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Marja Keranen

Depolitization of Political Participation

Abstract

An increasing worry about diminishing voter turnout and political participation led the Finnish government to initiate a program for enhancing political participation and civic education. This “Citizen Participation Policy program” (“Kansalaisvaikuttamisen politiikkaohjelma”) was initiated in 2003. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for program coordination, but the program aims at inter-sectoral activities and results. The program has been active in organizing projects and seminars. It has also integrated social science researchers in its activities.

The aim of this paper is, **firstly**, to study a program text by using rhetorical methods, asking what the program suggests, in what ways does its arguments, how it analyses the situation of diminishing participation and what it suggests should be done to the problem. Further, the text is analysed in rhetorical terms asking who is talking to whom in the text. **Secondly**, the text is contextualized in terms of debates on changes that have affected the efficacy of political participation and transformed the meaningfulness of political activity. Discussing the fit/lack of fit between the project and the contextual changes may suggest other means for enhancing democracy.

A claim is made that diminishing participation is a reasonable reaction to the contextual changes inside and outside of the political system; localization of governance, privatization of the public sphere, consumerization of citizenship and de-politization of political participation. Therefore, isolated debates about political activity may just come to blame the victim, the citizen. Efforts for re-politization should therefore be based on a thorough analysis of the contextual changes and a reformulation of questions asked.

Marja Keranen
Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy
40014 University of Jyväskylä
Finland
Markera@yfi.jyu.fi

1. INTRODUCTION

An increasing worry about diminishing voter turnout and political participation led the Finnish government to initiate a program for enhancing political participation and civic education. This “Citizen Participation Policy program” (“Kansalaisvaikuttamisen politiikkaohjelma”; <http://www.om.fi/333htm>) was initiated in 2003. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for program coordination, but the program aims at inter-sectoral activities and results.

The Citizen Participation Policy Program is one of four inter-sectoral programs initiated by the current Vanhanen government, the other areas being employment, entrepreneurship and the developing of information society. The concept of cross-ministerial cooperation in itself has been evaluated and also discussed the media (HS 31.9.2006; HS 22.10.2006). In the media coverage, cross-sectoral steering has been deemed problematic and the programs still ineffective. Yet, some results have been reported. (HS 7.1.2007). As the Vanhanen government’s period is about to end as parliamentary elections are held in March 2007, suggestions are made for new program areas. It is also suggested that the programs might turn out more effective, if they had “own money” directed to them in the budget.

The Citizen participation Policy Program is not among the suggestions for future. Whatever the evaluation of the program might be, I find it an interesting opening and illustration of current debate on democracy and participation. It has raised discussion by organizing projects and seminars. It has also integrated social science researchers in its activities to a degree not seen in Finland in recent decades. To me, the program is interesting as a sample of textual material on democracy, the state of democracy and suggestions to how democracy should be advanced in Finland.

This paper does not aim at evaluating the program in its totality. Rather, I choose to discuss just one single paper, the Citizen Participation Policy Program in Government Strategy Document 2006 (<http://www.om.fi/Etusivu/Ajankohtaista/Kansalaisvaikuttamisenpolitiikkaohjelma/Tietoahjelmasta/lang=en>. 5.1.2007), which is a slightly revised version of the original program paper included in Vanhanen-government’s program. The paper – about 9 pages long - is just a small piece in the massive paper production in the program. Because of its official status, the text can be deemed as to some degree representative of the program efforts. Still, the scope of my analysis is in no way meant to be total.

The questions that I want to pose to the paper are:

- What are the modes of talking about participation in the text? How is participation and citizenship constructed, and what is the space for citizen participation constructed in the text?
- What are the contextual changes that might effect participation? Are these visible in the program text and what is the analysis made of them? Does the program answer to the requirements of contextual changes?
- Finally, I will discuss the program text more generally and ask what the prospects for success in democratizing Finland and advancing citizen participation

might be? What are the effects of the program in a broader context? In what ways are power relations reordered in the new situation? What is politicised vs. de-politicised? What is made public vs. private? What is centralized vs. decentralized? What is counted as politics vs. government?

The first aim of the paper is to study the program text by using rhetorical methods, asking what the program suggests, in what ways does it motivate its arguments, how it analyses the situation of diminishing participation and what does it suggest should be done to the problem. Further, the text are analysed in rhetorical terms asking who is talking to whom in the text.

My version of textual analysis stems from a tradition of seeing rhetoric as political action, seeing politics as made essentially by speech acts, texts and images (Perelman 1996; Palonen & Summa 1998). The tradition of new rhetoric (Perelman, Toulmin, Burke) analyses any kinds of speech acts as argumentative activity, asking, what are the rhetorical devices used in the texts, what are the argumentative techniques used. As rhetoric is about persuasion, the analysis asks, how the text persuades its audience to believe in the argument. The grounds for credibility are thought to be based on pre-given contracts between the sender and the receiver of the text, contracts about what is seen as valued, good or bad, truthful or untruthful. The analysis can seek for grounds of valorisation that can be quantitative or qualitative. Sometimes quantity works as an argument for value; sometimes it is better to be “rare” and deviant from the masses.

Argumentative analysis can look for pairs of oppositions constructed in the text, pairs like the one between the truth and the untruth, or the one between how things seem to be on the surface and how they really are. One can look for what things are associated to each other, and which things are separated or opposed. The tradition of rhetoric includes huge listings of tropes to be found by careful analysts, the main ones being metaphors, metonymies, synecdoche and irony.

The main purpose of rhetorical analysis still is to analyse, who is trying to persuade whom, and with what argument. Although analysing *the logic* of the argument might be considered, and is, an essential part of analysis, the strength of the exercise may still lie in the possibilities of analysing the *ethos* component of the text (how the speaker represents him/herself to the audience), and the *pathos* component, telling how the texts appeals to its audience.

Like any method for analysing texts or discourses, rhetoric, too, is about distancing the text, about offering a possibility to see it as alien and unnatural. In spite of undoubtedly good intentions of the government, I will now turn to looking at the text from this alien perspective to see what we can find. In the following chapter, I will simply cite the text and make comments on it, following the text from the beginning to its end.

2. THE TEXT: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION POLICY PROGRAMME

The text is divided into 1) an introduction, a background description that motivates the need for the program, 2) an implementation plan that lines out the different problem areas and stakes out the suggestions on what should be done, 3) a financial framework stating the budget numbers allocated to the ministries involved, and 4) a final chapter on organizing and monitoring the program. Here are stated indicators for measuring program effects and levels of goal achievement.

WHAT IS WRONG? IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

The Citizen Participation Policy Program is intended to promote active citizenship, the operation of civil society, exercise of influence by ordinary people and effective functioning of representative democracy. The goal is a dynamic representative democracy that is complemented by the participation of citizens and ensures that they are consulted and can wield influence.

The background chapter of the paper expresses the aims of the program. It establishes the **intention** (active citizenship...) and the **goal** (a dynamic representative democracy...). It also defines the **actor** (the program is defined as the actor here). The rest of the paper follows a conventional structure for any reform attempt: in order to motivate an action you need to establish a need, a lack that requires action. Let's see how this lack is explicated and detailed.

The 100th anniversary of the introduction of a new parliamentary system and the enactment of a new electoral law will be celebrated in June 2006. That reform gave Finnish women full political rights at a comparatively early date. Local-level democracy is founded on a system of municipal self-government, which is one of the most democratic in the world. The biggest recent changes have been the election of the President of the Republic by direct popular vote and Finland's accession to membership of the European Union. Finnish citizens thereby became citizens of the European Union.

The lack is established by referring to Finland's glorious past in guaranteeing women's political rights and local, municipal self-government. In these regards Finland has been a forerunner, **among the best** in democracy. Some recent changes are mentioned, but not clearly valorized. Direct popular vote of the president and EU membership may be seen as a continuation of this glorious trend from the past. Referring to national history works as an anchorage to the past, but also to the present: it defines an **us**, we Finns as the selected nation. Having been among the best comes to **oblige** even our future actions.

Section 14 of the Constitution of Finland requires the public authorities to promote opportunities for individuals to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concern them. Accordingly, the prerequisites for civic education, civic activities and citizen participation must be well provided for. Doing so also ensures that key dimensions of social capital are strengthened.

This background/ motivational chapter states that even the Finnish constitution requires that authorities should take some action. This time, the text establishes a more specified actor: **authorities** need to do something, and they are authorized to act by the constitution, the highest norm of all in the narration of a nation. But actions are required not only by the national history and legislation. **Social capital**, its **key dimensions** works as a new authorizer, at the same time bringing in the authority of science. The new vocabulary brought in here works as “the strange word” once referred to by Bahtin (Volosinov 1990, 84-103), delineating the audience of the text to knowing insiders and less knowledgeable outsiders, as social capital has not been widely discussed in the Finnish public sphere. The references made here are to the language of science. These high powers mission the authorities to act. But why? The problem facing the hero (authorities) is described in the following chapter.

Now, in the beginning of the 21st century, several of the criteria of civic education, citizen participation and exercise of influence are weaker than in the other Nordic countries. The main factors explaining this passivity are scant education and low income. There appears to be a connection between length of education and several yardsticks of social capital, such as participation in voluntary activities and organizations and holding elective offices. Finland is dividing into active citizens seeking new ways of participating and passive citizens who remain uninvolved in decision making. At the same time, a traditional sense of subordination is transforming itself into weak civic commitment.

Coming to the present situation, the argument is developed in the vocabulary of **research**, more specifically the language of **measuring participation**, authorizing the description with factuality. Comparison to other Nordic countries becomes a primary criterion for evaluation. Social deprivation is another. The text implies a correlation between social deprivation and national comparison without actually making one, Finland supposedly showing lower income or educational levels than the other Nordic countries. Assuming a correlation would lead to the logical solution that higher income or education would solve the problem of low participation. This conclusion is not drawn in the suggestions of the program. Neither is it quite clear, that such a correlation exists. (Although the Finnish income level is lower than that of other Nordic countries, the educational level is not. The motivation refers to a complicated set of explanations that may or may not be valid; consultation with Martti Siisiäinen, 15.2.2007).

However, the text does not say but only implies a correlation between the two sentences, which, from the point of view of persuasion, is enough. Nevertheless, the program text risks the conclusion, that there is a rupture, a clear dividing line within the nation between the well-off and the poor. In a country with traditionally fairly even income distribution, this argumentation may or may not be true, but it refers to a value of which there is fairly high consensus. **A divided nation** – divided between the well of and “those who now participate little” acts as a strong rhetorical device. (For other examples of the figure of a divided nation, see Kantola 1998, 49-63 and Keränen 2000, 15-41.)

Active participation in the activities of organizations is at a lower level in Finland than in the other Nordic countries. The volume of participation has remained unchanged for a long time, but activity is dwindling in many traditional organizations and its orientation is towards physical exercise, other leisure pursuits and lifestyle associations. Active

participation in the activities of political parties has fallen from eight to two per cent in 20 years. Willingness to take part in political group activities is substantially less than in the other Nordic countries. The Finns use other means of influencing decision making moderately well. They are in the lowest third of established democracies when it comes to voting least. A positive feature is the Finns' trust in each other and their high level of social interaction.

The need or lack, the problem that has to be solved by the program is, that Finnish **measures of citizen participation are lower than in other Nordic countries**. The text relies heavily on the rhetoric of measurement and of comparison between countries that now are produced as facts. The forms of participation that are most worrying are the traditional forms: party activity and traditional organizations. What “the other forms” or “the trust” mean – the measures where Finns are good or better – remains unclear. Neither is it - actually - clear, why all of this is problematic. Maybe Finns can indeed live truly fulfilling lives by being more active in sports organizations rather than parties.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The chapter on implementation starts with describing the challenges facing the actor/the program and states the main aims and goals for the program.

*The challenges facing representative democracy relate **to ensuring adequately high voter turnouts**, the ability of political parties to perform their tasks, new modes of citizen participation and consultation, a need to dovetail the various levels of decision making from the local to the global as well as the threats that have arisen from international tensions and increased surveillance of citizens. A challenge in its own right is that of implementing municipal self-government against a background of restructuring of public services and deepening European integration. At the same time, the traditional perception of citizenship is broadening. Citizenship of a nation-state remains important, but alongside it is a strengthening sense of affinity with local and regional communities as well as of European and world citizenship.*

The list of challenges is fairly short but very impressive. It lists changes in all possible levels from global to local, but in a fairly speedy manner. The first challenge seems to be about “ensuing adequately high voter-turnouts”. As this block of challenges is fairly big, I will return to analyzing it in the latter part of the paper. However, I would risk the suggestion that this text block does not necessarily form the starting point or the methods chosen for attacking the problems.

If the challenges are huge, so is the aim of the program.

*The aim with the Citizen Participation Policy Program is to put in place the prerequisites for Finland becoming **one of the best countries in Europe** where citizen participation is concerned.*

The main areas attacked in fulfilling this task are the following.

Principal aims of the Citizen Participation Policy Program

*(1) **Schools and other educational institutions** will promote growth to active and democratic citizenship in accordance with the principle of lifelong learning. Alongside Finnish citizenship, EU and world citizenship should also be taken into consideration in education.*

*(2) The legal and administrative framework within which **civil society** functions must be propitious for citizen participation and suit the times. The **third sector** must have adequate research, training and development services at its disposal.*

*(3) **Traditional and new channels** for citizen participation will be developed so that they support the full participation of citizens in the activities of communities and society. **Administration** must have the tools and attitude it needs for interaction with citizens.*

*(4) The **structures and practices of representative democracy** must work well on all levels of decision making and reflect the changes that are taking place, everything from the information society to globalization.*

The text states that Finnish legislation already is from the point of view of citizen participation mainly *either good or excellent*, taking in use a standard formulation of any survey questionnaire. The best method *that the authorities have at their disposal* are schooling and adult education, *good conditions for civic activities to take place*, *new modes of interaction between citizens and administration*, *financial support for actors in the field of civic activities as well as the production and dissemination of information concerning democracy.*

The civil society is seen as *a nursery for the skills needed in a democracy, a channel for influence and a developer of social capital...A fostering of active and democratic citizenship should also include immigrants within its focus.* In order to gain more information about the state of participation and civil society, more research is needed.

For all the main areas of action, main methods and activities for fulfilling the goals are outlined. A large amount of activities have been directed to **education in various forms**.

1. Promoting education; education in schools, in teacher training, in adult education

The aim is to enhance activities of student bodies, clubs, various participatory projects and schools' cooperation with different organizations. There is talk about communitarian methods and virtual communitarianism. Life-long learning is one the buzzwords of the program. The schools' operational culture (toimintakulttuuri) should be changed to promote active participation. *"The essential challenge is to translate policy into practice and give sufficient attention to those who participate little."* Special mention is made to the Participating Pupil – Communitarian School-project that now encompasses about 80 municipalities and all of the teacher training units' practice schools.

Another project mentioned is the "Citizen Participation in Teacher Training" project, which will continued in collaboration with municipalities and trainee teachers. *"A national network of training for teachers is being created to promote an interactive structure in the operational culture of schools and other educational institutions and support practical implementation of the curriculum process."* Supplementary training for teaching staff will

be emphasized. Teaching materials to help include citizen participation in instruction in various levels of education will be developed.

Further, a Youth Participation Project aims at preventing marginalization of young people, encompassing 38 schemes in 70 municipalities, youth councils, youth parliaments and Youth Voice meetings.

Civic studies will be increased in adult education and a project to develop study groups will be launched. Civic studies organized by the adult education sector will be increased, partly in collaboration with communities, associations, organizations and political popular movements. Special attention will be paid to language, culture and civics courses for immigrants. How, exactly, this will be done is unclear to me. Adult education is mainly organized by folk high schools that organize courses on their own initiative in response to people's request for hobby activities. One of the areas of education and research is education.

2. Promoting civil society

The goal is a participatory, discussing, multifaceted civil society that is sensitive to the needs and wishes of people, one of which the role will come more clearly into focus as its vitality grows and forms of activities appropriate for our times are adopted. Civil society strengthens democracy by developing the competences that are needed in a democracy, channeling and amplifying the influence that citizens wield and contributing to the development of social capital... Third-sector training, research, development and support are likewise needed.

Promoting civil society involves:

- clarification of legal provisions concerning the activities of organizations, studying young people's ways of acting politically, and investigating the opportunities of civic organizations to operate internationally in Europe and globally.
- commissioning a separate study on the definition of public utility
- funding university-level courses and research into civic activities.

Special groups targeted by the program are "those who now participate little". The youth and the immigrants are targeted as special groups in need of schooling.

*A problem in its own right is the question of how **those who now participate little** can achieve **fully fledged citizenship**. The primary task of the public authorities is to ensure that the conditions in which civic activities and civil society function are favorable. This presupposes that the legal provisions affecting civic activities are formulated clearly*

*A report will be drafted on how education, cultural work and the efforts of organizations can support civic activity **on the part of those who now participate little** and engage them in the activities of civil society.*

***Immigrants** will be given assistance in forming organizations to help them preserve their cultural identities and integrate into Finnish society, with special attention being paid to children and adolescents.*

3. Promoting participatory democracy and access to information

The goal is to develop the methods of participatory democracy in a way that gives citizens the opportunity to have an input into decision-making processes on the various levels of administration. A key prerequisite for democracy is that citizens trust administration. Trust is born of both people's personal experience and the interaction between citizens and administration that is built on it. One a priori condition is access to information, its adequate availability and a social discourse. The biggest challenges relate to opening up new channels through which to exercise influence and increasing general participation, something that requires special attention to the groups that now participate little.

Means for enhancing participatory democracy are:

- the conduct referendums and popular initiatives
- an electronic forum for consultation with citizens (otakantaa.fi) will be taken into use
- implementation of common principles concerning consultation with citizens, a manual drafted for public servants,
- pilot projects for developing a model of interaction between administration and nongovernmental organizations
- a plan for citizen participation and consultation, parallel to the OECD's equivalent development work, including electronic means of consultation, consultation with civic organizations and special measures required for groups who now participate little
- opportunities for young people to exercise influence, development of network democracy to help municipalities provide information and advisory services.

4. Representative democracy

A special chapter describes representative democracy and its ideal functioning of representative democracy.

The goal is a representative democracy founded on broad participation. As part of it, elections will capture people's interest, be conducted using up-to-date procedures and public opinion is correctly gauged. The electoral system and voter activation will be developed to ensure that voting is founded on sound knowledge and electoral practices that support a representative democracy with power of appeal. Legislation and good municipal practices will be developed to strengthen representative municipal democracy and political guidance, especially in those municipal functions where tasks are organized through more indirect modes of directing self-government or market-based solutions have been adopted for them. Support will be provided to enable political parties to revise their tasks and ways of working. A discourse on citizens' prospects of being able to understand the contents of laws and appraise the legal provisions that form their environment will be launched.

- to improve the conditions in which holders of elective office do their work, local government legislation is changed to make a municipal mayoral model possible, to allow

elective municipal office holders leave of absence from their employment to enable them to perform their public duties

- The Local Government Act will be amended to strengthen owner-direction in municipalities and increase transparency, developing legislation concerning commercially based operations, containing a new commercially based municipal group.
- The municipal democracy audit project will be continued. Its aim is to improve the ability of municipalities to define what a functioning democracy is, and a model has been formulated to help them in this. This is a project that has been going on for some time.
- projects aimed at clarifying legislation and increasing its comprehensibility have also been initiated earlier and now included in this program.
- an election information system will be developed. Possibilities of electronic voting will be examined.
- The need to change the electoral system for European Parliament elections will be assessed
- the opportunities of expatriate Finns to vote are developed,

Interestingly, the program takes initiative to a co-operation with political parties:

- *Together with political parties and civic organizations, new means of increasing the interest of voters will be developed.*
- *Together with the political parties, their changing pattern of tasks as key actors in representative democracy will be clarified, with special attention to processing political goals and maintaining a social discourse.*

5. Administration of democracy-related matters

A final chapter of the implementation plan is devoted to “**Administration of democracy-related matters**”. A special administrative body needs to be established for monitoring the program and seeing that *indicators of democracy* are followed and utilized.

The task of the administrative body responsible for democracy-related matters is to develop cooperation in these matters, monitor indicators of democracy, provide the state administration with the information on citizen participation it needs, present initiatives for developing democracy, maintain an Internet portal providing information and background on democracy and promote citizens’ opportunities to influence the state administration also via information networks.

- *Cooperation between administrative bodies in relation to democracy affairs will be improved, (Ministry of Justice)*
- *The democracy portal kansanvalta.fi will go online. It will contain information on democracy, citizen participation and democracy policy for use by citizens, administration and researchers. (Ministry of Justice)*
- *A democracy policy will be drafted for further use.*

Democracy has now been constructed in terms of policy, a specific policy-field that requires its own administrative apparatus and own measurement instruments to be monitored for the needs of state administration.

Even further work in the program is expected to be a cooperative exercise between the same ministries (the Council of State (Government), the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education), the Ministry of Justice taking responsibility for coordination. Other parties involved in program activities are to be the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, major political parties and civic organizations. Officials from the ministries implementing the program will form a network of liaison persons. Further specifications are made for personnel costs in the education sphere, adult education, central government contribution to the operating costs of civic institutes and folk high schools, study centers, summer universities, and uses of profits from the Slot Machine Association RAY to promoting youth work.

THE GOALS

The final chapter of the text discussed the current state of affairs and describes an image of the future. It also sets goals for program implementation.

Changes in citizen participation take place slowly and a sustained long-term effort will be needed if the program is to be effective.

Although the issue at hand may be expected to be fairly complicated and concrete goals difficult to set, the final chapter of the paper is, indeed, very precise:

A monitoring framework for citizen participation will be developed in spring 2006. The points of departure in drafting have been that:

- *Where the key indicators of civic education, civic activities, citizens' participation in managing the affairs of society and their exercise of influence are concerned, Finland will re-attain the status of **one of the best countries in Europe**.*
- *Schoolchildren's civic **knowledge will remain good** and their **willingness to participate** will be **at least on the European average level**; the **share of studies intended to support citizen participation** will increase in the educational work done by voluntary organizations.*
- ***Voter turnouts** in local-government and parliamentary elections **will rise to the Nordic level**; the poll **must not be lower than 50 per cent** for any age group or in any area; Finland will make her own contribution to increasing the voting percentage in European Parliament elections.*
- *The **proportion of their time that people devote to participatory activities** will increase; young people will have the opportunity to participate in hobbies to which they feel an attachment; the indicators of social capital will reveal an upswing in all age groups.*
- *Democracy **audits will be adopted** in various types of municipalities; **party memberships will grow** and **parties' internal democracy will become anchored in public opinion**.*

The program has been criticized for vagueness (HS 22.10.2006; Vihreä Lanka 22.12.2006 and Nykypäivä 18.12.2006). It seems to me, however, that there is nothing vague about these goals. Other problems might still rise: How is the government going to go about in securing school children's willingness to participate? What is the government going to do to increase the voluntary organizations' willingness to organize courses in civic education? Why must people allot a certain percentage of their time to civic activities? What percentage is acquired? Is there is a risk for even too high percentages? What is the government going to do to make people yet again become party members? Why should there be a competition between nation-states on measures of participation?

REFLEXION

Looking at the text you can say that this certainly is a standard administrative text, using ordinary vocabularies of administrative speech and standard structures of narration in an official document. You may criticise it for vagueness: the political will behind the program may be hard to find. Suggestions made here are generally good and could not possibly be criticised by anyone.

The program has been criticised for being vague and imprecise. Yet, the activities of the program are fairly well detailed, the division of labour between ministries is clearly defined, and goals are set with even extreme preciseness. But does this help? Who, exactly, can take responsibility for voter turnouts to rise to the Nordic level in a country where voting is not obligatory?

The narrative structure of the text follows a very conventional model for any reform attempt, where **the beginning** creates a frame for the attempt, constructs a version of the past and a the problem, a rupture in the historical development that now needs to be corrected so that the glorious past can continue into the future. The description of the problem is needed in order to motivate the reform actions.

The middle of the text continues specifying the problem an, at the same time, defining solutions.

The end restores the balance and covers the rupture created in the text. It shows how things can continue in accordance to the historical development described at the beginning and the glorious past can be lengthened to the future.

Main suggestions of the program rely to a large extent on **education** which, of course, cannot be bad. The citizenry needs to be better educated and better informed. Education is needed in schools, adult education,

Other suggestions made are:

- participation needs to be measured
- civil society needs to be researched more
- the role of the media needs to be discussed

- election information needs to be made more activating. Better information is seen as a solution to low voter turnout
- the role of the parties needs to be discussed
- better “hearing” of the citizens by better access to information, clearer legislation and clearer language in administration
- representative democracy needs to be supplemented by forms of direct democracy
- an administrative unit is needed for democracy policy.

All these issues certainly need to be discussed and researched more. All the activities certainly are good and valuable. What could possibly be wrong here? Is there anything that could be criticised? And what could there be to stand in the way of implementing the measures suggested?

In the following I turn to contextual changes that might affect an easy implementation or stand in the way of reaching the goals set for a program.

3. THE CONTEXT

In the following, I will try to contextualise the text to a fairly common conception of what has happened in politics in recent decades. This is done by contrasting and comparing new modes of talking about participation, citizenship and democracy versus new modes of governance in a context of a multilateral state. As the contexts of nation-states have changed, we can ask: what are the consequences of this for democracy, participation and citizenship. As new modes of governance have transformed from government to governance – and multilevel governance – we can ask how this development has transgressed the relations between politics and government and, therefore, constructions of citizenship and democracy. Along these developments, power has become more difficult to detect and accountability more difficult to require. Questions of steering versus accountability arise. How should we conceptualise participation in a way that would catch changing meanings of participation?

This argumentation evolves by *contrasting text with context*, by contrasting often narrated past ideals of democracy to present conceptualizations of relations between democracy and governance. What has changed?

Participation and citizenship have traditionally been conceptualised within the frame of a naturalised nation-state in a nation-state system, where each state acts as a sovereign within its territory. The borders of a nation-state used to define the demarcation line between order and anarchy. Ideal citizenship was constructed as active (or less so) participation in matters of the state. A civic culture of citizenship was a precondition for the legitimacy of state power and governance. Ideal democracy was based on the idea of citizen participation, correspondence between citizens’ demands, government delivery of required policies, transparency of decision-making and implementation - and responsibility required in next election.

In a representative democracy citizen participation is expected to be the inflow/input of the political system that in regularly held elections tests the accountability of the elected representatives, whereas the output of the system is implemented by a civil service, a neutral bureaucracy. In this terminology, then, democracy is crucially about public voice and accountability, whereas government refers to steering from the top down and the capacity to control societal activities.

This is no longer so. Parties have changed from membership organizations to media and election organizations. The importance of media has increased as media, instead of the parties, takes care of mediation between politics and the citizenry. However, media contents have changed as politics in media representations gets personalised. As membership activities of parties decline, voting decisions come to be based on the personal appeal of the party leaders. The role of civil society is not as an actor in interest articulation but rather as a provider of services no longer produced by the public sector.

From the 1970s onwards, citizens and voters have come more often to be constructed as receivers of welfare services rather than civic activists. In developed welfare states, issues of policy outcomes grew in importance. However, economic policies of globalized nation-states have come to promise less and less of those services. As the tasks of welfare states have been cut down, they have become delegated to the third sector, the civil society, not as activists but as service providers. Mary Kaldor wrote (2003) that the national bargains of the earlier period are said to be hollowing out. There is an increased disenchantment with the formal political process giving rise to growing apathy and frustration. There is a decline of commitment on both sides, the citizens and the state: loyalty to the state versus willingness and ability of the state to secure economic and social rights or political rights in a substantive sense (Kaldor 2003).

The literature on governance and multilevel governance has come to raise the question of – not only steering – but also the consequences of governmentalization to transparency and accountability (Pierre & Peters 2000; Bache & Flinders (eds.) 2004; Kjaer 2004). The changing role of governance networks begins to be widely discussed and the problematic relationship between representative democracy and governance networks is increasingly researched (for example Sørensen & Torfing 2005). The consequential consumerization of citizenship is also at least hinted at in current literature. Significantly, even the changing role of interest organizations is now discussed in terms of social *capital* (Rothstein & Stolle 2003)

New governance is described to be about how the centre interacts with society and relies on self-steering networks. Problems of steering have led to proposals and mechanisms for direct involvement of parties involved, thereby guaranteeing effective implementation. Networking and lobbying in early stages of decision-making may lead to easy implementation, but not equally for all. Not all citizens get to participate equally, if the mode of participation is direct involvement, networking and lobbying.

The crucial question here is not only how to steer, but how to improve accountability. Inefficiencies of traditional accountability mechanisms have led to compensatory models for citizen participation in order to reintroduce direct accountability, but these, again, as Kjaer (2004, 15) calls it, “short-circuit the increasingly complex structures of accountability”. This raises the paradox that participation in the new networks may in itself be a part of the privatization of accountability.

In policy networks, power is diffuse and lies in relations between actors. Power does not reside in any centre and it is not anybody’s possession. However, network membership is limited and not representative of the population. If administrative functions are fragmented, so is responsibility. Multilevel governance does not even assume a centre that is capable of implementing policies in the old sense. Neither is it assumed that the citizenry would have some interests to articulate. Participation of the interested partners in local level policy networks may advance implementation of policies, but it also annihilates questions of democracy and accountability.

And further, the division between the domestic and the international has broken and the significance of territorial borders has lessened. New discussions on citizenship have been disconnected from the nation-state, but possibilities of global democracy remain vague and states still remain the only sites of formal representative democracy. (King & Kendall 2004; Richards & Smith 2002; Pattie, Seid & Whiteley 2004)

Whereas “in the old times” democracy would have been conceptualised as a bottom to top – relationship of interest articulation and accountability, and governance would have been conceptualised as a top to bottom – relationship of steering and implementation, this no longer applies. Some even claim that the feedback loop has been reversed, the government now making claims to parties and the citizenry rather than the other way round (Lindvall & Rothstein; Österud & Selle 2006).

It seems, from the point of view of liberal democracy, that relations between politics and government/governance have changed so that power has become increasingly non-transparent while the area of “politics” has been taken over by new discourses and practices of governance. A larger area has been depoliticised and the ideal of transparency and accountability attached to representative democracy has been lost. It seems that even ways of conceptualizing citizenship have removed from a repertoire of politics to a repertoire of government and governance, where the citizen is constructed as a consumer and the idea of citizen as someone who has a political voice has been lost.

Current trends that change the meaning of participation and citizenship: localization of governance, privatization of the public sphere, consumerization of citizenship, i.e. de-politization of political participation. A situation where democracy has become management.

Not surprisingly, then, citizen participation has declined in Westerns countries. As relations of representation have changed it is, indeed, less meaningful to participate

in the old style. Diminishing participation and voter turnout is a reasonable reaction to the contextual changes inside and outside of the political system; localization of governance, privatization of the public sphere, consumerization of citizenship and de-politization of political participation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Returning to the text of the Citizen Participation Policy Program we can now relate the text to the context described above, a description of changing politics based on current research literature.

Methodologically, this is a contribution to rhetorical or discourse studies in politics (for example Howarth & Torfing 2005). This is to offer an alternative to the methodological individualism of survey studies that might have an individualizing bias built into them. As de-politization of political life is the issue studied here, it is necessary to take a distance to pre-given conceptions of what politics is and where it resides. Politics, then, is seen as conflictual struggles about definitions of reality and possible conflicts in adapting or resisting those definitions. "Political participation" is not a natural fact, it is a contested concept with a tradition of interpretations.

The rhetorical approach allows me to ask, what the texts say, but also who is talking to whom (the top or the bottom), in what context, and what kinds of consequences for the receiver (resistance, adaptation or empowerment). Why is this well-meaning text for advancing participation and democracy coming from the centre rather than the bottom? Are the suggestions – or even the goals - expected to implemented, and how would successful implementation materialise? Is the repertoire used in the text a repertoire of democracy or that of governance? How does the texts construct the position of the citizen, how does it construct democracy, how does it politicize or de-politicize issues, what are the power relations constructed in the text and what kind of power relations are established between the authors and readers of the texts. The central terms of rhetorical analysis, ethos, pathos and logos allow us to ask, who is talking to whom in the text.

Who is the sender of the text? How does she/he represent herself or make herself known in the text? Administrative texts usually rely on passive forms and neutral expression. Things are commonly developed, enhanced, fostered and improved. We do know that in reality the sender is a coalition government and ministries in cooperation; in practice some officials acting on behalf of the state. In rhetorical terms, we can assume that the sender assumes to be capable of sending, of effecting some changes in its environment, of having the authority to implement the changes suggested in the text. The sender takes a position of authority, which naturally should come with the office.

Who is the receiver? As above. The receiver is another bureaucrat, marginally a politician, who is prepared for being concerned about the state of affairs.

Where is the citizen? Citizen is the object of administrative attempts. As “Finland” becomes the collective agent travelling through history, the citizen becomes the object of education. Well-meaning talk about citizen participation can also be interpreted as patronizing the citizen. The “problem” constructed in the text is less about the system and more about people’s behaviour, that should be changed. (In the “reality” outside of the program text, there has not been a lot of debate about the program in the media. As a methods class in political science in the autumn of 2006 experimented with analysing the program text, this caused some bewilderment, as the program was not known to the students earlier.)

Other questions might rise on the basis of the text and the suggestions made:

Why is so much energy and activity of the program directed to education, enlightenment and research? Citizens should be educated on all levels, schools, in adult education, even in their free time. Special groups in need of education are the youth, immigrants, “those who now participate little”. Why are these constructed as problem groups? Education can never be bad, of course, but a strong allocation of resources in education also brings to mind the former nationalising effects of school systems and the integrative role of schools in nation-building. In a country where the school system is comparably good, this effort to **educate and enlighten** the people also leads to the question of **how dumb, exactly**, we now are seen to be. Why is there a hierarchization of citizens to less well-off, childlike, non-adult ones, implying that we still need to “mature”? (The popularised version of the program, a brochure for wider distribution is titled “Towards a Mature Political Culture”, implying a human life cycle projection of time towards maturity. What the youth or old age of a democratic culture look like, can only be imagined.

Although the program for added transparency of simple language use in administration was added to this program, it is not in the first hand about added transparency of governmental activity do that they can understand the decisions concerning them, perhaps not so much to be able to control the actions of the bureaucracy (also Pohjantammi 2006, 145-148). And although there is much talk about citizen participation, it is not primarily about citizens’ rights for political; voting is needed for other reasons.

Why is the relationship between the government (the administration) and the parties, but also the media constructed as one between the administration as a sender and the parties, the media and civil service organizations as receivers? The program takes initiative in discussions with the parties to help **them** to find anew their genuine/proper political role. The program initiated media education schools but also media research and seminars discussing the role of the media in democracy. As the role of media and the parties used to be to mediate between the citizens and the parliament/government, this can be considered a new initiative in reversing the feedback loop.

Why is democracy now constructed as a policy field, as “democracy policy” (Swedish “demokratipolitik” (Peterson 2001; Amnå 2004) in need of its own

administration and follow-up instruments, instead of being a quality of the whole political system?

Why must activity be measured? Why is the follow-up information for surveillance of citizens thought to be quantitative? The text shows a firm belief in measurement. While there, obviously, is a lot of research on the diminishing percentages of voter participation (for instance Paloheimo 2005; Hickey & Mohan 2004), the long tradition of participation studies runs the risk of remaining de-contextualised, keeping constant the categories of research in themselves. Less attention has been paid to *what it means to participate, how modes of talking and contexts of participation have changed, rendering the activities of participation more or less effective and meaningful.*

Why is the narration from the beginning to the end constructed as basically national, with residual mentions made to other political structures but not really analysed? Why is the version of national history constructed as sanitized, heroic but also purely non-political, as if we had travelled through history on the same boat from victory to victory?

Why is there a competition between nation-states in measures of voting rates and participation? Why is the only motivator and the horizon for the future for Finns to do well in this competition? What kind of a construction of national identity is this, with the citizen still not having an individual say in the matters of the state, but rather supposed to act on the basis of a national pride, or at least no shame in front of “Others”.

As the text describes the world from its own perspective, we can also ask what descriptions or accounts it comes to conceal:

What it is not?

- Participatory democracy does not have any priority. The main focus is on representative democracy.
- Participation is aimed at a national frame of representation, although people should be informed (enlightened) about EU politics, too. The relative loss of significance and sovereignty of nation-states is not discussed any further.

What else is told? There is a competition on rates of voter turnout. The units competing are nation-states. Finland competes mainly with other Nordic countries. Finland – as an actor – has a glorious past in this competition. It has fared less well in recent years. The goal of the project is to reach the same level as before.

How, then, should the program text be analysed in the changing context? It seems to me that it confirms many of the themes of contextual change described above. It speaks in the repertoire of governance and turns participation into governance.

The current context could be described as one, where politicking – in Palonen's (1993) terms - in the national parliament may still seem to be the major locus of politics, but politics have changed so that integrative and international vs. local levels increase in importance and drain the functions of the nation state, whereas policies coming from the EU and international organizations unify national practices and at the same time “change the rules of the game”.

Politics (as conflict, deliberation of differing meanings) is drained out of the national context Finland. Political participation has become depoliticised and managerialised, a domain for regulating people's activities.

The effect of this seems to be a massive *de-politization*, politics losing its importance and relevance for the citizenry and turning into mere legitimization of decisions, constructing citizens as dopes that merely are to be persuaded to adapt themselves to non-conflictual “politics” – a contradiction in terms. Citizens should be active but well-behaving and cooperative, responsible producers of the public services now cut down. Political activity is constructed as cosy socializing in a communal spirit rather than acting for interests and solving social problems.

The increasing worry about diminishing voter turnout and declining participation has led governments to initiate programs for activating their citizens and enhancing civic education. However, in the new context, government actions for enhancing participation seem paradoxical. And consequently, policies addressing citizenship activity, but disregarding contextual changes, may appear superficial and narrow. The citizen gets blamed while actually being a victim. And if political participation does not seem meaningful, neither does it help to measure it in the old style; surveys and individualised measurement of activities can end up producing patronizing and individualised pressures.

If isolated debates about political activity may just come to blame the victim, the citizen, any possible efforts for re-politization should therefore be based on a thorough analysis of the contextual changes and a reformulation of questions asked. Discussing the fit/lack of fit between the projects and the contextual changes may suggest other means for enhancing democracy. How can we avoid producing results that individualize the problem, blame the victim and patronize the citizenry by complaining over people's passivity? How can we, then, create resources for a critical debate on participation and democracy in the new situation, re-conceptualise the issue in a way that makes sense of contextual change of the Finnish nation-state, and to make transparent the fuzzy relations of power that now remain hidden?

Politics (as conflict, deliberation between differing meanings) is drained out of the national context Finland. Political participation has become depoliticised and managerialised, a domain for regulating people's activities.

What if there had been an analysis of all the means for political participation that could be available for reasonably well educated people from a small nation-state in a very complex international structure? **What if this text was written from the perspective of the citizen, in a repertoire of, if not liberation, at least deliberation and contestation? What does it take to start the discussion from the citizen's point of view?**

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