

BRINGING PARTICIPATION CLOSER TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE EXPECTATIONS IN PORTUGAL: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY (846)

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This article is motivated by the recognition of existing gaps between most common participatory practices and the hopes of participatory governance materialisation. Beyond normative mismatches, tangible gaps exist regarding the prospects and the effective results of participation, but also those resulting from the way citizens and civil society perceptions become misaligned with those of local public authorities. Thus, the paper ponders the tension between the heavy legacies of traditional forms of political action and policy delivery, embedded in modernist and sectorial structures of public administration, and the emergence of new demands originated by innovative programmatic layouts and new social movements agendas and citizenship cultures, all accompanied by growingly pressing societal challenges. The correspondent theoretical debates recover the issues of co-creation and co-production (Albrechts, 2013, Watson, 2014, Wamsler, 2016), and the way they have been confronting traditional forms of participation, hence also considering the role of civic initiatives in the reconfiguration of the public sphere (Fung & Wright, 2008, Seixas & Mota, 2021). This debate is triggered by the notion that innovative participative practices are permeating local governance practices unevenly, leading to fragmented effects of positive contamination of the more traditional ones, as has been recognized for the Portuguese situation (Seixas & Guterres, 2019, Falanga & Ferrão, 2021, Rio Fernandes et al, 2021). The article organizes relevant empirical information regarding diverse examples of innovation in local participatory practices in Portugal. The main goal of the research is to bring further observation and interpretation for the possible evolution – including its unbalances and gaps (of dialogue) between traditional and innovative forms of governance, participation over co-creation, in addition to the bridging routes that have been explored. The purpose is to identify productive lines of coalescence between the different agents and spaces, thus contributing to position more stable and permanent arrangements within the Portuguese local governance systems.

Keywords: Participation, Co-creation, Co-production, Civic Movements

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