys to measure knowledge gains, with surveys repeated two months after

event to test long-term effects of the experiment. 6,000 citizens were invited to participate, of which 147 responded, and only 79 completed the sessions.

Ostbelgien, Belgium (in OECD, 2020)

Selection method: Stratified Random Selection

Level of government: Regional

Institutionalised/ Ad-hoc: Yes

Top-down/ Bottom-up: Top-down

Empowered / Unempowered: Empowered

Digital/Analogue: Analogue

Details: In February 2019, the Parliament of the German-speaking community of Belgium introduced a new mechanism, the Ostbelgien model, consisting of three interconnected participatory bodies, building on the experience of the G1000 back in 2011. First, a Citizens' Council of 25 randomly selected citizens decides on the topics to be discussed by separate citizens' assemblies, where the agenda can be suggested by either parliament and government or civil society and the general public. Second, a secretariat of full-time officials organises the citizens' assemblies. Finally, one to three Citizens' Assemblies per year, each consisting of between 25 and 50 people, meet across several days to deliberate on a single topic proposed by the Council. The Assembly's recommendations will have to be considered by Parliament and an explicit justification is required if one or more recommendations are not adopted. As a way of strengthening feedback loops, after one year another public committee meeting will scrutinise the degree of implementation of the recommendations.

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