Chapter 14
The "Pragmatist Turn" in Theory of Governance

Alain Loute
Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium

ABSTRACT

In this essay, the author focuses on what Jacques Lenoble and Marc Maesschalck call the "pragmatist turn" in the theory of governance. Speaking of pragmatist turn, they refer to recent work by a range of authors such as Charles Sabel, Joshua Cohen and Michael Dorf, who develop an experimental and pragmatist approach of democracy. The concept of "turn" may raise some perplexity. The author believes that we can speak of "turn" about these experimentalist theories because these theories introduce a key issue, what we may call the question of "self-capacitation of the actors." The author tries to show that this issue constitutes a novelty compared to the deliberative paradigm in the theory of governance. While the issue of collective learning is a black box in the deliberative paradigm, democratic experimentalism seeks to reflect on how the actors can organize themselves to acquire new capacities and to learn new roles. The author concludes in revealing the limits of this approach.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I would like to focus on some research results of the Centre for Philosophy of Law at the Catholic University of Louvain. In particular, I will focus on what Jacques Lenoble and Marc Maesschalck call the "pragmatist turn" in the theory of governance. Speaking of pragmatist turn, they refer to recent work by a range of authors such as Charles Sabel, Joshua Cohen and Michael Dorf, who develop an experimental and pragmatist approach of democracy, what they call "democratic experimentalism" (Dorf & Sabel, 1998).

The concept of "turn" may raise some perplexity. It refers to an idea of novelty or overcoming,

an idea of transition from one paradigm to another. Can we really speak of "turn" about these experimentalist theories? Do they really permit to overcome other paradigms in the theory of governance or do they only constitute a deepening of these? Should we not rather regard such theories as a form of deepening of the deliberative paradigm?

Based on the work of Lenoble and Maesschalck (2010), my goal is to demonstrate that these theories constitute a real "turn" in theory of governance. The reason is that they introduce a key issue, what we may call the question of "self-capacitation of the actors." They seek to reflect on how the actors can organize themselves to acquire new capacities and to learn new roles. It seems to me that the issue of "self-capacitation" of the actors is a novelty compared to other paradigms in the theory of governance.

To demonstrate this thesis, it seems useful to begin with the diagnosis of a paradox in our societies. The paradox is that although there are more and more opportunities for participation in our society, the influence of citizens does not seem to have been really increased. In a second step, I will try to show that this paradox of participatory democracy refers first of all to an unsettled question in the deliberative paradigm, of which Habermas is the most famous representative, namely the question of the "capacitation" of the stakeholders to assume their discursive role within the deliberative programming of the society (Maesschalck & Loute, 2007). In a third step, I will show how "democratic experimentalism" makes this question of the "capacitation" of the actors a central issue of theory of governance. I will conclude in revealing the limits of this approach.

THE PARADOX OF THE PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY REVIVAL

In the last few years, some reform practices that have taken place within our States, have revived the ideal of participation: recurring theme of participative democracy, deliberative practices, implication of the users in the evaluation of public services, etc. Some authors, like Blondiaux and Sintomer (2002), refer to the emergence of a "deliberative imperative." The European policy context is also strongly influenced by the theme of participative democracy. This is for instance illustrated with the White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, 2001) which highlights participation as one of the principles for a good governance. Other authors, like Pierre Rosanvallon (2008), show how much democratic legitimacy implies the necessity and prescription of proximity and reflexivity. Our societies have thus entered the era of "reflexive modernization" (Beck, 1986; Beck et al., 1994) which brings into question the strict divisions of the task of our representative societies and our societies founded on the power of experts (Callon et al., 2001). For us, although they constitute a new mode of participation, the paradox of these new practices initiated by politics is that they do not seem to induce a real growth of power of citizens in collective decisions. They do not seem, using an expression of Marcel Gauchet, to render power *appropriable* by the members of the political community (2002). These offers of participation touch only a small part of the population, when they are not "colonized" – using an expression from Habermas – by the lobbies or by administration discredited which seek to acquire some form of legitimacy[1]. The multiplication of deliberative spaces has instead had the effect of making possible new forms of opportunism and strengthening the domination of majority interest.

COLLECTIVE LEARNING: A BLACK BOX IN THE DELIBERATIVE PARADIGM

We believe that this "deficit" of the revival of participative democracy refers first of all to an unsettled question in the deliberative paradigm,

Related Content

ICT Management and Compliance: An Action Research Project
João Barata, Paulo Rupino da Cunhaand Sofia Barata (2014). *ICT Management in Non-Profit Organizations (pp. 242-264).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ict-management-and-compliance/107858

Concerns and Solutions on Electronic Voting Systems Adoption
Yurong Yaoand Edward Watson (2003). *Managing IT in Government, Business & Communities (pp. 127-146).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/concerns-solutions-electronic-voting-systems/25905

Unethical Information Security Behavior and Organizational Commitment
Toshihiko Takemura (2014). *Approaches and Processes for Managing the Economics of Information Systems (pp. 181-198).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/unethical-information-security-behavior-and-organizational-commitment/94287

Inter-Organizational IT Governance Research: A Literature Review
Ari Helin (2019). *International Journal of IT/Business Alignment and Governance (pp. 40-54).*
www.irma-international.org/article/inter-organizational-it-governance-research/233155

A Business Case Process for IT-Enabled Investments: Its Perceived Effectiveness from a Practitioner Perspective
Kim Maes, Steven De Haesand Wim Van Grembergen (2017). *Strategic IT Governance and Alignment in Business Settings (pp. 1-23).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-business-case-process-for-it-enabled-investments/166887