A Realistic View of the Participatory Utopia. Reflections on Participation[*]

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Participation has become a buzz word in many an economic and social context. This however hides the fact that there is a great variety of different participative practices, both on micro and macro levels, practiced for very different purposes. Sometimes speaking of participation is just juggling with names.

In many enterprises market driven work organisations offer "participation" to employees, which is in fact a device to misuse employees' interest in "authentic participation" (Fals Borda, 2013/2007) for increasing the efficiency of work by dependent autonomy. In modern forms of so called interactive value creation via the internet we find another practice: so called participation of consumers or online communities of co-producers in designing, creating or improving (new) products. Even in trade unions the use and practice of participation is sometimes ambivalent.

In order to distinguish authentic participation in the interest of participants from the misuse of participation for different interests (increase in efficiency; exploitation of participants' creative capacities) this author coins the term of democratic participation, characterised by, among others, democratic dialogue between subjects (no othering business); collective reflection; giving a voice to all participants. Finally it is argued that the practice of democratic participation may open horizons of utopia.

Key words: authentic participation, democratic participation, participation on micro and macro levels, trade unions' participative practices, inflationary use of the term participation

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[*] The expression "Participatory Utopia" was first used by my colleague Danilo Streck (2013).

The present inflationary and undifferentiated speaking of participation hides the fact, that there is a great variety of participative practices, depending on the different contexts, in which, and on the different purposes for which participation is practiced. I will briefly try to characterise six different practices named participation, many of them misleadingly.

1. Participation as dependent autonomy at work versus democratic participation

Since about 20 – 30 years employers have realised that participation may considerably increase the efficiency of work. In a market driven work organisation, indirect steering and a kind of employees' dependent autonomy have substituted the former hierarchical work organisation based on personal command and control. This is a form of making instrumental use of the employees' interest in participation. Many employees however begin to realise that this kind of participation is not in their interest. Being more and more efficient at work, they themselves endanger their health up to burn out situations (self-damage). They expected real participation (co-determination) but found themselves in a situation of dependent autonomy (Peters, 2001), dependent on working conditions beyond their influence.

The instrumental use of employees' participation in market driven work organisations aiming at increasing efficiency and productivity of work is clearly different from participation which meets employees' interest in self and co-determination.[1] Are there any possibilities of creating space for democracy visible in these modern, market driven forms of work organisation?

Before dealing with this question, I want to discuss an argument referring to the "distance between our participatory ideals … and our actual, messy practice as action researchers" (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2011). According to the authors this messy practice of action research, this deviation from espoused values of participation has to do with the omnipresent character of

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[1] I am using the term „democratic participation" in order to mark the difference to all forms of instrumental participation, which are actually dominant in organisations and enterprises.

power as (according to Foucault) "a basic component of all social relations. Thus it is not possible to organise power-free communicative spaces in organisations", Marianne Kristiansen and J. Bloch-Poulsen conclude. (l.c.).

I am not convinced by this conclusion. Nobody experienced in organisational reality and development can realistically expect that power free spaces of communication might or do exist in organisational reality. One cannot conclude this from, e.g., Habermas' theory of communicative action and deliberative democracy; the less, as Habermas distinguishes between life world as a space of communicative action on one hand, and system (economy) as the realm of instrumental action *(Zwecktätigkeit)* on the other hand, where communicative action is not possible by definition. This assumption is however to be questioned, too, though for different reasons.

Anyhow: Neither from experience nor from reading Habermas one may expect the possibility of an ideal speech situation in real organisations (system), and one should not be surprised or disappointed to find out, that power free communication spaces do in fact not exist in organisations. In other words: The existence of power in social reality is normal, as we know by experience rather than from theory.[2]

This means that any efforts to organise democracy at work are confronted with organisational structures characterised by power, be it by personal hierarchical power through command and control in traditional Fordist work organisations, be it by impersonal, structural power exerted by market imperatives in market driven organisations. In any case and under any form of (structural or personal) power practicing democratic dialogue,[3] open for all members of the enterprise, needs and at the same time opens public spheres in enterprises (Palshaugen, 2002), dialogue spaces (Fricke, 2013) or, as Nies and Sauer say, reflection spaces (Nies & Sauer, 2012).

Dialogue spaces are the topoi for utopia. Actually employees suffer from the dependent autonomy limited by working conditions (especially limited

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[2]   It is however necessary to distinguish different forms of power. Not all of them are negative in relation to participation, e.g. authority (if opened up for discussion, of course).

[3]   See Björn Gustavsen's 13 criteria for democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1992, pp. 13-14).

personal and time resources) which they cannot influence. Although they appreciate their autonomy as an alternative to open hierarchical forms of work organisation, they are subject to self-exploitation by the built-in tendency to permanently increasing the efficiency of their work. Dialogues in open and public spaces are necessary for a joint analysis of their situation, and they are essential preconditions for the employees to understand its logics and to realise that the difficulties to cope with their tasks and challenges are not due to individual weaknesses but equal to all of them. To overcome their isolation in dialogues is a source of solidarity, which has become so rare in present work situations in enterprises as well as in society, and it is a first step to practice democratic participation as a strategy to create public spaces in enterprises. This opens perspectives of refuting the understanding of the economy as a private institution of capitalist owners according to market logics as seen by neo-liberal ideology. Here the political dimension of democratic participation and democratic dialogue becomes evident.

Last year I presented these considerations in a workshop on power and participation in Roskilde (Denmark). During the discussion following my presentation, Olav Eikeland from Oslo and Akershus University College argued that organisations are not the appropriate place for democratic participation. They are, he argued, spaces of instrumental action, not of communicative action (Habermas). Accordingly any efforts to introduce democracy and democratic participation in organisations are in vain.[4]

I oppose this argument, and I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs 2 and 3 that traditional as well as market driven organisations are far better places to organise democratic participation than situations created by strategies to dissolve enterprise as an organisation, such as crowd sourcing (2) and interactive value creation chains (3). These are the latest tendencies of fluid capitalism (Zygmunt Bauman) to exploit consumers' and producers' creative potentials by hindering them to organise and communicate except via internet. Dialogue, democratic participation seems impossible under these

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[4] Maybe I am reproducing Olav's argument too briefly – so I invite him to elaborate his argument responding to the present article in *International Journal of Action Research* – be it in IJAR's discussion forum, be it by a full article.

conditions of fluid workforce and virtual co-operation, at least far more difficult than in organisations.

2. Crowd sourcing – juggling with names

One of the most advanced concepts of crowd sourcing is called Generation Open (GenO). It has been developed by IBM in order to organise a process of software production by using the worldwide resources of qualified engineers and software specialists (Lepke, Rehm, & Jänicke, 2013). The sourcing model Liquid as well as GenO are instruments to raise software development and management productivity considerably by, e.g. cycle time reduction by 30% (IBM 2010, quoted by Lepke et al., 2013, p. 21).

Liquid is a decisive step to dissolve enterprises and shop floors as the organisational spaces for production and value creation in the field of software development, application, and services.[5] Within the global IBM concern, software services are co-ordinated by so called Global Delivery Centres (GDC), which serve as bridgeheads for communicating and co-operating with customers. There are only a limited number of IBM employees with better paid jobs working in these local GDCs. It is their job to recruit, guide and coordinate low paid IT workers worldwide.

Software projects are divided into smaller standardised work packages of some hours to few days duration with given delivery dates, defined quality criteria and fixed prices. These work packages are announced for application via internet (IBM crowd sourcing portals such as Topcoder or zerochaos). Engineers worldwide may apply for a work package; it is however only the best qualified result that will be paid. All participants, being paid or not, have to deliver their results including the rights for IBM to make use of them. No participant will be informed about the reasons why his concept is only the second best. "This is the principle of the IBM competition named Liquid" (Lepke et al., 2013, p. 26, my translation).

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[5] The following presentation of Liquid and GenO organisation at IBM is taken from Lepke et al. (2013, 20 ff.).

Managing large software programmes and the many small work packages into which these programmes have been divided is executed according to the principles of "agile software development". Two out of these 12 principles say: "The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organising teams. …At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly" (www.agilemanifesto.org)[6]

Self-organising teams? This reminds us of the well known concept to achieve autonomy at work, developed during the Norwegian programme for Industrial Democracy and the German programme for Humanisation of Working and Living Conditions. It is however nothing but juggling with names. In the present context of "agile" software development and management self-organising teams have nothing to do with autonomy at work according to employees' interests: they aim at increasing efficiency of work, as the second principle clearly indicates: "At regular levels the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly. A third principle even intensifies this demand: "Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely" (l.c.).

Another component of the IBM GenO and Liquid system are the so called blue sheets and blue cards. Blue sheets contain information about resources needed, dates, quality requirements, and assets (such as programme codes, best practice description, etc.) to be used or developed. After the work package has been finished and delivered, team supervisors check its quality and usability. In case of in house delivery the employees are granted so called blue points according to the quality and timeliness of their product. The blue points are collected individually for every employee. If the sum of collected blue points in international ranking is above average, the employee gets the

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[6] The agile manifesto has been signed by numerous well known software programming specialists such as Kent Beck and Ward Cunningham (developers of extreme programming), Ken Schwaber (inventor of scrum – another software development concept, see Sauer & Pfeiffer, 2013), James Grenning (running an agile development blog) etc. The manifesto is internationally very prominent among software industry; it has been translated into many languages from Albanian, Català, Cesky, Euskara to Hungarian etc.

status "blue select", otherwise he/she remains "blue player". On basis of these blue cards, blue points and status definitions employees are worldwide compared, identified by their "digital identity" in international rankings (Lepke et al., 2013, p. 25)[7]. Outside experts get liquid points, too, granted for participation in callings; by collecting these points they improve their "digital identity". Based on their position in international rankings the experts may improve their chances for being selected in future worldwide calls.

My intention in this paragraph is to demonstrate the nearly total lack of opportunities for democratic participation in crowd sourcing strategies. Compared to any organisation or enterprise these chances do not exist in crowd sourcing situations; at least they are much more restricted. Both crowd sourcing systems and economic organisations are structured by power relations, though in different forms: by personal or structural power in organisations whereas power in Liquid systems is exerted through organising worldwide competition among isolated "participants". Nevertheless the chances for democratic participation are better in organisations, because there is the opportunity of real (not virtual) personal communication between employees, while crowd sourcing strategies are developed to use human resources worldwide without assembling them in a place at a time.

The above presented information about crowd sourcing as organised by IBM concepts (Liquid; blue sheets/blue card) is taken from an analysis elaborated by two works council representatives at IBM (Lepke and Rehm) and a trainer from an IGM training centre (Sophie Jänicke). I have decided to follow these authors because their analysis is based on experience with IBM strategies, and it is written very clearly in an informative language, based on facts.

For more detailed information about crowd sourcing the reader should however have a look on the original report, published in IG Metall 2013. My intention in this paragraph was not to provide a genuine and detailed analysis of crowd sourcing systems, but to demonstrate the lack of dialogue spaces and accordingly of opportunities for democratic participation in these capital

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[7] For a detailed description of the concept of digital identity (see IBM 2010, quoted by Lepke et al., 2013, p. 25).

dominated fields, based on worldwide competition among isolated experts. This system may be described as a "virtual conveyer belt" on in which isolated software experts compete for standardised work packages without any guarantee to be paid, and without opportunity of personal communication.

3. Participation as interactive value creation

There is a new business emerging called participation of consumers in designing, creating (new) products (so called co-producers or prosumers). This is a form of extracting "tacky knowledge" from consumers (examples: stainless deodorant spray, Nike sneakers or software components). Consumers comment on possibilities to improve a product via internet or in communicative networks. Some firms organise open innovation processes by, e.g., inviting so called lead users to a seminar in order to skim off their usable knowledge. These seminars are organised like a collaborative play, building on participants' motivation instead of paying them for their ideas.

Astonishing enough, there are sociologists who seem to be enthusiastic about these forms of participating in interactive value creation processes, calling them opportunities of self-determination and self-development. "The participating actors, many of whom are themselves users of the products they co-produce, make their contributions voluntarily, without contract or salary…. Collaboration among co-producers is co-ordinated neither by markets nor by hierarchies, … but by these actors' online community"; examples are YouTube, social networks, Wikipedia and other media platforms (Wittke & Hanekop, 2011, pp. 9-10). "In other cases, firms open only some tasks to external actors, (which) …typically include product feedback, tests, design, or product development and innovations. In such firm-driven forms of collaborative production the governance is hybrid: value creation by firms is co-ordinated by markets and/or hierarchies. "New business models of open innovation and customer co-creation (however) … are increasingly pushing firms to involve externals", which raises the problem of combining "hierarchy and market coordination with 'pure' collaborative projects" (Wittke & Hanekop, 2011, pp. 10-11). Prosumers' motivation is described as "fun, gratification, self-fulfillment, an interest in the specific issue or activity, and

the enhancement of knowledge and abilities." In additionan important "incentive for participation is that users want a certain product that serves their individual needs" (Wittke & Hanekop, 2011, pp. 12-13).

It is not necessary in the context of this paper to go deeper into these descriptions and analyses of new business models. What I want to show is that many an interpretation of these new phenomena in social science literature is doubtful, exaggerated and beyond reality. Some examples: We read about "the ability to manage the value chain from the customer's point of view"; the increasing empowerment of customers; "lead user innovators" and "customer co-creators as the central entity of the value chain"; "new forms of value creation which are based on informal, non-contractual, flexible and often short-term relationships", etc. (Piller, Ihl, & Vossen, 2011, pp. 32-36).

Taken seriously, the categories of empowerment and participation are not appropriate to analyse and understand what really happens within the new business models and market strategies. Reality in internet economy does not correspond to democratic/participative values and practices; these categories are used in a formal sense only. Lamla (2012, pp. 152-179) in a critical discussion of social science literature on interactive value creation points out, that its interpretations of the latest trends in internet economy range from "chances of new forms of economic democracy" (consumer citizens or netizens), "morality of markets (Stehr, 2007)", democratisation of provider-customer-relationships (Benkler, 2006; Reichwald & Piller, 2006) up to "intensification of capitalist exploitation (Voß & Rieder, 2005: all literature quoted from Lamla, 2012, p. 153). Lamla is critical about the connotations of economic democracy or morality of markets in connection with new trends in internet economy, and I think he is right.

Sabine Pfeiffer (2012) discusses another weak point of current social science literature dealing with Web 2.0. In a serious analysis of actual trends in internet economy she points out that the current discussion of customer-provider- relations in new business models neglects the fact that economic value is not created by any new relationships between customers and firms, lead user meetings etc but by labour. She criticises the "mainstream discourse which claims that internet does not only change society but also its economic foundations: Digitalised value creation spreads into all (social and economic)

spheres thus eroding traditional value creation chains. Places and forms of value creation seem to vanish in virtual worlds, materiality of product and production process seem to have dissolved into bits and bytes" (Pfeiffer, 2013, p. 177, my translation). Who creates economic value, Sabine Pfeiffer asks: the 38.000 Nike employees, working in development, design, marketing and sales departments to produce and sell Nike sneakers, or is it the customer who via a special website may design his individual sneaker according to his preferences and wishes (Pfeiffer, 2013, p. 191).

This is exactly the point, I think. In discussions, interpretations and analyses of the internet economy and its new phenomena concrete work and workplaces/work organisations are more and more hidden behind a curtain of internet based relationships between customers, in "product clinics" (Piller et al., p. 38) or elsewhere in the internet. Democratic participation, democratic dialogue and dialogue spaces cannot take place without real contacts between persons at work, in organisations or elsewhere. That is where they are needed. Using the words of participation, empowerment, collaboration to describe virtual relations is nothing but confusing.

4. Trade Unions' often instrumental understanding of participation

Participation has become a buzzword in German trade unions. The reality however is, that even trade unions are partly infected by the emerging trend to use participation as an instrument to increase efficiency.

I have been a member of a working group on participation on high IGM level for two years. The idea was and is to plan and initiate a TU campaign to enhance participation in local TU organisations and in enterprises. The first step was an IGM conference about participation in February 2013 with about 100 participants, most of them members/heads of works councils and trade union officials from different organisational levels (local level up to the vice chairman of IG Metall). Apart from some group discussions, held in traditional forms, the conference was not very participative.

Several participants (local trade union officials and/or heads of works councils) presented examples of participation they had organised in "their" enterprises. Some of the examples were impressive by their genuine democ-

ratic understanding and practice of participation, but in the general discussion during the conference it turned out that the majority of participating union officials did not have a democratic understanding of participation. One of them even claimed: "We (trade unions) did not invent participation". What he wanted to say was: We are confronted in "our" enterprises by management initiated participation, and we have to react. The result is that the broad majority of works councils does not imagine or practice democratic forms of participation, in which the employees (blue and white collar workers) have an active role determining the means and goals of participative processes in democratic dialogues. Works councils imagine, that it is their business to initiate but at the same time to limit and control participative processes. In other words: They copy the management understanding of participation as initiated, organised and directed by management, but not by employees themselves as genuine democratic processes according to their interests.

Why so? One major reason is that trade union officials and members as well as employees in general lack any consciousness of trade union history. In the discussion during the mentioned conference I reminded the audience that democratic participation was a trade union invention and a burning interest of workers for improving and co-determining their work and life conditions since the late nineteenth century. Trade unions should be proud of their history re democratic participation. These remarks met spontaneous applause by the audience.

The problem however is that trade union organisations have been sceptical against direct workers' participation since the 1920s, and they still are. Democratic participation as a trade union strategy did not play a major role since those days. Generally speaking: democratic participation processes are always open processes: and this is something threatening for big organisations and their bureaucratic governance, especially for IGM with its culture of centralisation.

It turned out more and more that IGM officials, both on central as well as on local level, do not have a concept of democratic participation. There was a campaign to organise participation on enterprise level called "Better instead of cheaper" (Besser statt billiger) as of 2003 and following years. The idea was to make employees participate in innovation processes; they are invited

to elaborate innovation as an alternative to cost cutting strategies. This is certainly legitimate as a defence strategy against outsourcing, closing down production sites and imminent unemployment. But it is ambivalent insofar, as the goals of these processes are an increase in productivity and only in the second place, if at all, to improve the employees' working conditions (Haipeter et al., 2011).

Another example for the ambivalence of trade union's participative concepts and practice are tariff agreements by which works councils are obliged to organise in co-operation with management employees' participation in continuous optimisation processes in order to increase productivity and efficiency of work permanently to the benefit of the firm. The employers association was very interested to negotiate this tariff agreement and to get these "participative" processes going, so they paid a price for it: In return they guaranteed the existing jobs for the next 8 years (2012 – 2020), they offered jobs to all apprentices after the end of their training and they agreed to pay casual workers the same wage as regular employees. This price is however not too high, because the tariff agreement was negotiated and accepted in aviation industry, an industry with solid growth and high profits (Zukunftstarifvertrag 2012 between the employers' association of the metal and electro industry, Hamburg and IG Metall, district Küste)

I call this co-operative practice between industry, trade union and works council collaboration instead of participation.

5. Direct participation and socio-political context on micro and macro levels

We have to distinguish forms and fields of direct participation in organisations/enterprises from those in regions or in society. In all these fields the opportunity of direct and democratic participations depends on the more or less favourable socio-political contexts

In Germany there are extensive legal regulations on employees' and trade unions' co-determination rights on enterprise and on plant levels. They are codified in co-determination laws (1951, 1976) on the level of the enterprise

(Unternehmensmitbestimmung), and on plant level by the Industrial Constitution Law (Betriebsverfassungsgesetz, 1972, 2002, 2009).[8]

As seen from the perspective of democratic direct participation, these regulations are ambivalent. On the one hand they provide a context and frame for direct participation: to a certain extent co-determination rules open and guarantee space for democratic and direct employees' participation. On the other hand they limit and sometimes even hinder processes of direct participation, because their logic is regulation of representative democracy. There are only 3 paragraphs that grant direct co-determination rights to workers (§§ 90/91; 82 I, 2 and 28a II, 1, Industrial Constitution Law); the great majority of co-determination regulations refer to works councils as employees' representatives.

It is therefore very much dependent on works councils' attitudes and capacities/capabilities, whether they support direct participation of employees or not. One has to take into account, that members of works councils are by tradition trained in the spirit of representation. They understand themselves as employees' representatives, whose task is to represent workers' interests. They are so to say the specialists for co-determination and do not depend on dialogues with employees to understand their interests and needs. Secondly, many of them are afraid of losing power and influence within the enterprise, if they concede employees to present their interests and needs themselves by direct participation. They do not understand that their fear to lose influence and power is based on misunderstanding direct participation: If they play the game well, they may see employees who become active and self conscious by direct participation as an additional source of influence for negotiations with management. And finally most works council members (at least in IG Metall) are recruited from of the group of blue collar workers which hinders them to understand the way highly qualified employees (white collar workers, engineers and other experts) communicate, cooperate and think. This is a sincere problem for IG Metall since decades, especially in market driven work organisations, in which qualified employees tend to accept management's

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[8] For the following discussion I regard the regulation on plant level by Industrial Constitution Law only.

offer of dependent autonomy at work. It is only in recent years, that more and more works council members are recruited from the group of qualified white collar workers and experts. These groups tend not to accept the style of representative works councils only; they are very much in favour of autonomy at work; an offer of direct participation by works council would certainly meet their interest in self management and their self consciousness: both are important preconditions and capacities for direct participation.

Direct participation is also a need and an opportunity in society, however not really accepted by a society, which is used to practice and understand democracy exclusively as representative democracy. Among experts and politicians of nearly any political orientation, with the exception of some greens and the pirates, there is a fear of direct participation, be it democratic in a normative sense or not. Elected representatives on all levels from local to national and international level, in politics as well as in trade unions, are afraid of open participative processes, because results and demands are unforeseeable and a threat to those in power. They do not realise nor accept that democratic participation might one day become the only way to re-establish acceptable, legitimate democracy.

In addition, one has to see that important decisions are taken or at least prepared and dominated by experts and lobbies, i.e. by expertise and/or big money and financial interests. This leads to an erosion of representative democracy as e.g. Colin Crouch (2005) has pointed out. The notion of national and international politics as dominated by international capital becomes more and more common. People are widely excluded from decisions on developments and big projects that significantly affect their living conditions.

Consequently there is much public resistance against such projects. Strategies for people to participate in decisions that threaten their life conditions or values are not developed or practiced. It is therefore that people protest in direct public actions of resistance against such projects, as long as opportunities of direct participation are missing. There are many examples, nationally and internationally, of these forms of public resistance by direct action. In Germany the big resistance movements concern

– the use and permanent disposal of nuclear waste

- noise and land grabbing by the Frankfurt international airport

- the waste of (not only financial) resources and destruction of a city by plans to build an underground railway station in Stuttgart, while the existing station is well functioning

- the fact that financial institutions like European Stability Mechanism (ESM) that decide about the transfer of billions of Euros to banks; the so called Troika (EU, IMF and World Bank) imposing austerity politics on European states like Greece, Portugal, Spain etc: they are all acting without legitimacy from national or EU parliaments and nevertheless have a decisive impact on living conditions and perspectives of millions of people.

It is a common argument, that direct actions against such projects, even though they lack democratic legitimacy at least according to the rules of representative democracy, are not legitimate. The interesting point however is, that both parties, those in power like politicians, capital owners, financial concerns on the one hand an the people on the other challenge each other's legitimacy of action. This points to a fundamental crisis of the system of representative democracy, which will certainly not be tolerated unlimited. One of the possible solutions to reinvent democratic social regulations will be peoples' direct participation in public decisions.

Here the political dimension of democratic participation on the micro level in organisations/enterprises becomes now visible: Employees who develop their innovative qualifications and democratic practices will on a social level become the citizens, who may use their experiences and capacities to rescue and develop our democratic systems by direct democratic participation activities. The institutional frame for direct democratic participation is however still to be developed. A challenging perspective!

6. Democratic participation – an end in itself, based on democratic values

I am speaking of democratic participation, in order to mark the difference between this normative concept and instrumental forms of participation. Democratic participation is a genuine human interest (anthropologic con-

stant). All humans want to live and work as far as possible in self-determination: hence their interest in democratic participation.

The essential elements of democratic participation are democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1992; Kristiansen, 2004); collective reflection (Eikeland, 2007; Nies & Sauer, 2012; Fricke, 2013); each participant having a voice in an open change process (Streck, 2013), no othering business (Eikeland, 2007).

Employees welcome the opportunity to engage in democratic participation processes. Due to the difficulties to influence their working conditions in market driven organisations and resulting from the lack of respect in hierarchical organisations, they are however often handicapped by long term experiences of failure. They have too often experienced at work, that they have little or no direct influence on their working conditions, except through their trade union representatives, which often creates problems, too. Employees' interests are hurt, their voices not heard, their innovative qualifications suppressed.[9]

After initial scepticism however employees are normally very enthusiastic; their engagement is high and honest, under the condition however, that they have the opportunity to determine the ends of participative processes themselves and to participate from their results. They also insist in having a voice in designing and performing the process of democratic participation - see Gustavsen's "criteria of democratic participation" (Gustavsen, 1992, pp. 13-14). Kristiansen and Bloch Poulsen (2005) report on the same experience.

Democratic participation processes release a great and unexpected innovatory potential (Fricke et al., 1980; Kristiansen, 2011); participants become creative and often very courageous. Their engagement takes place in a context of conflicts, constraints, power structure etc., i.e. in messy reality. In spite of these constraints they realize after some time that their activity and innovative qualifications have at least some impact, often growing when participative processes unfold. They experience what it means to communi-

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[9]   There is a culture of silence (Freire 1975) in many a European and North American enterprise/organisation as we find it in Latin American societies as a result of colonization 500 years ago and the following suppression of the people's voice and lives.

cate instead of bearing their working conditions isolated from each other, doubting in their capacities to cope with their jobs' requirements. We experienced this in all our action research projects, from the first one in the 1970s with so called unskilled blue collar workers (Fricke et al., 1980; Fricke, 2011a), to the latest one with a group of works council members and local trade union officials 2006-2009 (Buggeln, 2013).

It is absolutely necessary to practice democratic participation in organisational reality; otherwise it is not possible to start processes of enhancing employees' self-determination and of change directed to work place democracy. This does however mean that democratic dialogue cannot be realised in its ideal form, as e.g. formulated in Habermas' or Buber's or Bakhtin's theories. Democratisation by participation and dialogue must be practiced in difficult real contexts. That is why they have only limited chances in present societies, but on the other side they do have a chance, and it will grow over time as I will argue later in this paper.

There is a set of 13 criteria for democratic dialogue, published by Björn Gustavsen in 1992. These criteria have been developed from practical experience in about 60 action research projects within the Swedish LOM programme in the early 1980s. They guided participants in these projects to learn how to practice democratic dialogue and democratic participation in real organisational situations, i.e. under conditions of power, conflict, constraints etc, in other words: in messy practice.

Gustavsen's criteria are important as landmarks on our step by step way to democratic participation. Failures will happen, but there is "no way to democratic participation than walking it in present reality" (Antonio Machado, quoted by Danilo Streck), which means engaging in intensive processes of learning and change. According to my experience from action research projects between the 1970s and 2009 these learning processes can be hard, intensive and very deep, for both researchers and practitioners. It is important, I think, to describe and reflect such learning processes more often in action research writing than is usually done at present (one rare exception are Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2004).

I want to present Gustavsen's criteria of democratic dialogue here in full length in order to demonstrate that at least some of them, taken seriously and

practiced continuously, are appropriate to initiate deep going personal learning processes as well as radical changes in organisations/enterprises.

CRITERIA OF DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE[10]

1. The dialogue process is a process of exchange: ideas and arguments move to and fro between the participants

2. It must be possible for all concerned to participate

3. Each participant has an obligation not only to put forth his/her own ideas but also help others to contribute their ideas

4. All participants are equal.

5. Work experience is the basis for participation. This is the only type of experience which, by definition, all participants have.

6. At least some of the experiences which every participant has when entering the dialogue must be considered legitimate.

7. It must be possible for everybody to develop an understanding of the issues at stake

8. All arguments which pertain to issues under discussion are legitimate. No argument should be rejected on the ground that it emerges from an illegitimate source.

9. The points, arguments etc., which are to enter the dialogue, must be made by a participating actor. Nobody can participate „on paper" only

10. Each participant must accept that other participants can have better arguments

11. The workrole, authority, etc. of all the participants can be made subject to discussion – no participant is exempt in this respect

12. The participants should be able to tolerate an increasing degree of difference of opinion

13. The dialogue must continuously produce agreements, which can provide platforms for practical action. Note that there is no contradiction between this criterion and the previous one. The major strength of a democratic system compared to all other ones is that it has the benefit op drawing upon a

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[10] Björn Gustavsen "Dialogue and development. Social science for social action: Toward organisational renewal" (1992, pp. 3-4).

broad range of opinions and ideas which inform practice, while at the same time being able to make decisions which can gain the support of all participants.

Engagement in democratic dialogue using these criteria stimulates a process of learning/training by practicing democratic participation in any organisation. This is my experience, which I will exemplify by some selected criteria as follows:

Criterion 10: Each participant must accept that other participants can have better arguments.
This criterion challenges the claim of managers to have better arguments by their hierarchical position or by personal power. Whose reality counts will be found out in dialogue.

Criterion 11: The workrole, authority, etc. of all the participants can be made subject to discussion: no participant is exempt in this respect.
This criterion speaks of authority instead of power in general. Not power per se is hindering democratic dialogue. There is authority that may be useful in dialogue processes, under the condition however, that it may be questioned and discussed. Authority is a form of power in social relations that should not be destroyed for principle.

Criterion 12: The participants should be able to tolerate an increasing degree of difference of opinion.
This criterion accepts differences of opinion as a necessary precondition to achieve results acceptable for all participants. Democratic participation does not only allow but enhances the articulation of differences by enabling each participant to have a voice (Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen are very much aware of this challenge in their action research practicing democratic dialogue; they call it dissensus sensibility). At the same time it is respected that accepting increasing differences is a learning process for people who have lived before in a culture of silence.

All these criteria of democratic dialogue are included in criterion 4: All participants are equal (though different, I would add).

To realise democratic dialogues according to the list of criteria is as easy as criterion 4 pretends, but difficult to achieve (Brecht: *Das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist*).

7. The utopian dimension of action research and democratic participation

The very heart of action research is not intervention, Eikeland says, but collective reflection among practitioners across different fields of practice including research. "Action research invites everyone to dialogue as equals…; mainstream research does not but remains outside the field of practice as interpreting audience and spectators" (Eikeland 2006, p. 230). In another paper Eikeland asks: "Why cannot other professions do as the research professions: Justify their professionalism through systematic and collective self-reflection based on … practitioner experience and analysis?" (Eikeland, 2007, p. 52).

In other words: through democratic participation practitioners are invited to engage in democratic dialogue as a chance to practice collective reflection. As a result practitioners experience the possibility of reflexive work. The idea is not to establish communicative spaces free of power; both Foucault and organisational/social reality tell us that this is not possible. The idea is to create public spheres in organisations where democratic participation and democratic dialogue may be practiced. In concrete: Development organisations (Palshaugen, 2000) may serve as a space for reflection back stage, i.e. outside workflow (Eikeland, 2006).

My late French colleague and friend, Claude Faucheux, expressed the same idea. He said (in a seminar on action research, which I organised in 1993): "Why do we need action research? It is not an illusion to expect the reflexive element to become part of praxis to such a degree that practitioners (actors) regard research as a normal process of constant reviewing their actions. Co-operation with professional researchers will then be a normal praxis. Consequently practitioners will then better realise the importance of research for their local affairs…. Contradictions between subject and object,

between science and applied science will disappear …" (Faucheux, 1994, p. 160; my translation).

8. Future chances of democratic participation in organisations and society

As I said, the present socio-political context in Europe and the US is not favourable for practicing democratic participation, neither in business nor in society. Nonetheless the social situation is more in need of democratic participation than ever before. I can see the following tendencies:

The ongoing crisis of representative democracy: participation in general elections is diminishing constantly, sometimes below 50%. As a consequence legitimacy and acceptance are low.

Employees will some day realise that the promise of autonomy at work is a deception, a poisoned chalice. They will refuse to practice participation as an instrument to increase efficiency, and they will demand co-determination on working conditions.

Trade unions will certainly one day find out that there is no way to revitalise but by accepting democratic participation of their membership. They will resist the demands for opening their organisation to democratic participation as long as possible, but at the end they will have to change: Change or die!

The modern practices of "interactive value creation" via internet and communicative networks will also turn out to be methods of profit creation at the cost of consumers. Work and working conditions will be discovered behind the curtain of internet economy phenomena, actually broadly discussed in economic and social science literature, and labour will continue to claim the right of democratic participation.

Facing the ongoing post democratic weakening of representative democracy (Colin Crouch) our joint endeavours to practice democratic participation will one day be appreciated more than at present. The more the actual practices of so called participation will be recognised as instruments for purposes which are not the employees' or citizens' purposes, the more chances will emerge to practice democratic participation. We may then build on the indestructible interest of all humans in real self-determination, autonomy and

democratic participation at work and in their lives. Not at least as a political project.

What we need is a realistic view of the participatory utopia (Danilo Streck).

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