

## Community Participation Approaches for Network Governance: A Theoretical View

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### *Abstract*

*This article discusses the recent theoretical debate on community participation policy debate within the context of network governance. It attempts to bring out the different views of critiques on how the state has captured community participation as social capital in its policy discourse. The paper illustrates the weakness of existing interpretations on why the community developments fail. The article is based on the finding of the secondary data available on this discourse.*

**Keywords:** Network governance, community participation, social capital

### **Introduction**

Governance now signifies ‘a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a new changed condition of ordered rule or the new method by which society is governed’<sup>1</sup>. Now, “political power and institutional capacity are less and less derived from formal constitutional powers accorded to the state but more from a capacity to wield and co-ordinate resources from public and private actors and interests”<sup>2</sup>. Thus the comprehensive, functionally uniform, hierarchical organizations governed by strong leaders who are democratically responsible and staffed by neutrally competent civil servants who deliver services to citizens<sup>3</sup> – to the extent they ever existed – are not necessarily the important actors. Later in the 1990s, Rhodes moves more explicitly to an analysis that identifies ‘network’ as an alternative mode of governance to markets and hierarchies<sup>4</sup>. If price competition is the central coordination mechanism of the market and administrative orders of the hierarchy then it is trust and cooperation that centrally articulates networks<sup>5</sup>.

This form of governance links itself to the civil society organizations, mass organizations, interest groups, etc., to help citizens’ or community inputs into the policy formulation and monitoring processes of the governments. Among all, an important role as a ‘mediating institution’ is now given to the community and its local community organization as the negotiating and collaborating agency between the citizen and the state.

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Understanding how communities form collective association and how gathering takes place expands the understanding of democracy and civic participation in several ways, a task that has become more relevant as participatory development programs grow in popularity, particularly in the developing world<sup>6</sup>.

Such active participation links governance to wider debates of communitarian approaches too. Communitarian theorist like Micheal Sandel (1998), for example, states that citizens can look beyond their self-interest to the larger public interest, adopting a broader and long-term perspective that requires knowledge of civic affairs and also the bonding with the community at large. Weber (1958) was profoundly ambivalent about the rationality of modern capitalism, awed by the virtues of its power and efficiency and yet saddened by the dehumanizing loss of community, tradition, and mystery it produced. Capitalism was seen as efficient but eroding the collective sentiments of the community. Further, he said capitalism as “the routinized economic cosmos, and thus the rationally highest form of the provision of material goods –has been a structure to which the absence of love has been attached from the very root.”<sup>7</sup> Socio-cultural norms that determine the social sphere of life and the same norms too have an impact on their power of ‘functionality’ in the public realm. This power makes a difference in their community and highlights their experience of being agents of social transformation. So this paper will attempt to give an overview of the debate of community participation approaches by State policy. Here it recognizes the community's self-governing best practices in service delivery for bringing network form of governance in Public Administration.

### ***Community and Community participation***

The concept of ‘community’ has been defined and contested by many scholars across the discipline. Here I take Taylor (2003)<sup>8</sup> who identifies at least three general senses in which community is used as -Descriptive: A group or network of people who share something in common or interact with each other: Normative: A community as a place where solidarity, participation, and coherence are found and Instrumental: where (a) community as an agent acting to maintain or change its circumstances (b) the location or orientation of services and policy interventions. While community participation is defined by Oakley and Marsden (1984) as the process by which individuals, families, or communities assume responsibility for their welfare and develop a capacity to contribute to their own and the community’s development. The community development approach emphasizes self-help, the democratic process, and local leadership in community revitalization. Most community development work involves the participation of the communities or

beneficiaries involved. Thus, community participation is an important component of community development and reflects a grassroots or bottom-up approach to problem-solving.

According to Ralph Linton (1945), the ‘culture of a community is a way of life of its members, the collection of ideas and habits which they learned, shared and transmit from generation to generation’<sup>9</sup>. The development of culture is a social activity and over the years, it gets institutionalized. Therefore, it becomes all the more important in contemporary times to have a definition of governance that is broadened to include the informal institutions, both traditional as well as modern. Thus, Newman <sup>10</sup>refers to ‘the emergence of “negotiated self-governance” in communities, cities, and regions, based on new practices of coordinating activities through networks and partnerships. This can also be termed as a “society-centered way of governing”’.

These sociological and cultural approaches to governance give importance to the ‘voice of society’ in addition to democratic and political reasons. The act of including the voices and concerns of "beneficiaries" in the projects that are meant to help them offers a counterweight to traditional top-down (multilateral, neoliberal) development approaches. Governance reform following the structural adjustment programs<sup>11</sup> had a serious impact on local self-government in developing countries. As such many “effective local practices or the existence and functioning of well-managed community-based governance systems have not been sufficiently absorbed into the policy-making process and are rarely acknowledged in such reforms”<sup>12</sup>. This raises the need for a governance system that places public service, democratic governance, and civic engagement at the center and meets their shared interests rather than attempting to control or steer society<sup>13</sup>.

As Penna and Campbell (1998) argue that cultural factors, norms, practices, and indigenous institutions are of value in the everyday lives of non-western societies. Rather than dismissing non-western cultures as anti-democratic and authoritarian, there is a need to engage and work with existing institutions and practices to promote development and enhance choice and freedom for individuals and groups. In this context, the Asian Values debate has thrown little light while generating much noise. These problems, therefore, emerge from inadequate definitions of the nature and scope of the state and civil society, which exclude semi-autonomous and autonomous self-governing communities with their institutional structures, laws, and social security mechanisms. There is an absolute failure to conceptualize the role of non-state authorities in governance.

## **State Policy and Community Governance-Social Capital**

So how the State does capture such community development movement for Network Governance? The appearance of modern ‘Social Capital’ conceptualization is a new way to look at this community participation debate, keeping together the importance of community to build generalized trust and at the same time, the importance of individual free choice, to create a more cohesive society. Thus social capital, in the form of social networks and trust, is generally known as resources generated from social interactions of a community. It is for this reason that social capital generated so much interest in the academic and political arena and the social capital protagonists are James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putnam. The mainstream social capital approach, led by Robert Putnam (2000) and Michael Woolcock (2000), regards social capital as the ‘missing link’ in poverty alleviation and as the ‘essential glue’ in binding people together.

This approach of social capital taken from a neo-institutional framework marks the recognition of ‘community’ as supplementary to the state and market. World Bank (2002), UNDP (2001), OECD (2001), and IFAD (2001) use this approach and have become a truly worldwide concept in both the developing and developed world and in development ideology, as well as practice. However, there are critiques on the absence of meaningful analysis of ‘community’ which is a critical weakness in the economic perspective of institutions.

Community development approaches can usefully be classified according to their ‘method’ or ‘process’ orientation. For example, a project to install rural infrastructure could be either method or process-oriented depending on the key aim behind the project. If this aim is just to supply services to a rural area, then working with the community can be interpreted as a method or a way in which these services can be provided. A process approach would look to the skills and opportunities that a community could accrue through their involvement in rural infrastructure installation, and how social capital could be strengthened. Therefore one can be critical of how community participation takes place.

On other occasions, the incorporation of informal institutions is for increasing the legitimacy of the project and enhancing the success of formal institutions. This approach, however, does not consider the ‘dark side’ of socially embedded institutions. For example, they may perpetuate gender and ethnic exclusions, and reinforce unequal access and distribution of social capital. Marliyn Taylor (2003) et al. and many commentators write that in the neoliberal lexicon ‘communities’ under the guise of self-help were asked to pick up pieces of structured adjustment and new market policies.

Reason undermines trust; let then go back to the community's a-rational values. The weakness with the communitarian approach is the resulting exclusion of outsiders and, as an implicit outcome, the instrumentality of the relationship to those not belonging to the community. This last aspect ironically links the communitarians to the individualistic approach. Therefore many social capital theories are not able to conceive a not instrumental social relation to explain many economic and social choices.

Theorists of social capital often portrayed the state as one of the culprits in the demise of the community. For many theorists of social capital, the expansion of the formal bureaucratic organization of the state “crowds out” informal networks without providing the same range of value and functions, leaving communities worse off. Coleman, for example, suggests (e.g., 1990: 321) this kind of “zero-sum” relation between state-sponsored activities and social capital, in which government involvement leads to the atrophy of informal networks, diminishing social capital.

However, Communities that are relatively homogeneous, with equitable local power structures and a high level of social trust (usually most developed where there is a tradition of local cooperation, and where institutions enforce rights and agreements and reward trustworthy behavior), are likely to have a stronger capacity for collective action and thus be more effective in self-organizing and governing development projects<sup>14</sup>. This argument for the need for community in development is clearly shown by Wai Fung Lam’s report on a well-known case—the irrigation project in Taiwan where community knowledge and local people were involved in the implementation of the policy. This work has been documented by Peter Evans, which said transformation can be achieved through synergy between the local people and the state. The synergistic model tries to bridge public-private division and advocates state-society cooperation as a key institutional factor for grassroots development.

Various empirical studies in Indian cities have also revealed the persistence of the traditional collectives as relevant conditions for the structuring of social relationships in the urban situation too. There are even difficulties inherent in articulating formal organizational realities with the rules and norms embedded in informally constructed social structures. In cases where community roles were recognized, the governance reform being mostly structured from top-down model often neglected in its approaches to develop the need to focus on processes, mechanisms, and institutions through which societies collectively make decisions and implement them, and how individuals, groups and

communities articulate their interests, and exercise their rights. This can be elaborated as traditional institutions of governance are recognized in the District councils of few states in the North eastern states of India. Khasis in Meghalaya have a traditional system of governance called 'Dorbar'. However, Mayumi Murayama writes that the laws and regulations enacted by the Centre for application to the North Eastern Region do not take cognizance of indigenous systems and customary laws<sup>15</sup>.

In the Indian administrative reform, community collectives as 'social capital' are being reflected in the 2<sup>nd</sup> administrative reform commission, 2005 under the Chairmanship of Shri Veerappa Moily in its 9<sup>th</sup> report on 'Social capital-A Shared Destiny'. The report recommends institutionalizing the "Social Capital Institution" through partnership and bringing a better synergy between the state and such institutions. The North Eastern Region document(2008), consequently, expresses the desirability and the necessity to ensure a harmonious relationship between the constitutional institutions of local governance and the Traditional Institutions for better governance of the people and the region at large. The document also mentioned that 'a top-down development planning strategy has not involved people in designing and implementing the strategy and, not surprisingly, the relationship between public spending and service delivery outcomes has been tenuous. The various public investment projects in the region have not yielded commensurate benefits. Lack of people's involvement has robbed the system of a sense of belonging and led to inefficient and wasteful resource allocation on the one hand and a lack of social accountability on the other'<sup>16</sup>. That is to say decentralized governance with the active participation of the people is an end in itself as it reaffirms the universal value that all men are equal and the right to decide his/her future lies within the individual self.

### **Conclusion**

Social capital has been the term undoubtedly used in policy delivery to mobilize such types of constructive collective action or pro-social features of communities towards creating positive synergies for social and economic development. The empowerment agenda inherent in the idea of social relations as vehicles for social and economic advancement inevitably places the approach within the participation paradigm. However, the past decade has witnessed a growing backlash against participation<sup>17</sup> on the basis that participatory approaches have often failed to achieve meaningful social change, largely due to a failure to engage with issues of power and politics. Mancur Olson (1965) and Garrett Hardin (1968) offer a pessimistic view of collective action because selfish individuals are tempted to get a free ride. They argue that strong

state regulation or very well-defined private property is the solution to collective action dilemmas. In their analysis, they give little recognition to the possibility of group co-operation. The problem of using community development as a tool of policy without a clear understanding of its internal dynamic meant that "the community development process itself was open to abuse, either through co-option by privileged groups or through destruction by those same groups, to whom it posed a threat" (Allibrand, 1982:141, quoting Holdcroft). Therefore it remains a strong sense in the literature on participatory development that the proper objectives of participation are towards transformation and development of community in its true sense.

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<sup>1</sup>Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996), *The New Governance: Governing without Government*. Political Studies, 44: 652–667.

<sup>2</sup> Peters, G. and Pierre, J. (2001) 'Development in intergovernmental relations: towards multi—level governance', Policy and Politics, 29.2., pp. 131-5

<sup>3</sup> Ostrom, V. (1973) *The Intellectual Crisis in American Public Administration*. CITY: University of Alabama Press.

<sup>4</sup>Rhodes, R. A. W. (2000a) 'Governance and Public Administration' in J. Pierre (ed.) *Debating Governance: Authority, Steering and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, G., Frances, J., Levacic, J. and Mitchel, J. (eds.), (1991) *Markets, Hierarchies and Networks: The Co-ordination of Social Life*. Sage Publications, London

<sup>6</sup>Crook, R. and Manor, J. (1994) *Enhancing Participation and Institutional Performance: Democratic Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa*. A Report to ESCOR, ODA of Phase Two of a Two-Phase Research Project

<sup>7</sup> As Quoted in Ram A. Cnaan, Carl Milofsky (2007) *Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations*, p 9

<sup>8</sup>M Taylor, 2003 [\*Public policy in the community\*](#) Palgrave Macmillan p: 34

<sup>9</sup> Linton, R. (1945) (ed.) *Present World Conditions on Cultural Perspective*, In *The Science of Man in World Crisis!* New York: Columbia University Press,

<sup>10</sup> Newman, J. (2001) *Modernising Governance: new labour, policy and society*, London: Sage p 24

<sup>11</sup>Based on the concept of New Public Management where the thrust was given on efficiency, economy and effectiveness with the main doctrine based on neo-taylorism and public choice approach.

<sup>12</sup> See Amita Singh (2005) ed. *Administrative Reforms Towards Sustainable Practices* , Sage publication p19

<sup>13</sup> In the words of Janet V Denhardt and Robert B Denhart the new approach is understood as "New Public Service".

<sup>14</sup>Philippe Dongier, Julie Van Domelen, Elinor Ostrom, Andrea Rizvi, Wendy Wakeman, Anthony Bebbington, Sabina Alkire, Talib Esmail, and Margaret Polski: Chapter 9 Community Driven Development

<sup>15</sup>[www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Download/Jrp/pdf/133\\_2.pdf](http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Download/Jrp/pdf/133_2.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Peace, Progress and Prosperity in the Northeastern Region Vision 2020 Vol 1 page 8

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