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ABSTRACT

There have been waves of enthusiasm for citizen participation before. I discuss several features that make the current one distinctive: Its scale and scope, its reliance on modes of collaboration made familiar by digital media, its dependence on coalitions of actors, within and outside the state, for its effects, and its professionalization in techniques of facilitated discussion. I focus on the latter, exploring how professionals' understandings of the aims and limits of participation sometimes conflict with those of participants. More broadly, I argue for a better understanding of how models of participation diffuse across institutional settings and with what effects.

Introduction

In 1962, student members of the fledgling Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) outlined a vision of what they called a 'participatory democracy' in which ordinary people made the decisions that affected their lives. SDS did not invent the term participatory democracy, and they used it in the Port Huron Statement to describe a political system, not a mode of organizational decision-making. Indeed, formally, SDS relied on parliamentary procedure and bureaucratic offices. Still, the group's informal and egalitarian style put it in stark contrast to mainstream civil rights and leftist groups, and for activists in the new left, anti-war, and radical feminist movements, participatory democracy soon became an organizational ethos as well as a macropolitical vision (Polletta, 2002).

SDS activists were scathing in their criticisms of the grey-suited businessmen of the modern corporation, particularly of their conformism, their preoccupation with rank, and their sharp-clawed pursuit of economic success. Yet, in the early 1960s, those same grey-suited businessmen were also discovering the virtues of participatory democracy. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1964, management guru Warren Bennis and his co-author argued that the most hidebound companies were now trying to 'humaniz[e] and democratize large-scale bureaucracies'. They were encouraging emotional expression, an indifference to rank, and a faith in 'consensus' rather than coercion or compromise as a way to deal with conflicts (Slater & Bennis, 1964, p. 52).

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Animus to bureaucracy, and the things that went with it—hierarchical and centralized decision-making, the premium on rules and qualifications, the disdain for local knowledge and personal relationships—characterized also the US federal government's approach to poverty in the 1960s, with its commitment to 'maximum feasible participation' of the poor in administering relief (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). And it underpinned the decision of the chief US development agency, USAID, to fund cooperative institutions (Mansuri & Rao, 2012).

Just as today, then, social movements, government, and international development efforts in the 1960s were animated by a vision of ordinary people participating in the decisions that affected their lives. Just as today, people experimented with a variety of collectivist organizational forms and consensus-based decision-making processes. And just as today, radicals worried that the participatory initiatives being touted by mainstream political actors were democratic in name only, substituting feel-good opportunities for voice for mechanisms of genuine accountability.

My point is not that the more things change the more they remain the same. To the contrary, important features of today's participatory moment are unarguably new. One of the things I want to do in this article is to identify some of these features. Then I ask what they mean for what citizens actually get from their political and economic institutions. My point in drawing attention to the fact that businessmen, government bureaucrats, and activists in the 1960s all claimed to be operating as participatory democracies is that there were, and still are, very different participatory democratic projects. There are different logics of participation: different understandings of the purposes of participation and its limits. There are different understandings of the demos; that is, of the people making up the participating group. These understandings matter for what participation looks like, and for whether it succeeds or fails.

Like critics of the contemporary zeal for participation, I worry that what is touted to citizens as participatory democracy is often less participatory and less democratic than, certainly, I would like it to be. But the situation, I argue, is not necessarily one in which civic engineers are selling spectacles of participation so that policy-makers can carry on making decisions behind closed doors. To the contrary, I argue, the people organizing participatory forums are often true believers in the democratic virtues of such forums. But they sometimes understand—and organize—deliberating citizens in ways that limit citizens' capacity to act by way of such forums.

New models of democracy

What is perhaps most striking about the contemporary enthusiasm for citizen participation is its sheer scope and scale. As I noted, USAID gave some money to cooperative institutions in the 1960s but local empowerment was by no means an organizational priority. Nor was it a commitment of the whole development field. Today it is. In the last decade, the World Bank has funnelled close to US$80 billion into local participatory development projects (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). Participatory budgeting, once synonymous with the single city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, has spread to thousands of municipalities around the world (Baoicchi & Ganuza, 2014; see also Montambeault, 2016). Briefs for 'collective intelligence' are made in education, video gaming, and financial investing (Bonabeau, 2009). Books like *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Surowiecki, 2005) are bestsellers. Canada empowered

a citizen body to define a constitutional agenda (Smith, 2009). Finland 'crowdsourced' its constitution (Castells, 2013).

The impetus to citizen engagement has had diverse sources. In Europe, the mandate to 'bring the EU closer to the people' by way of routinized citizen consultation was a response to concerns that shifting decision-making beyond nation states was hollowing out democratic accountability (Kohler-Koch & Finke, 2007). In England, efforts to involve the public in science followed public controversies over how the government dealt with mad cow disease (Hagendijk & Irwin, 2006). In the United States, as I will discuss at greater length below, the arguments for citizen engagement were technocratic. Involving stakeholders was more efficient than relying on litigation to reach compromise. Overall, there has been expansion not only in the number of initiatives but also in the kinds of issues seen as appropriate for public discussion. Science and technology, once seen as the purview of experts, are now common topics of citizen forums.

Certainly, the Internet has played a role in the profusion of opportunities for citizen input. New digital technologies dramatically lowered the costs of joining, forming, and coordinating groups (Shirky, 2008). They made it possible to combat the problems of scale that have long dogged briefs for participatory democracy. In addition, however, digital media have made familiar new forms of collaboration. That many people routinely post reviews on Amazon, revise Wikipedia entries, and sign online petitions may have made participation in an online consultation about downtown development or genetically modified food seem of a piece with these other forms of participation (Polletta, 2014).

Alongside the proliferation of participatory initiatives, both online and offline, has been the growth of an organizational infrastructure for organizing, running, and interpreting the results of such initiatives. There are now many models for doing participatory democracy. In the United States, there are twenty-first-century town meetings, Deliberative Polls, study circles, online dialogues, Citizen Choicework, visioning exercises, Appreciative Inquiry; in Europe, citizens juries, consensus conferences, planning cells; in Canada, citizen assemblies; in Brazil, participatory budgeting and municipal heath councils; in India, village panchayats. Each model has its own proponents and techniques, and increasingly, professionals credentialed in its use (Lee, 2015). We can thus talk about an institutional field of citizen participation, something that did not exist in the 1960s.

Finally, government's role in organized citizen participation has changed. In the United States, efforts to involve citizens in decision-making in the 1960s and early 1970s were associated with an expanding state. Such efforts contracted, in turn, during the recession of the late 1970s (Howard, Lipsky, & Marshall, 1994). Today, citizen participation coexists with the dispersion of centralized state power. This is true both in the sense that authority has been transferred to civil society and market actors outside the state, and in the sense that, especially in Europe, authority is now shared among levels of government, both within the nation and above it (Hagendijk & Irwin, 2006; Melo & Baiocchi, 2006). These developments mean that government entities are only one among the many kinds of groups that sponsor participatory exercises. When governments do sponsor participation, they are rarely in a position to act on the resulting recommendations unilaterally. Instead, the recommendations of 'the people' need to be effectively framed and pressed by a coalition of actors in order to have any chance of impact. What makes the situation even more complicated is that participatory exercises are usually animated by

the desire to combat the public's alleged loss of trust in government (Irwin, 2006). In other words, at the same time that government is, in some ways, less capable of acting on the will of the people, it must convince the people that it is more willing to do so.

How professional norms shape democracy

Today's participatory enthusiasm is distinguished, then, from previous agendas of citizen participation by its scale and scope, its reliance on new digital technologies, and its complicated relationship with the state. What do these features mean for what people want and get from their political institutions? Scholarly opinions have been mixed. Champions talk about the emergence of Democracy 2.0, in which new digital technologies have made participation easier (Barber, 1998; Dahlhberg, 2001) and new understandings of how to organize participation have made it more effective (Fishkin, 1997). Engineers of public participation today know that consensus should never be had at the expense of stifling conflict, that people need to feel safe in order to share their opinions, that formal procedures may be more effective than informality in preventing people from feeling marginalized or ganged up on (Lee, 2015; Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual, & Gastil, 2006). Champions argue that carefully run deliberative forums make for better policies as well as more informed citizens. Just as important, they can restore citizens' damaged faith in the policy-making process. Even enthusiasts acknowledge, however, that assessments of the impacts of deliberative forums and campaigns are still lacking (Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, & Leighninger, 2012; Smith, 2009).

Critics of today's participatory initiatives charge that the people speak but they have no control over the final decisions that are made. Indeed, critics argue, grand spectacles of public participation may make it that much easier for back room decision-making to carry on as usual, unscrutinized and unchallenged. Such spectacles provide a satisfying experience of democracy in the moment, but they are no substitute for mechanisms of democratic accountability. Just as so-called flat management in business ended up putting workers in the position of monitoring each other's performance in a constant Panopticon-like state of surveillance, so participatory democratic exercises in governance have been charged with allowing people to 'choose' just which cost-cutting measure will be imposed on them. Again, participation comes in lieu of power (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Lee, 2015; Lee, McQuarrie, & Walker, 2015; Michel, 2014).

To adjudicate between the champions and critics of contemporary exercises in citizen democracy, we need careful studies probing the operation and impacts of particular initiatives (Braun & Schultz, 2010; Smilde, 2011). We need to know about the conditions in which policy-makers take seriously the recommendations that citizens arrive at and the organizational forms that promote genuinely diverse participation. Fully popular control and complete co-optation are only two among the many outcomes of participatory initiatives. Probing the range of such outcomes will move beyond the sometimes florid claims made both by critics and by champions of participatory decision-making. But we also need a better grasp of how people understand what democracy is and what it is good for. That is, we need to know how the people who organize and participate in democratic initiatives understand the purposes of participation. How do they understand the appropriate methods and norms of participation? And where do they locate the appropriate

boundaries between participation and something else, whether elite decision-making, managerial prerogatives, or the operation of the market?

In this article, I focus on the understandings that are embedded in the professional norms of the people who organize participatory decision-making. Those norms levy expectations about how to make decisions and what to do with the decisions that are made. They define what counts as equality and what constitutes a breach of it. For example, the 1960s' brief for radical democracy in for-profit companies that I cited earlier operated with a very different view of the demos than did new left activists. The model for the former was one of scientific collaboration. Democracy was 'inevitable', Bennis and Slater argued, because the complexity of production required the collaborative efforts of experts. By contrast, the demos imagined by new leftists was one of poor and working-class people whose interests traditionally had been ignored by experts. One can see that those very different understandings of the demos would be associated with different ideas about the purposes of participation, different standards for fairness, and different metrics of success.

Consider, in a more contemporary example, the people who organize the Burning Man art festival each year. What began as a bonfire held by a group of friends on a San Francisco beach in the mid-1980s today involves the construction of a temporary city in the Nevada desert each year, complete with sanitation, medical facilities, roads, and upwards of 47,000 people dedicated to experiencing participatory art. But, as Katherine Chen argues in her ethnography of Burning Man, the paid staffers who operated from a San Francisco headquarters remained committed to participatory democratic decision-making. Staffers touted the group's commitment to consensus. 'For a decision to be adopted, everyone must give his or her consent' (2009, p. 56), they averred. Yet, when a volunteer complained on the listserv that decisions were being made by the Burning Man board without the input of participants, a board member sought to disabuse the volunteer of the idea that organizers would implement all participants' ideas. 'It's a democracy as far as it asks for people to contribute' (p. 56), she wrote. In another meeting, the same board member clarified, 'It's a do-ocracy' (p. 57).

Among staffers, Chen writes, 'Although organizers decide matters by consensus, the board has a designated leader. As the executive director, Larry Harvey exercises the final say' (p. 38). And in fact, Harvey assigned responsibilities to senior staff members, evaluated their performance, and set their salaries. He chaired meetings, supervised organizational finances, and came up with the festival's annual theme (p. 38). This seems a far cry from what I understand as consensus decision-making. But the interesting question is why it did not seem to bother people much. One possible answer is that staffers' models of democracy came from business management more than politics. On that model, consensus might be defined as something like getting people on board with a decision. And democracy might be understood as encouraging individual initiative and input.

Again, in Burning Man, the fact that democracy was defined in terms of participants' input rather than their control did not seem to bother people much. But let me give another example where a model of democracy that made sense to organizers seemed to make less sense to participants. The political operatives who ran then-presidential candidate Barack Obama's 2008 Internet campaign were young, from the world of Internet start-ups rather than electoral politics, and they came with an enthusiasm for bottom-

up decision-making. 'Open Source' was their model: the software programming code that was freely accessible to anyone who wanted to use and improve it.

Indeed, as Daniel Kreiss observes in his ethnography of the campaign, many staffers believed that the campaign should operate as a 'participatory democracy' (2012, p. 56). But that did not mean they invited supporters to help set campaign policy. To the contrary. Centrally and hierarchically organized, relentlessly focused on 'money, message, and mobilization' (p. 4), the campaign's Internet Division figured out how to persuade supporters to donate millions of dollars and thousands of hours of volunteer time while supplying the ever-more precise data that allowed campaign operatives to target their fundraising appeals. When some supporters used the interactive campaign website to demand that Obama return to his earlier position opposing legal immunity for the Bush-era telecommunications firms that had been involved in warrantless wiretapping, staffers responded by issuing a statement from the candidate that merely restated his position. Volunteers tried to organize to press the candidate to alter his position, but staffers shut down their efforts.

Obama staffers were not trying to pull the wool over anyone's eyes. They did give volunteers more access to voting data and more responsibility for fundraising than any campaign had done before. And they did see what they were doing as radically democratic. But their model of democracy, again, came from an institutional world with which they were familiar. That world was one in which a small community of experts worked collaboratively and informally to solve technical problems. This is the Open Source model. Obama staffers' idea of democracy did reach beyond the small group, but there it meant a system that, as Kreiss puts it, 'invited meaningful participation' (p. 56). One can see that 'meaningful participation' could be interpreted in ways that ruled out equal power. My point is that there are different ways to define democratic decision-making. The surprise, perhaps, is that we act as if it means the same thing to everyone. But the danger of a catholicity of definition is that certain models of democracy may come to dominate the conceptual space of democracy without anyone really realizing it.[1]

Let me now turn to a more extended illustration of the ways in which professional norms shape organizers' understandings of the proper scope of democracy, and the ways in which organizers' understandings may conflict with those of participants. I do so in the context of the evolving American field of citizen participation.

The people who do deliberative democracy

My sketch of the emergence of the field of public deliberation in the United States is tentative. We still know little about the contours of the field or its genealogy. But it seems as if several developments were important in shaping the field. Bids for citizen participation in the 1960s led to the creation of formal requirements for community input in environmental and planning decisions, along with new advocacy tools. But by the 1980s, there was a strong feeling that the process had become so adversarial and litigation-dependent as to be counterproductive. Planners began to experiment with new modes of environmental conflict resolution (Morrill & Owens-Smith, 2002). Providing structured opportunities for stakeholders (developers, landowners, residents, and environmentalists) to talk during or even before such battles emerged seemed the best bet for mutually satisfying outcomes. Meanwhile, urban planners looked for some alternative to the traditional

municipal hearing, in which a line of cranky citizens came to the microphone to speak their piece with little interest in the points of view of other speakers (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001).

In 1992, Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* gave voice to concerns about Americans' declining civic participation. No longer involved in the associations that had once built habits of engagement and political trust, citizens were withdrawing into a narrowly self-interested apoliticism. The bailiwick was picked up by academics and civic actors and turned into a brief for public conversation. James Fishkin introduced the concept of deliberative polling in 1988. The reasoned views of a random and representative sample of citizens arrived at through deliberation should have the force of public opinion, he later argued (Fishkin, 1997). Using the new language of deliberative democracy inspired by Jurgen Habermas, civic engagement specialists emphasized the benefits of civil public talk for Americans' level of political knowledge and trust.

The intergroup dialogues that took place in the wake of the Rodney King beating and that became central to US President Bill Clinton's national Initiative on Race were in some ways of a piece with this new interest in public talk. However, their goal was less to develop more informed and competent citizens than to promote racial reconciliation and healing (Leighninger, 2006; Walsh, 2008). Finally, as cities faced budgetary crises, enthusiasm grew for 'public–private partnerships' that would promote growth. As part of that thrust, urban visioning projects were developed that involved citizens in imagining creative futures for their cities (Helling, 1998).

These were very different agendas: Conflict resolution among self-interested stakeholders; educating voters; racial reconciliation; and creating municipal plans capable of attracting private investors. Yet, the response was the same: Structured opportunities for ordinary people to talk with one another about matters of mutual concern. To run such conversations, state agencies and civic coalitions drew on an emerging field of public deliberation specialists.

In a survey of these specialists, Caroline Lee and I found that they came to their work from a variety of fields, including communications, planning, social work, and conflict resolution (2009). However, backgrounds in organizational development and the 'adult education' associated with management consulting were prominent. In the 1980s, meeting facilitation emerged as a professionalized service and moved from human resources to marketing and strategic planning. During the period, various forms of managerial coaching and conflict resolution also gained practitioners. And indeed, in Lee and my sample, 42% of respondents listed 'organizational development and human resources' as among the top three topics addressed by forums they had facilitated.

In her ethnographic study of the field, Lee observes that facilitation firms often advertise their services to corporations that want to secure employee 'alignment' with downsizing, merger, and restructuring decisions (2015, p. 102). That the same people are facilitating municipal civic forums on police–community relations and corporate forums on downsizing seems at first glance odd. But deliberation and dialogue professionals insist that the same tools work equally for both. The same techniques for fostering collaboration, they maintain, can be used in any setting, whether corporate or civic, where participants are peers or where some participants employ others.

Public deliberation specialists are not naïve. As Lee shows, they are sensitive to the dangers of manipulation. They work hard to ensure that they do not push their own

beliefs, or those of their sponsors, in the talk they facilitate. They are critical of an ethos of the market that has turned citizens into self-interested and passive consumers. Many of the people Lee and I surveyed described themselves as coming out of 1960s' movements and they share those movements' commitment to popular empowerment. But their solution to the problems they identify is to do facilitation better. They do not question the purposes for which an organization has sought out democratic facilitation but focus rather on the quality of facilitation. Practitioners have perfected techniques for ensuring that people with higher status do not monopolize talk, for arriving at conclusions that capture common ground while not precluding disagreement, and for helping people to connect to their own feelings and fears. In their own gatherings, practitioners insist on using their techniques as a way to demonstrate their value in producing meaningful group talk (Lee, 2015).

As Lee points out, however, the problem lies not in the tools but rather in the ends to which those tools are put. And there is strikingly little discussion of those ends. I should clarify. There is a great deal of talk about the abstract and long-term purposes of deliberation (more engaged citizens, less unnecessary conflict) but little talk about the purposes of a particular deliberative forum (Kadlec & Friedman, 2007 make a similar point). Instead, practitioners treat techniques of facilitated talk as equally applicable, no matter what the purpose of the forum is. Deliberation aimed at getting people to accept cuts in workplace benefits is assimilated to deliberation aimed at soliciting public input into the design of a new downtown and to deliberation aimed at resolving a conflict between organized stakeholders. Practitioners do not broach the possibility that those settings might require different kinds of talk in order to be democratic. They do not broach the possibility that sometimes participants might *not* be well served by deliberation, even if sponsors are.

The problem is this. If models of deliberation that can be sold to corporations come to dominate the conceptual space of deliberation—if these models come to be seen as what democratic deliberation *is*—one can see how concerns about the outcomes of deliberation would be subordinated to concerns about the deliberative process. However, alongside the people who organize deliberative exercises, the people who participate in them also make assumptions about what democratic deliberation is and requires. Whether or not they have ever participated in a public deliberative forum, they draw on institutional analogies to form opinions about how the process should work. In the forums I studied, which I will describe below, participants likened their groups to think tanks, juries, teams, the United Nations, focus groups, branding workshops, and activist coalitions. The latter analogy was especially interesting, I argue, both because it conflicted with the models of deliberation on which the forum organizers operated, and because it points to possibilities for impact that organizers may have missed.

Competing models in deliberation about lower Manhattan

In the wake of 9/11, in a city known for contentious battles over development, there was remarkable agreement among New York City officials that deciding what to build on the site of the former World Trade Center should be a public process. Public forums proliferated in the weeks and months that followed: from community meetings in high school gymnasiums to university-sponsored panels, do-it-yourself design websites, electronic town meetings, and 'visioning workshops'.[2]

One of the largest forums, Imagine New York, was spearheaded by the Municipal Art Society (MAS), a long-time civic actor in New York. It was organized by a planning firm that was famous for its urban visioning exercises. Imagine New York brought 3500 people from the metropolitan area to 230 facilitated workshops in venues ranging from private homes to museums and universities. Participants were asked, 'How can we move forward from September 11th?' and then worked together to identify themes and practical ideas in the answers that were generated. These were recorded by group facilitators, and the resulting 19,000 ideas were synthesized into 49 draft vision statements by Imagine New York's Steering Committee. The draft vision statements were reviewed, amended, and ratified by 300 returning participants at a Citizen Summit. The final visions were released to the press and submitted to the official rebuilding agency, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), and other decision-making agencies (Polletta & Wood, 2005).

Listening to the City was sponsored by another civic coalition, the Civic Alliance, in conjunction with the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owned the World Trade Center site. On 20 July 2002, 4500 people met at tables of ten in a midtown convention centre to discuss preliminary plans for the site as well as transportation, housing, and economic development options. The 'electronic town meeting' format pioneered by AmericaSpeaks, a national deliberation group, joined group discussion with individual polling. Along with producing group recommendations that were synthesized by a 'theme team', participants used personal keypads to register their preferences on issues such as the importance of housing on the site, how they rated each of the six proposed plans, and how confident they were that decision-makers would listen to their recommendations. By the end of the day, the six site plans that the rebuilding agency had proposed had been rejected. Participants were uniformly critical of them as well as of the proposal to build eleven million square feet of office space on the site. Shortly after the event, which received extensive media coverage in New York and nationally, the rebuilding agency announced that it had scrapped the plans and arranged for a panel of architects and planners to select seven teams of architects, many internationally known, to develop new designs for the site.

The process of rebuilding Lower Manhattan was a complex and contentious one. There were numerous interests involved, including those of victims' family members, residents of Lower Manhattan, small and large businesses, the leaser of the site, and other developers. There were multiple agencies with claims to rebuilding authority, including the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, New York City's mayor, and New York's governor. Given that situation, the forum participants my team and I interviewed were clear-eyed about their prospects for influence. Any impact the forums would have, they said, would likely be due to the fact that the scale of the tragedy had made government more sensitive to citizens as well as to the precedent set by the design of the last memorial to a terrorist act, in Oklahoma City, which had involved significant public input. Participants pointed out that, in the case of Listening to the City, rebuilding authorities had helped to sponsor the forum and therefore could be held accountable to it, and, again in the case of Listening to the City, that the level of media attention awarded the event would create pressure on rebuilding authorities. Said one interviewee,

Maybe when there's a big tragedy like this, the government is more responsive, but in general I don't think so. Like I said, it really depends on media attention. It's only when you get their attention that they're going to respond to the public.

'It took away some of their wiggle room', another interviewee speculated about Listening to the City's influence on rebuilding authorities. 'It didn't eliminate it but it took away some of it.' An Imagine New York participant speculated, 'Because of Oklahoma City, [rebuilding authorities] might feel also it to be politically the wrong message to send [to not listen to the public].'[3]

Interviewees also emphasized that the organizers of the forums, and indeed, participants as well, would have to press their case in order to have real influence. Asked whether he thought Listening to the City would influence decision-makers, one respondent answered, 'It depends on the people who put Listening to the City together, how vigilant [they are] … If they back off and let them manoeuvre and manipulate this situation, it will be null and void what we did.' Another Listening participant said that had he been running the event, he would have pushed the rebuilding authorities to make a firmer commitment, to 'strip them bare', as he put it. 'They were still wearing their skivvies when they walked out.'[4]

Participants hoped, and sometimes expected, that they would be involved in advocating for the recommendations they had arrived at. Several people who had been in Imagine workshops made suggestions when we interviewed them for how to maximize the forum's impact. The organizers should get a story in a high-profile local magazine, they suggested, or get a powerful person in politics to take on the rebuilding agenda, or mobilize participants for a letter-writing campaign. Listening to the City participants, too, imagined a continuing effort. 'I hope that we will have some kind of influence, being that we were a collective, what you would say, an alliance', said one. 'Because there's power in numbers.' This interviewee went on: 'We need to protest, shut things down if we have to make sure they commit to really taking our—the stuff we did with the selection process and voting and the whole democracy thing—taking it seriously.' Another participant became less confident of the possible impact of the forum, she said, when she saw that 'they weren't talking about expanding the process'. Indeed, when interviewed a year after Listening to the City, participants complained that organizers had not capitalized on their enthusiasm. 'We were never invited to participate again. I think there should have been a second or a third follow-up with the rest of the plans.' 'With the exception of you people doing this work', an interviewee said about my team's research, 'there's nothing that I really see that continues to involve this group of people'.[5]

As these comments suggest, participants in both forums saw the exercises as something more than a one-time effort to solicit public opinion about rebuilding options. They saw themselves as a *group*, a group that could be mobilized to press for the recommendations they had reached. They operated with a model of political influence that combined pressure with persuasion. However, these views were in some tension with the views of the deliberation specialists who organized the forum.

Participants were told throughout the process that Imagine New York had two goals:

> To gather ideas and visions from the broad public. To ensure that those voices and ideas were heard by decision-makers who in the months and years to come will be formulating the plans and policies that are critical for the future of the region. (ImagineNY, 2002, p. 5)

However, when Imagine's recommendations were met with scant response on the part of rebuilding authorities (Polletta & Wood, 2005), the project's organizers had little in the way of an alternate plan. At the Citizen Summit, where participants ratified the 49 visions, organizers shifted gears somewhat, encouraging participants to write letters to rebuilding authorities rather than proposing any collective strategy for political influence. When, earlier in the process, I asked the architect of the visioning process how Imagine New York's organizers would ensure that participants' recommendations affected decision-making around Ground Zero, he said that his visioning exercises usually included a component in which participants identified the trade-offs they would be willing to make for the changes they wanted to see. That was not appropriate to do in Imagine New York, given the tragedy that had spurred it, he said. Still, this does not indicate any mechanism by which decision-makers can be held to the recommendations that emerge from the forum, other than participants' willingness to commit to belt-tightening.[6]

AmericaSpeaks, the organization that ran Listening to the City on behalf of the Civic Alliance, similarly did not mount any effort to press for the recommendations that emerged from the forum. In its public materials, AmericaSpeaks described its role as one of 'neutral, honest broker' and emphasized that 'any organization attempting to involve the public must position itself so that citizens have confidence that the forums they are participating in are unbiased and meaningful' (AmericaSpeaks, 2002, p. 1, 2). This conception of the organization's role was reiterated to facilitators at the close of Listening to the City, and it is in line with the neutrality that Lee (2015) found was espoused by deliberation specialists more broadly.

The civic groups who sponsored the two forums, by contrast, struggled with the question of whether guaranteeing 'meaningful' forums might require that the sponsoring organization move from serving as 'broker' to serving as public advocate for the positions arrived at in the forum. Initially, both the MAS and the Civic Alliance saw their role as one of expert consultant to rebuilding authorities. An MAS staffer described her organization's approach as 'having a quiet relationship—influential board members talking to people in LMDC [the main rebuilding agency]'.[7] Similarly, the head of the Civic Alliance explained in February 2002 that that 'our role is not to be directly part of the public process but to be a resource to people who make decisions' (quoted in Pedersen, 2002).

When Imagine New York's recommendations were ignored by rebuilding authorities, the MAS began to struggle with whether to be an 'outside advocate or a monitoring partner', as an MAS staffer explained. Striking a 'balance between staying public on issues and having a quiet relationship' was no easy task.[8] Eventually, the MAS became more comfortable with a role as public critic. It joined with advocacy groups to outline nine principles that had not been addressed by the rebuilding authorities' guidelines, while continuing to sponsor workshops and seminars for the public.

The Civic Alliance, for its part, had more success in gaining officials' ear early on. The group had been able to get some larger planning issues into the agenda for Listening to the City, as well as to secure the financial support, attendance, and endorsement of rebuilding authorities. Authorities' decision to shelve the initial site plans in response to the public veto that came out of Listening to the City was viewed as a huge victory. However, in the ensuing weeks and months, little else that came of the forum, notably calls for less office space and more affordable housing, was responded to by rebuilding authorities. Gradually, the Civic Alliance began to be more vocal in its criticisms, but the shift was

difficult. The stumbling block was partly practical. Would the group have more impact by challenging the process from outside it or trying to redirect it from inside? But there were also worries about turning a friendly process into an adversarial one. As an activist in the coalition told me, there was a reluctance to be perceived as 'obstructionist', given New York City's long history of community advocacy derailing development projects.[9]

Six months after Listening to the City, the Civic Alliance was willing to embrace an oppositional role. By that time, however, opportunities for public input had diminished. There may have been no way that the civic groups sponsoring public deliberation could have secured a continuing role for the public. With the New York state governor's re-election and increasing involvement in the rebuilding process, some of the ambiguity of authority that had allowed the civic groups to press for public input had receded. It is worth asking, however, whether the civic groups involved in Listening to the City and Imagine might have been able to win more earlier on. Right after Listening to the City, the public was cast as having virtuously forced narrow-minded rebuilding authorities to change course. This might have been the moment for Listening to the City's organizers to press hard, and perhaps mobilize participants to press hard, for more of the recommendations that came out of the forum. Organizers might have reminded authorities that 'the people' wanted not only an iconic tower but also affordable housing at the site. They wanted not only the restoration of the street grid but also a reduction of the amount of planned office space. We do not know, of course, whether organizers would have succeeded had they adopted a more contentious role. But this is the scenario that the forums' participants seemed to have envisioned, if not the forums' organizers.

Deliberation specialists tend to conceptualize public deliberation as a kind of an alternative to political contention, a sphere of civil and reasonable talk properly separated from the messy contentiousness of routine politics (see also Irwin, 2006; Lehoux, Daudelin, & Abelson, 2012; Martin, 2008). That conception ran up against participants' ideas about what it was they were doing and, possibly, against the demands of making deliberation matter in a contentious political process.

Case studies of other deliberative exercises reveal similar tensions. Barnes, Newman, Knops, and Sullivan (2003) describe a British effort to involve community members in planning a conference about young people's issues. Planning broke down over just what 'community' meant, with city officials pressing for involving youth groups from around the city while the original members of the group, who were politically active Pakistani Muslims, argued that their history of working on behalf of the community made expanding the group unnecessary. A Canadian network of scientists and policy-makers sought to include 'ordinary citizens' in their discussions about genetics policy, but network members' view of citizen participants as valuable only by virtue of their 'disinterestedness' made it impossible for them to take advantage of the knowledge that the citizen participants actually brought to the table (Lehoux et al., 2012). In forums in Germany and the UK, organizers' conceptions of the 'public' as composed of individuals led organizers to discourage participants from speaking as members of groups (Braun & Schultz, 2010). In each case, participants' ideas about what key democratic terms meant differed from those of organizers, in ways that may have undermined the possibility of effective participation.

Conclusion

Architect Michael Sorkin later described the Listening to the City forum as profoundly frustrating. He felt, he said, like a delegate in a '1950s Soviet Party Congress'. The options for how to develop the site had been determined in advance and they were basically identical. When the master of ceremonies for the event gave a 'brief pep talk on how the meeting was democratic as all get out because "in democracy, the people have a chance to speak!"' Sorkin had had enough. He stood up and yelled 'Buuuuuulllllshiiiiiit! Democracy means the people have the power to choose!' His 'tiny act of insurrection went completely unnoticed', he commented ruefully, as he was shushed and the tables turned to their deliberations (Sorkin, 2002, p. 58).

Certainly, the MC, who was the head of AmericaSpeaks, knew the definition of democracy. But I have argued that the contemporary enthusiasm for citizen participation conflates multiple kinds of decision-making under the broad banner of democracy. 'Flat management' does not mean that workers choose whom to hire and fire. Commons-based peer production like Wikipedia, where an online community makes decisions, is different from crowdsourcing, where an organization solicits ideas for a product design or technical solution and then rewards a winner (Brabham, 2013). When Obama campaign staffers declared that volunteers 'owned' the campaign, they meant that volunteers were encouraged to come up with new ways to raise money, not that they had any input into the candidate's platform.

What joins all these efforts is that they are 'democratic-y'. That is, they are associated with a kind of democratic flavour or sensibility. And there is nothing wrong with their claiming that flavour, as long as their place in the process of making decisions is clear. In that vein, it makes sense to distinguish among participatory projects generally, and those convened as part of a local, state, or national policy-making process specifically, based on how much actual control over decisions participants are intended to have (a la Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation' or Brabham's (2013) 'locus of control').

But I have also argued for better understanding how conceptions of democratic decision-making diffuse across institutional settings. For example, if models drawn from business management now inform participatory initiatives in local governance and models drawn from computer programming now define what counts as radical participation in electoral campaigning, one consequence may be that some values eclipse others in commonsensical understandings of democracy without anyone much noticing. Democracy may come to be associated more with openness than with equality, more with participation than with power. Having a voice may be defined more as expression than as influence. Whether that is actually happening, of course, remains to be seen.

Even more generally, however, we need a fuller genealogy of democratic participation. Pieces of such a genealogy already exist. In France, the case for public participation in science rests on a very different understanding of participation than that current in the 1970s, when participation was associated with experimentation more than consensus (Quet, 2013). In the UK, participation today is viewed as a route to restoring the public's trust rather than to providing it information (Irwin, 2006). Identifying why certain conceptions of democratic participation gain currency and others fade can help us to grasp the current horizons of democratic possibility, as well, perhaps, as to identify alternative possibilities.

Notes

1. In the same vein, Pateman (2012) criticizes the subsuming of 'participatory democracy' under 'deliberative democracy' for neglecting participatory democrats' concern with democratizing formally non-political institutions like the workplace.
2. In the following, I discuss two initiatives, Imagine New York and Listening to the City. I joined the steering committee of Imagine New York in December 2001. I was trained and worked as a facilitator, helped to plan the workshops and to synthesize ideas generated in them for the draft visions, and interviewed organizers. My research team and I observed 12 workshops and the summit, and interviewed 32 workshop participants over the phone in open-ended interviews about their experiences of the workshops and ideas about the rebuilding process more generally (see Polletta & Wood, 2005 for a fuller discussion). I interviewed the organizers of Listening to the City, participated in the day-long event, and, with my research team, interviewed 50 participants. We interviewed 24 of them again a year later. In our interviews with participants, we asked several questions designed to get at the conversational and political models on which they operated. For example, we asked participants, 'Have you ever done anything like Listening to the City (or Imagine) before?' (and a follow-up: 'Have you ever participated in a group discussion that was similar to this one?') and 'when you decided to come to Listening to the City, what did you imagine that you would do in it?' We also paid close attention to the analogies that people cited in answer to other questions.
3. Interviews L1B-FP14; L1-FP11; I-GSA11.
4. Interviews L1-FP12; L1-FP2.
5. Interviews L1-FP12; L1-LW8; LIB-GE2; LIB-FP2.
6. Polletta notes from Imagine NY Summit, 1 June 2002, New York City. Polletta's interview with Gianni Longo, ACP Planning and Imagine New York Steering Committee, New York City, 9 March 2002.
7. Polletta's interview with Holly Leicht, Municipal Art Society, phone interview, 17 October 2002.
8. Polletta's interview with Holly Leicht.
9. David Kallick email to Polletta, 14 November 2011.

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