

What Kind of Institutional Implementation for Participatory Democracy? Theories and Debate During the Long 1970s in the United States

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Abstract

In the wake of participatory turn, when participatory democracy has been promoted in multiple sectors of society — far beyond the proper domain of the polity —, the essay assesses the relevance of its very political origins for understanding its transformative meaning. For this purpose, the author reviews the late 1960s and 1970s political literature on participatory democracy theory and its basic findings toward the reform of liberal democracy and social change. This research is part of an ongoing PhD project on the institutional implementation of the participatory democracy during the long 1970s in United States, a topic that has still scarcely been studied.

Keywords: Participatory Democracy; Participatory Turn; Political Theory; Movements; Sixties.

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Since the 1960s, an abundance of techniques, discussions and scholarly literature has been produced in order to make decision-making processes participatory in a broad range of sectors of society concerned with people engagement and/or self-determination, in public or private spaces. This is the reason why the *Journal of Civil Society* has referred to this trend as a “participatory democracy turn” or “participatory turn.”¹ The trend has been identified as a cultural turn, because of the multiple fields involved, far beyond the proper domain of the polity. The cross impact of participatory democracy today has its historic roots in the very same Sixties, when participatory democracy was adopted by the large variety of groups composing the *Movement of movements*.² All of them were aimed at social change as a final goal, to achieve it even by means of democratizing their own particular system of reference. Consequently, organizational and epistemological innovations have been introduced since then, in social cultures as diverse as academies, unions, social services, professionals, political groups or movements, public institutions, industries etc.³ Apart from the separate specific outcomes, participatory democracy apparently has meant different things to different actors. In fact, the conceptualization of the participatory turn has provided the theory of participatory democracy with a core element. Since the 1960s the concept of participatory democracy has gone through a continuing process of reinterpretation and re-operationalization.⁴ Thus, it implies the relevance of a solid epistemological boundary in any evaluation concerning the transformative effect of participatory practices. This is especially meaningful in public policy analysis and institutional implementation of participatory democracy. Indeed, the promoter’s understanding and interpretation of participatory democracy affects the level of citizen participation and its actual impact on decision-making, the policy’s efficacy, and indirectly it may determine potential protests outside of the institutional spaces. Moreover, participatory processes have been developed by left- and right-leaning governments over the years, often associated with populist politics. In fact, public input might be used (or abused) just as a means of consensus building, with the risk that the very exercise of democracy could be deeply flawed.⁵

In the wake of participatory culture, the historical analysis of the institutional implementation of participatory democracy in the United States must necessarily start from the 1970s. The reason can be explained by two main factors. First of all, when the concept of participatory democracy entered the political lexicon of the New Left — and that one of the 1960s social movements —, through the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)’s Port Huron Statement (1962), it was stated as a principle of agency.⁶ By the 1970s it had been sufficiently debated to be recognized as a distinct democratic theory by political scientists and developed as a viable form of government.⁷ In those years, Pateman (1970), Macpherson (1976) and Barber (1984) published the three texts that the political theory literature still refers to as the canon for the participatory democracy theory, stemming from the critical approach to the mainstream liberal democracy theories of that period.⁸ Secondly, in the long 1970s⁹ progressivism set in motion a number of reform movements pressing for citizen-responsive policies, based on community activism, coalition campaigns and public interest groups.¹⁰ At the same time, the Demo-

1. Laurence Bherer, Pascale Dufour and Françoise Montambeault, “The Participatory Democracy Turn: An Introduction,” *Journal of Civil Society*, 3 (2016): 225-30.

2. Van Gosse, “A Movement of movements: The definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell), 277-302.

3. Marta Gara, “Introduzione,” in *Underground Press*, ed. Marta Gara. Milano: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 2018, 89.

4. Bherer, Dufour and Montambeault, “The participatory democracy turn,” 228.

5. Agnes Batory, Sara Svensson, “The use and abuse of participatory governance by populist governments,” *Policy & Politics*, 2 (2020): 227-44.

6. *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Students for a Democratic Society, 1962), 7-8.

7. Jeffrey D. Hilmer, “The State of Participatory Democratic Theory,” *New Political Science*, 1 (2010): 45.

8. See, for instance, the pluralistic interpretations of Joseph Schumpeter and Robert A. Dahl.

9. This periodization refers to the period from the late 1960s-early 1970s gradual demise of protest upheavals to the early 1980s, when the core features of Reaganism have not yet spiked. Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001, xvi.

10. See, for instance, Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.

cratic party's internal reform and the season of administrative decentralization changed the national institutional framework, increasing the channels of citizen representation. Indeed, Barber's *Strong Democracy*, the most comprehensive work on participatory democracy theory, could not actually exist without the widespread experience of local administrative reforms and the model experiments brought forward by left-wing politics and progressive officers during the long 1970s, on a national scale. The cross-fertilization of practices and theories was a distinctive feature of public discourse on participatory democracy in United States in the long 1970s. Nevertheless, the institutional implementation of the participatory democracy during the long 1970s have scarcely been studied. This is the reason why my PhD dissertation will focus on this topic. I will specifically discuss two case studies: the cutting-edge political initiative of Tom Hayden in the California political arena (1975–1982) and the breakthrough institutional path of Julius Hobson in the first-elected city council of Washington, D.C. (1971–1982). The historical analysis of their strategies and accomplishments to implement participatory democracy at the state and local level will be based on original archival findings and an interdisciplinary methodological approach. Against this background, the present paper especially intends to demonstrate the first step of that research, which is a review of the long 1970s political literature on participatory democracy theory and its basic findings toward the reform of liberal democracy and social change. Actually, beyond the political theory canon, many other authors contributed to constructing the theoretical framework and the institutional tools of participatory democracy in the aftermath of the Movement. The first section will be mainly devoted to Arnold Kaufman and the late 1960s debate, while the second section is dedicated to Pateman's and Macpherson's theories. The third section will explore the vision of localism through the lens of a more militant perspective. Barber's theory and a more institutional approach to participatory democracy in United States will conclude the essay.

Arnold Kaufman was the first intellectual to speak about a participatory democracy theory in United States, although the political theory literature on the subject usually seems to scarcely consider his role.¹¹ At the time of his first essay, in 1960, Kaufman taught political philosophy at the University of Michigan (U-M), Ann Arbor, and for some years as a faculty advisor, he had been helping a political issues group for students, which was looking for new political directions. Even Al Haber, later the first president of the SDS, entered the group in the late 1950s as a freshman.¹² Kaufman was also among the few faculty members at U-M who organized the first teach-in, in 1965, against Congress' authorization to deploy troops in Vietnam.¹³ Tom Hayden, born in a Detroit's suburb, was a student at the U-M College of Literature, Science and Arts from 1957 to 1961.¹⁴ During that period, he was in friendly contact with Kaufman and both of them were part of the same activist group, which also gave birth to VOICE, the first U-M student political association in 1960.¹⁵ In the winter of 1962, Tom Hayden wrote the first two drafts of the Port Huron Statement, the second one especially focused on participatory democracy.¹⁶ Scholars have extensively inquired about the meaning of the Port Huron Statement and its political and philosophical background.¹⁷ Likewise, the influence of John Dewey on

11. Hilmer, "The State of Participatory Democratic Theory," 45. Arnold Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," in *Responsibility*, ed. C. Freidrich. New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1960, 266-89; reprinted in William Connolly, ed. *The Bias of Pluralism*. New York: Atherton Press, 1969, 178-200. The almost absent references to Kaufman's works in the participatory democracy theory's literature could be due to the fact that neither Pateman nor Macpherson and Barber mentioned him as a reference.

12. Alan Haber, author interview, May 25, 2019

13. Richard D. Mann, "The Ann Arbor Teach-In and Beyond: An Oral History," in *A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement and Its Times*, eds. Howard Brick and Gregory Parker. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2015, Chapter 24.

14. Thomas Emmett Hayden, Alumni Files Index (1848-1968), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

15. Tom Hayden, *Reunion. A Memoir*. New York: Random House, 1988, 43.

16. Tom Hayden, "Students for a Democratic Society: Convention Document 2," in *A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement and Its Times*, eds. Howard Brick and Gregory Parker. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2015, Prologue.

17. The most comprehensive studies are: Richard Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds., *The Port Huron Statement: Sources and*

Kaufman is well recognized, chiefly due to the human benefits of participation.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is critical to return to U-M and to the companionship between Kaufman and Hayden, since it provides a much-needed historical reference to define Hayden's first understanding of participatory democracy, as well as that of the 1962 SDS Convention. Indeed, a letter sent by Kaufman in 1970 reads:

You have to check this with Tom [Hayden], but it is my impression that he got turned on to the idea of a democracy of participation, and, in any event, first started to think seriously about the theoretical dimension on the topic, when he took one of my political philosophy courses – a course I devoted to defending participatory democracy, attacking the conventional views expressed by people like Schumpeter, Lipset, Dahl et. al. — that is, broadly, the countervailing power conception of democracy.¹⁹

Hayden confirmed that he attended Kaufman's course in 1960,²⁰ when the philosopher published his first explanation of participatory democracy, *Human Nature and Participatory Democracy*. In the 1960 essays, Kaufman aimed at showing that there was no evidence regarding the alleged incompatibility between human nature, the industrial society and political participation, as the mainstream liberal democracy theories affirmed. Instead, he thought there was theoretical space to figure out participatory democracy's main function: "the development of human powers of thought, feeling, and action." Moreover, Kaufman expressed the need for a systematical empirical inquiry, since neither Dewey, nor G.D.H. Cole had done this.²¹

Since Kaufman's 1960 essay was meant to introduce the participatory instance in democratic discourse, the second essay, published in 1968, seems to rise from the contingency. Indeed, the latter's introduction reads:

The foregoing essay [*Human Nature and Participatory Democracy*] was written in a time when few Americans defended participatory democracy. Ten years later the concept and the cause have been moved to the center stage.²²

The situation had changed in so far as the goal of Kaufman was then to define the limitations of participatory democracy. That was necessary, according to Kaufman, since from the radical viewpoint, participatory democracy had become the single-most popular remedy for a lot of contemporary social and political evils, above all people's systemic powerlessness. Kaufman did not debunk his previous position, but he specified that participatory democracy could not be an exclusive form of government in advanced industrial societies unless they wanted to lose their management efficiency. To this purpose, Kaufman marked the basic outlines of the institutional framework where the participatory democracy should have been implemented. In his view, participatory democracy is just a way of decentralizing decision-making and should rest on the local level, working through face-to-face meetings. The state and the national representative systems should work as counter powers, to prevent the local participatory governments from becoming "municipal tyrannies."²³ The national government should set uniform standards for the legal rights and the national distribution of wealth and revenues. Also, the task of planning the legal framework for local participatory democracy should finally be done at the national level, in order to grant and intensify citizens' participation. Developing

Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015; Brick and Parker, *A New Insurgency*; John Mcmillian, ed., *The new left revisited*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

18. Richard Rodewald and Richard Wasserstrom, "The Political Philosophy of Arnold Kaufman," *Social Theory and Practice*, 1, Arnold Kaufman Memorial Issue (1972): 5-31; Hilmer, "The State of Participatory Democratic Theory," 45.

19. Arnold Kaufman to George Abbott White, June 19, 1970, Students for a Democratic Society 1960-1968, Box 4, Arnold S. Kaufman Papers (1954-1971), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

20. Hayden, *Reunion*, 42.

21. Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," 184, 191.

22. Arnold Kaufman, "Participatory Democracy: Ten Years Later," in *La Table Ronde*, 251-252 (1968): 216-228, reprinted in William Connolly, ed., *The Bias of Pluralism*. New York: Atherton Press, 1969: 201-12.

23. Kaufman, "Participatory Democracy: Ten Years Later," 205.

two sets of institutions that are able to coexist — as Kaufman had already wished in his 1960 account — which are the enhancing of human dignity and responsibility by the mean of participation could be joined with liberal democracy's advantages (e.g. the preservation of order and the efficiency of a bureaucratic system on a large scale).²⁴ In his 1968 essay, based on the most recent sociological findings on contemporary movements' politics, Kaufman also clarified leadership's role in participatory democratic groups.²⁵ Kaufman defines leadership as a natural expression of competence and experience, which is useful for quicker achievement of the organizations' strategic aims. This belief came from one of the basic elements of Kaufman's theory: the paradox of participatory democracy. Indeed, the philosopher boldly explains that "before participatory decisions can become sound, they will be unsound — necessarily."²⁶ Thus, it implies that any form of participatory decision-making truly enables the gradual empowerment of the people who are concerned in the process. Nevertheless, this should be previously discussed and evaluated, depending on the collective action's timing and advantages and, especially, without dismissing leadership as a manipulative authority. In fact, a preemptive anti-leader attitude had been observed among New Left groups, as Kenneth Keniston states in his most recent research.²⁷

Kaufman's 1968 perspective on participatory democracy hardly looks like a comprehensive doctrine, but the urgency he felt towards the definition of the participatory limitations suggests how compelling the implementation of participatory democracy in public decision-making was for the philosopher. Therefore, Kaufman eventually defines participatory democracy as "only an instrument of political change and accountability."²⁸ Indeed, defining the limitations of participatory democracy ideally sets Kaufman in a broader current of thought regarding the late 1960s.

Since Kaufman published the first essay on participatory democracy in 1960, there were not only the student and the antiwar protests on the streets to oppose the systemic flaws of the liberal consensus. Besides the movement's politics, spread by pamphlets and the underground press, scholarly criticism was even raised against the mainstream pluralist interpretation of the liberal democratic theory, retrieving with more coherence the polemical remarks made by C.W. Mills in *The Power Elite*, back in 1956. Precisely, Kaufman's essay "Participatory Democracy: Ten Years Later" was reprinted in 1969 in a collection entitled *The Bias of Pluralism*, which ideally aimed to gather the main fronts of criticism.²⁹ This criticism pointed out that the biased context — within which elite competition occurs — prevents groups from being truly represented, due to lack of organization and legitimacy. Therefore, a number of issues, which were of potential interest to the public, were ruled out. Moreover, personality development was not encouraged by the existing work life and decision-making processes and the *status quo bias* blocked any possibility of reform.³⁰ The editor, William E. Connolly, highlighted that this "critical temper" was finding "increasing expression within the left wing of political science (and allied disciplines)," and it bears the duty of designing a new theory of democracy.³¹ Meanwhile, Connolly highlights that some of the critics were concerned about finding the strategy of social change, trying to practically overcome the status quo bias.³² Kaufman was among them, also because of his more comprehensive work, *The Radical Liberal*, that had recently been released. That aim fruitfully inspired scholarly inquires in the 1970s, crossing political and sociological fields and often in connection with

24. Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," 198.

25. Kaufman's sociological references are: Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals. Notes on Committed Youth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968 ; Michael Walzer, "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," *Dissent* (May-June 1968).

26. Kaufman, "Participatory Democracy: Ten Years Later," 206-07.

27. Ibidem.

28. Ibidem.

29. Connolly, *The Bias of Pluralism*.

30. William E. Connolly, "The Challenge to Pluralist Theory," in *The Bias of Pluralism*, ed. W. E. Connolly, New York: Atherton Press, 1969, 18.

31. Connolly, "The Challenge to Pluralist Theory," 19-23.

32. Ibid. 26-7.

political subjects or activists.³³

Above all, the *critical temper*'s perspective sheds light on the intellectual landscape in which the participatory democracy theory was set in the late 1960s. Indeed, participatory democracy was conceived as one of the several solutions and instruments offered by critics of pluralism. This recognition is critical to understanding the concept's interpretation in that period, and how it could have affected the 1970s progressive policymakers inclined to participatory democracy's institutional implementation.

Carole Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory*, her first and fundamental book released in 1970, aims at verifying the desirability of increased citizen participation in a modern democratic theory.³⁴ Pateman actually checked her theory on participatory politics by observing the existing participatory experiments in the field of industrial relations, focusing in particular on the workers' self-management in Yugoslavia.³⁵ Since then, factories in Yugoslavia were frequently used as case studies, in order to support the claims for participative work and citizen-responsive economics — the so-called "economic democracy" popularized in the mid-1970s.³⁶ The positive influence on human development obtained by democratic models of work management, according to Pateman, proves the benefits of participatory politics in terms of education and the political efficacy of the citizen. To hinder general disengagement in the political sphere assessed by mainstream democratic theories, Pateman retrieves from the democratic tradition the argument that "we do learn to participate by participating."³⁷ This is what Pateman calls "the socialization aspect of the participatory theory of democracy." Indeed, if the workers were used to exercising their own political efficacy at the workplace, they would be able to manage the same responsibility towards the polity. Pateman borrows the concept from G.D.H. Cole, just to extend the process to the entire society. Indeed, Pateman was the first scholar to formalize the "participatory society," namely the implementation of the participatory authority to a wide range of social contexts (e.g. industry, family, universities or local boards on housing) where ordinary men and women could be politically empowered.³⁸ Actually, it was what the 1960s social movements and the counterculture had experienced and envisioned, in their affinity groups and prefigurative organizations, by criticizing the mainstream pattern of hierarchical decision-making. According to Pateman, participatory society could still revitalize liberal democracy.

Since Pateman was acquainted with the ethical benefits of participation, in 1977 C.B. Macpherson, with *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, tried to figure out the institutional and socio-economic viability of participation's implementation in the liberal democratic theory.³⁹ First of all, on an institutional level, Macpherson assumes that beyond the neighborhood it would have to be an indirect or a representative system rather than face-to-face direct democracy. Then, he provides two "abstract approximations." The second is especially interesting, since the author deemed it as being the only one that is ideally implementable in Western liberal democracies. Macpherson states that, for the sake of liberalism, the existing structure of government could not be modified. In fact, citizen participation should actually be implemented by relying on the parties. In his perspective, parties should operate by pyramidal participation, with direct democracy at the base and delegate democracy at ev-

33. See, for instance: William Gameson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1975. Indeed, Gameson, a sociologist, was Kaufman's associate at U-M in early 1960s and one of Tom Hayden's friends.

34. Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 1.

35. Pateman, *Participation*, 85-102.

36. Actually, the Yugoslavia case study was earlier analyzed by Paul Blumberg's *Industrial Democracy: The Sociology of Participation* (1969). For an essential review of the late 1960s- 1970s scholarship on the industrial democracy, and economic democracy at large, see: Drew Christie, "Recent Calls for Economic Democracy," *Ethics*, 95 (1984): 112-28. For a comprehensive political account of the "economic democracy" theory, see: Martin Carnoy and Derek Shearer, *Economic Democracy*. New York: Pantheon books, 1980. The relationship between participatory democracy's implementation and the economic democracy theory during the long 1970s will receive the due consideration also in my PhD dissertation.

37. Pateman, *Participation*, 105.

38. Pateman, *Participation*, 42-3; 108-9.

39. For the general purpose of this paper, it is worth considering that Macpherson often relies on the scholarship published in the collection *Politics of Participation* (1972), whose essays had originated at the meetings of the Senior Politics Seminar at the University of Manchester, UK in 1969-1970.

ery level above that, through a parliamentary or congressional structure.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, according to Macpherson, even this perspective was unrealistic in front of the “apathetic equilibrium” based on contemporary citizen disengagement.⁴¹ Unlike Pateman, in Macpherson’s view, the participation opportunity was not enough to convince people to be involved. Before introducing participatory reforms, the capitalistic society should change. Citizens had to stop thinking of themselves as consumers, and social and economic inequalities needed to be reduced. These changes, however, were unlikely to be achieved without strong democratic actions. Was it a theoretical conundrum? Macpherson looked at the reality and found some “loopholes” in the vicious circle: the increasing awareness of the costs of political apathy, the increasing awareness of the costs of economic growth in terms of quality of life; and the increasing doubts about the ability of corporate capitalism to meet the consumer’s actual desires, while reproducing inequalities. Macpherson observed all these changes in North America, related to both people’s mindset and their habits. In his perspective, the “loopholes” could have a cumulative effect and affect the political arena. This “glimpse of possibility”⁴² towards the implementation of participatory democracy actually rooted the theory on the ground. Thus, it provided strategic hints to contemporary practitioners and policymakers, in addition to the suggestion of still considering the party reform to democratize the system.

Beside the outcomes of scholarship, even a rougher and militant reflection continued to flourish on the topic of participatory democracy during the 1970s. It was brought about by the 1960s turmoil as well as the late 1960s ‘critical temper’ and the following formalized theories. Nevertheless, it often seemed to proceed on different channels, references and areas of inquiry. To look at this current, it is good to pick up the 1971 essay collection, *Participatory Democracy*, edited by Terrence E. Cook and Patrick M. Morgan, who were then both young faculty members at Washington State University. The collection was conceived as a map of the ongoing public dialogue about the complexity of participatory democracy, gathering selections from contemporary intellectuals, such as, Paul Goodman and Robert A. Dahl, activists like Tom Hayden, Staughton Lynd, the late Frantz Fanon, through Lenin and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Although the editors supported the political and human benefits of participation, they considered the very core elements of participation’s implementation still open and debatable (e.g. the size of the participatory unit, the effective functioning of participatory decision making, the relationship between participatory units with other decision-making structures or the society at large).⁴³ This normative vagueness actually implied a large space for experimentation on political ground, especially through grass-roots collective actions. Indeed, the miscellany included some activists’ visionary and wishful contributions, which also proved to be very consequential in the following years. In this perspective, Milton Kotler’s selection from *Neighborhood Government* (1969) is worthy of consideration.⁴⁴ In his work Kotler essentially argued that participatory democracy could be implemented in cities by the formal structure of the neighborhood. This idea was extended by Karl Hess in 1975 with *Neighborhood Power: The New Localism*, co-authored with David Morris. While Kotler had conceived of the neighborhood’s self-government as a corporation, chartered by the state and the city administration, Hess stressed its autonomy from the outside and its economic self-sufficiency. Anyway, Kotler and Hess both became well-known proponents of the successful neighborhood movement during the 1970s, figuring out citizen participation as local direct democracy and self-reliance.⁴⁵

40. C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 108-114. For the record, Macpherson does not mention the Fraser-McGovern Commission’s guidelines to democratize and open-up the Democratic Party in the United States.

41. Macpherson, *The Life and Times*, 94.

42. Ibid. 98-115.

43. Terrence E. Cook and Patrick M. Morgan, “An Introduction to Participatory Democracy,” in *Participatory Democracy*, eds. Cook and Morgan, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971, 1-40. The same vague and militant approach to participatory democracy can be found in the contemporary Daniel C. Kramer, *Participatory Democracy: Developing Ideals of the Political Left*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1972.

44. Milton Kotler, “Neighborhood Government,” in *Participatory Democracy*, 239-46. About the contemporary trend towards localism, see, in the same publication, Tom Hayden, “On Trial,” 43-8.

45. Benjamin Locker, “Visions of Autonomy: The New Left and the Neighborhood Government Movement of the 1970s,” *Journal of Urban History*, 3 (2012): 577-98.

A new group of neighborhood-based studies has recently framed the local area as being a relevant scale for observing national discourses and policies.⁴⁶ It is interesting here to notice that the 1960s political claim for citizen participation and the anti-bureaucratic instance of the same epoch coalesced into the 1970s myth of the neighborhood government. Therefore, the original opposition to centralism and the liberal Establishment frequently blurred in the 1970s with anti-statism. Indeed, populism (both left- and right-wing) was another feature of the participatory democracy interpretation and re-operationalization in that period.

Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy* marks the last valuable stage in the framing of participatory democracy theory along the timespan covered by this paper, before the renovated interest in the mid-1990s. Indeed, Barber's work stands out to provide a detailed program of integration of participatory features in the United States institutional system. According to Barber, the strong democracy is a form of government in which all people govern themselves, in at least some public matters, for at least some of the time.⁴⁷ In addition, strong democracy is the theory of talk, judgement and public seeing. Indeed, Barber owes his philosophy, in particular, to the current of American Pragmatism (as Kaufman did).⁴⁸ The deliberative aspect is, thus, a core element of his participatory discourse (both in theory and practicality), since the collective discussion enables persuasion and self-education, which are the human skills of political participation.⁴⁹ On the institutional level, Barber stands for adding participatory ingredients to the representative institutions of large-scale modern societies. He also stresses the need for civic engagement not only on a local level but also affecting national decision-making. For this purpose, he proposes an integrated agenda of legal reforms grounded in the United States constitutional framework. The twelve points program calls for a broad range of new institutions, such as the neighborhood assemblies with agenda-setting powers; televised town meetings at regional level; public paid civic education; a national initiative and referendum process on congressional legislation, with a multi-choice format at two-stage voting; universal citizen service to strengthen the people responsibility for public interest; as well as public support for workplace democracy. According to Barber, to be effective, all these reforms should be introduced together, and they could be achieved by addressing the number of constituencies already mobilized in previous years and driven by an interest in participatory democracy.⁵⁰ Indeed, Barber's perspective on participatory democracy's institutional implementation was not only a detailed theory, but a blueprint for progressive democrats.

Today participatory practices require a deep analysis in order to be properly addressed. Already in 1970 Carole Pateman had to recognize:

The widespread use of the term in the mass media has tended to mean that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared: 'participation' is used to refer to a wide variety of different situations by different people.⁵¹

Nevertheless, as this paper has demonstrated, public confusion could actually be translated into specific aims and interpretations, deeply grounded in the activist and electoral arena. In addition, the present literature review has stressed the strategies for reforms and social change, since the participatory democracy theory originated in the 1960s as a principle of agency. More importantly, the multiple voices debating the participatory democracy theory during the 1970s and early 1980s laid some critical guidelines towards its institutional implementation, especially due to the socio-economic and political context in the United States during that epoch. Besides actual the purpose of my dissertation, that of historical analysis, it would be interesting to inquire as to whether in those participatory visions

46. Susanne Cowan, "Back to the Neighborhood: Ideas and Practices of Local Government," *Journal of Urban History*, 5 (2019): 1071.

47. Benjamin R. Barber. *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, [1984] 2003, xxxiv.

48. Ibid. xxxii.

49. Ibid. 265.

50. Ibid. 261-311.

51. Pateman, *Democratic Theory and Participation*, 1.

developed in the long 1970s there were some hints for better understanding at this time the strategies for the institutional implementation of participatory democracy.

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