Power and Influence-Based Political Participation in European Democracies

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Power and Influence-Based Political Participation in European Democracies. In this article, we analyse issues related to political participation from the perspective of sociological theory. The key argument is based on a theoretical framework distinguishing clearly between power and influence. We employ Talcott Parsons' theory of steering media and use it as a base on which to build a classification of forms of political participation. We show that with the development of a society, power-based political participation is not being replaced by influence-based political participation. Instead, in developed societies, the number of active citizens increases, and they tend to use more of both power-based and influence-based forms of political participation. Based on our classification of the forms of political participation, we examine a set of quantitative indicators using a hierarchical cluster analysis in order to explore differences and similarities among EU members as regards the use of power or influence-based forms of political participation.
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Introduction

Recently, quite a few mass protests, gatherings and uprisings demanding social and political change took place in new EU member states. Some common denominations of these protests are: discontent with the political system and functioning of democracy; general distrust in institutions and the rule of law; distrust in politics, government, political parties; as well as general indignation at the high levels of corruption. All this accumulated discontent rooted in the context of a deep economic crisis and painful reflections and insights into many mistakes and injustices that have occurred in the period of transition or to say, post-socialist period. In Slovenia, massive protests directed against the political elite reached its peak during the winter 2012 – 2013. Key ideas and slogans were often presented in a universalistic manner and they referred to entire political elite in a very simplistic sense of "all politicians and political institutions being bad". A necessity to replace the whole political elite as well as change thoroughly the political system was expressed loudly. Among the visions for a better society and requirements for change, it was common to hear proposals and initiatives for a greater participation of people in decision-

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making processes. Some of the proposals even suggested, that people should be the ones to do all the decision-making instead of the political elite that has lost the confidence of the people and should be abolished. There were numerous requests for the establishment of new mechanisms through which people could influence the decisions on common issues.

The purpose of this article is to offer a reflection on current events and issues related to political participation from the perspective of sociological theory. The key arguments will be based on the theoretical framework of distinguishing between power and influence. To understand and justify this distinction, we will employ Talcott Parsons' theory of steering media and use it as a base to build a classification of forms of political participation. We will distinguish between two forms of political participation: the direct adoption of binding decisions at various levels and influencing decisions. In the former case, a citizen uses the medium of power, while in the latter he or she applies the medium of influence. Employing data from relevant cross-national surveys, we will aim to establish the extent and development of various forms of political participation in European democracies. In the empirical part of the paper we intend to test the theoretical issue weather the medium of influence is replacing power in modern democracies? Or is it more likely that with the modernisation, the political systems themselves are becoming more complex, which implies also a larger complexity and variety of coexisting forms of political participation? We also need to establish empirically whether there are other substantial difference in political participation among European democracies not based solely on the developmental differences.

Power and influence based political participation

The key argument of this paper is based on the distinction between power and influence, the distinction that has often been blurred in social theory. Max Weber's (1964) classical contribution on power and authority was followed and upgraded by a variety of authors during the 20th century. In social psychology the concept has been described at the empirical level and developed by social psychologists such as Raven, Moscovici, Van Avermaet, Asch and others. Political scientists and sociologists have also reviewed and applied these concepts. During the early 1950s, Lasswell and Kaplan have even noted "that the concept of power is perhaps the most fundamental in the whole of political science: the political process is the shaping, distribution, and exercise of power" (Lasswell – Kaplan 1950: 75). However, a strong all-inclusive theory on influence and power has been lacking. Some of the most important theoretical debates and issues on the topic include: the structure–agency debate (Giddens 1984; Clegg 1989), disciplinary power (Foucault [1977] 1995), the hegemony debate (Haugaard – Lentner 2006) and the debate on power („three

dimensions of power theory") in democratic theory and decision making (Dahl 1957; 1961; Lukes 2005).

Still the viewpoints on the definition of power and its relation to influence have been rather different. Some authors have treated the terms as synonyms (e.g. Baldwin 1980; Kerbo – McKinstry 1995), others have understood power either as an ability or capacity to influence (e.g. Cassinelli 1966; Hogg – Vaughan 2005; French – Raven 1958). While power was seen by some authors as solely a collective property (e.g. Arendt 1972), influence on the other hand was also attributed to individuals. However, the term "influence" was also a signifier for different and not always clear meanings.

It is obvious that the approaches to the concepts of power and influence have varied between different social disciplines and also within them. The goal of this paper is not to propose a single, best definition but to provide an operational definition of both terms, based on sociological theory that would allow us to observe and measure the shifts of the phenomenon in question: political participation.

A good starting point to differentiate between power and influence may be found in Talcott Parsons' theory of steering media, which distinguishes – and draws analogies – between money, power, influence and value commitments, which correspond in his general analytical model of the social system to the four key societal subsystems, namely economy, politics, societal community and institutionalised pattern maintenance, respectively (Parsons 1977).

Power implies directly binding decisions that must be implemented. In modern democracies power is heavily formalised through the bureaucratic systems of legally defined jurisdictions assigned to particular positions and bodies. In the final instance, it is upheld by the state and its (relative) monopoly over the use of physical violence (Weber 1964) manifested through the state's repressive apparatus. Influence, on the other hand, is vague and informal. It implies the abilities of persuasion (including manipulation) causing its objects to do or not to do something not because they have to, but because they have been persuaded to believe that they would like to.

Deriving from this differentiation, we can distinguish between two categories of political participation that both coexist at various levels: the direct adoption of binding decisions and influencing them. In the former case, a citizen uses the medium of power, while in the latter he or she uses the medium of influence. A typical example for the use of power is the participation at elections or at legally binding referenda, since in both cases the citizens' decisions are legally binding.

Table 1: **A classification of the forms of political participation**

	Types of political participation	Forms of political participation
Making *power* based binding decisions	Individual – direct	Elections, referenda, holding public office
	Organised – mediated	Membership in political parties
Influencing decision making	Individual – direct	Signing petitions, staging demonstrations, supporting boycotts, civil disobedience
	Organised – mediated (inclusion)	Membership in civic organisations
	Organised – mediated (representation)	Lobbying, advocacy, providing expertise

Source: Own model.

Except the minority of citizens who actually take over public office, the chances for individual power based participation are significantly limited because:

- the power used at the elections or referenda is extremely dispersed and the power of an individual voter is practically insignificant;
- it may only be used at very rare explicitly prescribed occasions (e.g. every four or five years);
- it cannot be used in very sophisticated ways, since it is either used to authorise an organisation or another person to make decisions in one's behalf (elections) or to choose between some very limited binary choices (referendum);
- it is placed at the bottom of activities within the classical hierarchical approach by Milbrath and Goel ([1965] 1982: 18), considered as quite basic, undemanding, even routine activity.

Voting as the major way of formalised use of power by the citizens is particularly relevant when the choices are relatively simple but less so when they become more sophisticated. In a classical industrial society of the early modernity the choices were more likely to be based on relatively straightforward collective loyalties, for instance on social class. The processes of further individualisation related to the late modernity (Beck – Beck-Gernsheim 2002), the shift toward more post-materialist priorities (Inglehart 1997), class fragmentation (Dahrendorf 1959) moving away from typical class based political and ideological loyalties (Lipset 1960; Bell 1965) all imply significantly more sophisticated political choices that can hardly be provided simply by voting. Clearly, voting retains its primary approaching as a highly formalised procedure of legitimisation (Luhmann 1990) to grand certain individuals and organisations the legally legitimised right to use power in order to adopt collectively binding decisions. However, it seems to be less relevant as

a means of citizens' power. Due to an obvious inconsistency between the simplicity of the choice and the complexity of the possible outcomes and the clear inability to foresee these outcomes by the citizens it may even be questionable to which extend one can really speak about power in this regard.

Consequently, one should raise the question whether the increasing deficiencies in power-based citizens' participation are somehow compensated in developed democracies by the increasing significance of citizens' use of influence, since it enables much more sophisticated effects and can be practised on an everyday basis. The influence based participation may include:

• individual actions of ad hoc nature: they only exist in a short run, they are intensive and directed toward a relatively concrete goal (examples include signing petitions, joining demonstrations, supporting boycotts or civil disobedience);

• long-term oriented organised actions (people usually don't become members of civil society organisations (CSOs) for a day or a week), characterized mostly by less intensive relations, primarily directed toward more general, often long-term goals. They can be based on membership in a variety of CSOs that usually tend to pursue the goals of their members by representing their interests and visions in the forms of lobbying, advocacy or providing expertise to the decision-makers in power.

Although the distinction between the two is far from clear, since membership in the CSOs may also involve intensive (inter)actions, and (inter)actions may transform into organisations, one clearly cannot equate the two, because they are – at least in the analytical sense – distinct. A variety of recent protest movements such as the 'Occupy' ones may combine the intensity of ad hoc individual actions with somewhat more long term organisational elements though it may be assumed that they tend gradually either to dissolve into more isolated but intensive individual actions or transform towards CSOs (or even political parties struggling for *power* in a classical sense).

It may be assumed that the growing complexity of the society makes voting as the central power based form of participation somewhat less relevant, while the relevance of influence based political participation is increasing. As claimed by a variety of authors, the decline in voting turnouts as a classical form of participation is not a reason for pessimism about the future of political participation. The contributions, for instance, by Holford et al. (2003: 14) thus imply that more individualised forms are emerging, which enable different kinds of participation that are less elite-directed and more shaped by individuals' values and political skills; the shifting relationships between national and transnational in the context of globalisation may generate interest associations at various levels with civic global action as a way of creating better opportunities for a more egalitarian participation (see for instance

Castells 2009; Held et al. 1999; Delanty 2000). Compared to voting, such *influence* based participation mostly does not seem to be decreasing though its forms may be changing. While new political and social movements differ from the classical associations, such as political parties and trade unions, in the fact that the former are based on a different 'nature of representative link' (Morales 2009: 27-29), i.e. replacing the representations of particular constituencies by universalistic claims (e.g. human rights, ecology), the old and the new seem either to replace or – even more – to complement each other (ibid: 60-62).

Power vs. influence in the political system

Citizens' participation is of course only one of the aspects of the functioning of the political system. To understand the relationship between power and influence in the political system as a whole, we may refer to a shift in the direction of political communication emphasised by Niklas Luhmann (1990). Like Parsons, Luhmann considers power as the symbolically generalised media of the political (sub)system – required to generate collectively binding decisions. He describes politics as the circular power based communication running between the political public, the parliament and the government, which communicates its power through the state administration back to the citizens belonging to the political public. However, this is only the formal direction of communication and, according to Luhmann, the other, *informal* direction of political communication is becoming increasingly important – simply because the formal direction of communication is less and less able to handle the growing societal complexity.

This informal political communication is running in the opposite direction from the formal one implying the political public to influence directly the government through lobbying, providing expertise and advocacy. The government remains an important actor in the process of generating proposals of the new legislation and thus in fact plays the crucial role in the agenda setting of the parliament. The political parties in the parliament, on the other hand, are applying increasingly sophisticated mechanisms of marketing to persuade the citizens to support them. And the circle of communication is thus complete from the other way around.

However, since Luhmann's theory is dealing with self-referential operationally closed systems constituted by their own specific symbolically generalised media, he fails to note the difference between the *power* based formal communication and the *influence* based 'informal' communication. Obviously, lobbies may only *influence* the government, the government cannot generate binding decisions for the parliament and the parties cannot command the citizens to vote for them. Influence is thus becoming increasingly crucial

for the operations of the political system under the conditions of high societal complexity.

It may be asked whether this is really something new. Using influence in relation to power holders in order to affect their power based decisions has clearly had a long history – perhaps no shorter than politics itself. In pre-modern societies there were clearly cases when advisors to the monarchs might have been more relevant than monarchs themselves – directing the power of the sovereign by their influence.

The phenomenon of influence is thus far from new but it can be argued that its increasing significance in relation to power is an observable trend in the postmodern societies. This significance is based on the two mutually related phenomena that also characterise postmodern societies more than any others: societal complexity caused by the high levels of their functional and structural differentiation and the significance of specialized (expert) knowledge required to steer such societies in the context of complexity. Although modern political leaders whose positions are mostly achieved (instead of ascribed) in a comparatively meritocratic ways, they may be even less competent and more ignorant than traditional monarchs – *when compared to the level of sophistication* of their tasks of using power to steer complex systems (on relative ignorance in modern societies see e.g. Willke 2001). Societal complexity makes them increasingly dependent on the specialized knowledge that experts poses and it is precisely the specialized, expert knowledge that is the key source of the increasing role of influence in modern societies. In most cases, lobbying, political agenda setting and political marketing can only be persuasive and thus successful when supported by specialised expert knowledge.

Specialised knowledge as a tool of influencing

As the amount of new knowledge is growing exponentially and innovations are being constantly produced, policy issues, that governments are facing, have become increasingly complex and uncertain. These developments provide great opportunities for the economic and social environments; however, they also represent and pose new threats, challenges, dangers and unknown side effects that impact daily lives of citizens (for instance public debates on food safety, genetic testing, ecology, etc.). Huge amounts of information and knowledge are being produced, shared and applied daily as well as their "side effects", that are related to the use of knowledge production (which can be both positive as well as negative). Because of our limited ability to confront daily and embrace these dispersed masses of knowledge, individuals and social institutions are forced to specialize in order to better understand, organise and manage them, which functionally as well as normatively differentiates societies. This also creates

challenges for decision-makers in power. Although the policy-making has also followed certain specialisations, the minority of citizens who actually take over public office and have the power to decide are often incapable to confront with dispersed masses of knowledge that might be relevant for their decision-making in various policy fields – so they may "borrow" this knowledge and credibility from specialized experts.

For decades the expertise was associated with science. But including only scientific experts into decision-making processes does not facilitate democracy and participation, which is important as the consequences of the science based decisions, may apply for the whole population. It was also expected that scientists will provide a solid base for justifying and making political decision credible. However, scientific knowledge itself is in many areas provisional, partial, uncertain and incomplete and often fails to predict more holistic, long-term consequences (see for instance Wilson – Willis 2004; Power 2004). This led many authors to believe that a wider society or as Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) put it, a wider peer community, which include a wide range of stakeholders to the issue, should be included in the decision-making processes. A variety of different approaches for engaging the interested public have been proposed including: deliberative polling, standing panels, focus groups, citizens' juries, consensus conferences, stakeholder dialogues and internet dialogues. A greater use of the public is seen by its analysts (see for instance Rutgers – Metzel 1999; Edwards 2010; Kates et al. 2000; Liebert – Schmidt 2010; Rogers 2011; Brunner – Steelman 2013) as not only potentially beneficial in terms of improving the quality and accountability of advice that may be generated, but also has a way of generally improving the political process. Providing specialized knowledge has become a new niche of influencing the policy-decisions that presupposes a need for cognitive mobilization of CSOs. And individuals leading them seem to be aware and interested in this novelty. The dimension of influence of civic associations, based on expert knowledge and other resources they can provide to the policy-makers, is getting pronounced, while the importance of active participation of citizens may be losing its momentum (Adam 2008; Tomšič – Rek 2008; Maloney – van Deth, 2008). A number of researchers have shown (see for instance Warleight 2003; Greenwood 2011; Maloney et al. 2010; Kohler-Koch – Buth 2013; Kohler-Koch 2012; Saurugger 2013) that CSOs can be imperfect representatives of the citizens; they can simply fail to mobilize on important issues.

But judging by the data provided by the European Values Survey (2008) and World Values Survey (1999/2000, 2005, 2008), the European general public seems quite content with such developments. Compared to 'traditional subjects of governance' like political parties, parliaments and even government

itself, Europeans tend to trust civic associations more (for example environmental protection movements, labour unions, women's movements, charitable or humanitarian organisations) (Rek 2012). Additionally the longitudinal analysis of Europeans attitude towards "having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country", shows that while the positive attitudes and confidence in traditional political channels are in decline and when an even greater number of Europeans are expressing dissatisfaction with the way national democracies are developing, a positive attitude towards experts involvement in policy-making, has remained very stable over the past fifteen years (Rek 2012).

However, it should also be noted that the influence based political participation may be significantly more demanding, since it requires substantial investment of variety of resources, including social capital (Adam – Rončević 2003) as well as significant knowledge and competence of the citizens and associations they form. This is also demonstrated by the impact of individual socio-economic status and status related resources re-confirmed recently by the multi-level regression model of Morales (2009). The institutions at the national and the trans-national level (e.g. the European commission), for instance, may be highly responsive to a wide variety of CSOs but only as far as the latter are able to apply quite sophisticated forms of communication with those institutions, provide a high level of expertise, operate within very complex sets of rules, etc. (see Makarovič et al. 2014; Rončević – Makarovič 2011).

Development, complexity and political participation

A significant dilemma we may derive from the theoretical reflections above concerns the new relationship between power and influence in the European societies - namely whether the increasingly pronounced limits of the power based participation and the growing need for the influence based one can be observed empirically in the cross-national context. Moreover, we should test, whether the influence based participation is replacing the power based one or coexisting with it. Our theoretical concepts are operationalised in Table 2.

Since we are not interested here in the longitudinal perspective but in the relationship between power and influence based participation on the one hand and the societal complexity on the other, we assume that the levels of complexity of a given society are indicated by its modernisation in terms of development. As the best general indicator of development we have used the Human Development Index (2012). In Table 3 we provide some basic bivariate correlations for 30 European countries.

Table 2: **Indicators of the forms of political participation**

Political participation		Form of political participation	Key Indicators
Making *power* based binding decisions	Individual – direct	Elections, referenda, holding public office	Voters' turnout – last parliamentary elections (Source: Voter Turnout Database, IDEA)
	Organised – mediated	Membership in political parties	Per cent of population belonging to political parties (Source: EVS, 2008, variable a068)
Influencing decision making	Individual - direct	Signing petitions, staging demonstrations, supporting boycotts, civil disobedience	Per cents of population reporting their participation in: signing petitions (Source: EVS, 2008, variable e025); boycotts (Source: EVS, 2008, variable e026); lawful demonstrations (Source: EVS, 2008, variable e027)
	Organised – mediated (inclusion)	Membership in civic organisations	Per cent of population reporting no membership in any CSO (Source: EVS, 2008, variable a080)
	Organised – mediated (representation)	Lobbying, advocacy, providing expertise	Number of Interest Representation Groups/organisations (Source: registered at EUs' Transparency Register, October, 2013)

The development of a society correlates strongly with the extent of most of the forms of political participation. The empirical data seem to demonstrate that *both* power and influence, are of greater importance and are being practiced more often in more developed societies when compared to the less developed ones. It seems safe to claim, that the medium of influence is not replacing the medium of power, but they both seem to broaden in their use and differentiation with the development of a society.

However, not all forms of political participation that we analysed can be fully proven to correlate strongly with the HDI. We cannot conclude in terms of statistical significance that the amount of lobbying, advocacy and providing of expertise correlates either with HDI, or with most of the other forms of political participation. This may correspond to the claims, which we have already discussed, that "civic experts", managers and heads of CSOs may form a new, civic elite, which does not really depend on its capacity to mobilize active citizens or members and are more dependent on other factors. Even so, the absence of higher correlation levels between organized representation and the development of a society remains puzzling. We assumed that the number of

Table 3: **Correlations between forms of political participation and development**

		HDI	Last Parliament. Elections Turnout	Petitions+ Boycotts + Demon-strations	CSO Membership (not a member)	Nr. of IR Groups	Political Party Membership
HDI	Pearson Correlation	1	,576(**)	,824(**)	-,633(**)	,340	,449(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,001	,000	,000	,066	,013
	N	30	30	30	29	30	30
Last Parliamentary Elections Turnout	Pearson Correlation	,576(**)	1	,615(**)	-,392(*)	,289	,318
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001		,000	,035	,122	,087
	N	30	30	30	29	30	30
Petitions, Boycotts and Demonstrations	Pearson Correlation	,824(**)	,615(**)	1	-,568(**)	,442(*)	,360
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,001	,014	,050
	N	30	30	30	29	30	30
CSO Membership (not a member)	Pearson Correlation	-,633(**)	-,392(*)	-,568(**)	1	-,131	-,581(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,035	,001		,498	,001
	N	29	29	29	29	29	29
Nr. of Interest Representation Groups	Pearson Correlation	,340	,289	,442(*)	-,131	1	-,087
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,066	,122	,014	,498		,647
	N	30	30	30	29	30	30
Political Party Membership	Pearson Correlation	,449(*)	,318	,360	-,581(**)	-,087	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,013	,087	,050	,001	,647	
	N	30	30	30	29	30	30
	N	28	28	28	27	28	28

**Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0,05 level (2-tailed)
Sources: HDI (2012); EVS (2008); EU Transparency Register (2013); Voter Turnout Database IDEA (2013); own calculations.
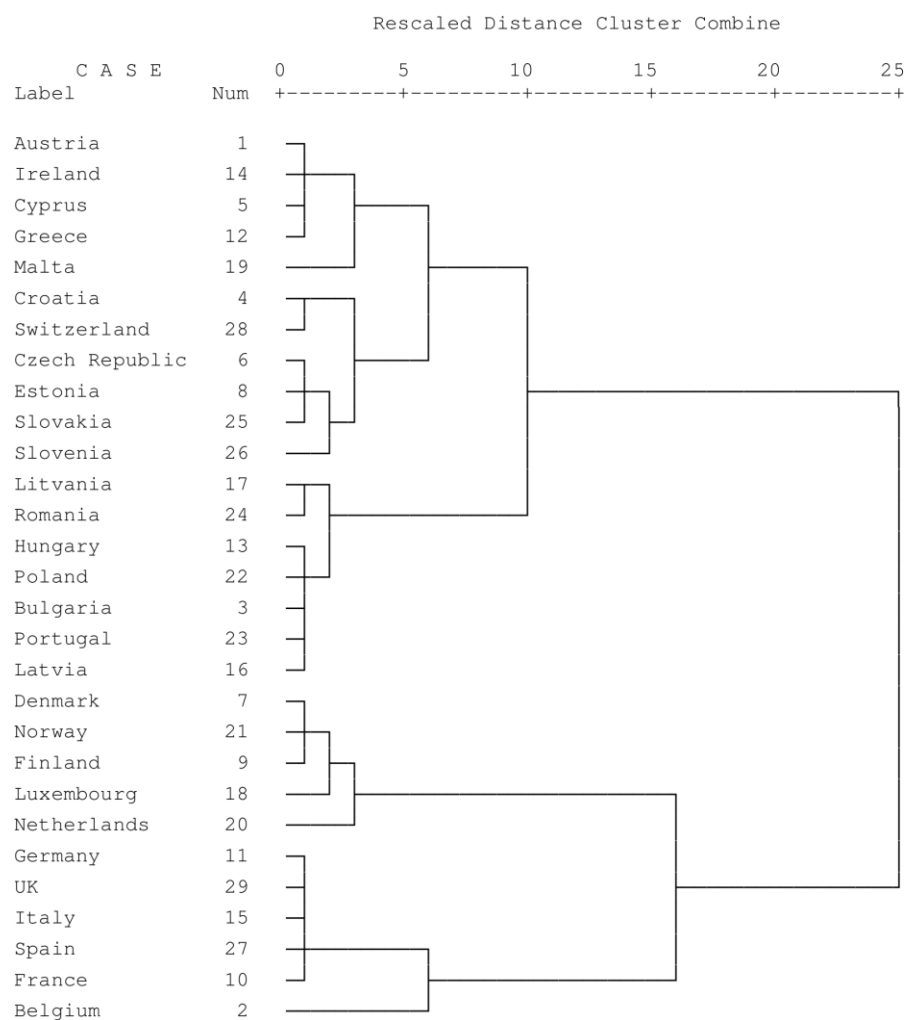
registered interest groups and organisations in the EUs' Transparency Register per national state would sufficiently describe the extent of lobbying and advocacy presence in a particular national society. However, given the puzzling result further research on this issue may be suggested before stating more general claims. Namely, the data provided by the Transparency Register gives us a better idea about the participation of national and transnational CSOs with head offices in one of the national states of the EU in transnational lobbying and advocacy processes as well as EUs' many expert groups. The specific context of the EU may thus explain the lack of significant correlation in this case. It is quite known that lobbying and advocacy groups at the EU level are not really that connected to the grass-roots of society (Maloney – van Deth 2008). We can also argue that the number of interest groups or to say organisations working at the transnational, EU level from a specific EU member state does not necessarily correlate with the development of this state, but more on other factors. Nevertheless, in order to provide more general statements about the connectedness of development and organized representation, we would need additional evidence.

On the other hand, we can find fairly strong correlations in the case of indicators of active participation of people in political processes, regardless whether they are individual and direct or organised and mediated. Consequently, the development of a society corresponds to higher parliamentary election turnouts. In such societies, membership in CSOs tends to be significantly higher, more people sign petitions and join boycotts or demonstrations. It would be worthy of further research, whether people in more developed societies have a comprehension, that such actions of theirs actually could have an effect on decision-making and to learn, how many of petition signed, boycotts or demonstrations have actually been included into legislation as a consequence of political participation of the people. Quite strong correlations between the above described forms of political participation are also significant. This implies that with the development of a society, the amount of active citizens seems to increase, and they tend to use more of both power and influence based forms of political participation.

Given the strong correlations between the emergence of various forms of political participation and development, it is not surprising that, as all EU member states are not equally developed, we also see a number of variations in the extend both power and influence are used in various nation states of the EU. To highlight the variations and on the other hand also similarities in the way political participation is expressed, we applied the method of hierarchical clustering. We aimed to group together the EU member states at various levels of similarity using our indicators.

Figure 1: **Hierarchical cluster analysis of forms of political participation in EU member states**

Dendrogram using Ward Method


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                          Rescaled Distance Cluster Combine

        C A S E              0         5        10        15        20        25
      Label          Num     +---------+---------+---------+---------+---------+

      Austria          1
      Ireland         14
      Cyprus           5
      Greece          12
      Malta           19
      Croatia          4
      Switzerland     28
      Czech Republic   6
      Estonia          8
      Slovakia        25
      Slovenia        26
      Litvania        17
      Romania         24
      Hungary         13
      Poland          22
      Bulgaria         3
      Portugal        23
      Latvia          16
      Denmark          7
      Norway          21
      Finland          9
      Luxembourg      18
      Netherlands     20
      Germany         11
      UK              29
      Italy           15
      Spain           27
      France          10
      Belgium          2
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Sources: EVS (2008); EU Transparency Register (2013); Voter Turnout Database IDEA (2013); own calculations.

While this more precise picture, as presented in Figure 1, confirms the general relationship between complexity and participation (both being most developed in the Nordic and least developed in the Mediterranean and East European countries) it also demonstrates the relevance of some national

specifics related to cultural patterns and political traditions. For instance, Finland and Slovenia share a very similar HDI but are placed in two completely different clusters, while Slovakia and Bulgaria are placed close to each other despite significant differences in terms of HDI.

Austria and Ireland interestingly form a specific cluster, which is being characterized by high level of making power based binding decisions (both individual-direct as well as organized mediated, meaning that there is a high level of voters turnout and high level of membership in political parties), while there is a medium (comparatively to other states) level of influencing decision making (signing petitions, staging demonstrations, supporting boycotts, membership in CSOs and lobbying, advocacy and providing expertise). Despite their geographic distance they may share a long Roman Catholic tradition, including the related corporatist arrangements (see: Jones-Correa – Leal 2001; Adshead – Millar 2003) that may also affect the ways of political participation.

The next cluster consists of some states from Southern Europe – Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Croatia. These states are similar in the extent of the use of power, which is high (a slight exception is a case of Croatia, where the participation at elections is lower, while the political party membership is as high as in the other states in this cluster). Individual-direct use of influence can be comparatively classified as medium, while the organised-mediated use of influence is low. They seem to follow some typical Southern European political and cultural patterns often characterised by low levels of trust and social capital making organised forms of influence more difficult (cf. Andronikidou – Kovras 2012).

The third cluster (consisting mostly of new democracies, namely the Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Portugal and Latvia) is quite diverse, containing some exceptions. However we can identify a following pattern: medium level of making power based binding decisions and a low level of influencing decision-making processes. Despite different levels of development in terms of HDI, these countries share authoritarian (communist, except in the case of Portugal) political traditions lacking well developed experiences and good practices of authentic citizens' influence to politics.

The fourth cluster includes the North European countries, namely Denmark, Norway, Finland, Luxembourg and Netherlands and is being characterized by both high level of making power based binding decisions and also a high level of influencing decision making. Besides the high levels of HDI these countries share the Nordic democratic traditions encouraging all types of political participation.

In the fifth cluster, we can include Germany, UK, Italy, Spain, France, and Belgium. Even though there are some exceptions, it can be noted that the use of

power in these states is medium, while interestingly in all cases the use of individual direct forms of influencing (signing petitions, boycotts, joining demonstrations) is high and the use of mediated forms of influencing (through CSOs) is medium, with an exception of Spain, where it is low and Belgium, where it is high. Participation in these countries may be affected by their comparatively significant size, which implies high numbers of CSOs but also difficulties in coordination related to the system's size (on countries' size-related governance issues see Adam, 1998). Citizens thus seem to use some direct forms of influence based participation more often to make their positions more visible.

Conclusion

From the cluster analysis it is obvious that there are considerable differences in political participation in European democracies. The clusters we identified are in many cases (but not all) regionally positioned and may besides the development of the country also depend on the national specifics or to say political traditions in specific parts of Europe. Citizens in some southern states seem to be comparatively active when it comes to power based forms of political participation (voting, party membership – in some cases this might be related to compulsory voting), but the use of mechanisms of influencing decision-making remains low. The "large countries" pattern, which also includes Spain and Italy is much more balanced, when it comes to considering the extent of power or influence use in decision-making processes, wherein the extent of the individual-direct influencing is remarkably high. While the (welfare) states in the northern part, with a long tradition of autonomy, universalism, individualistic protestant ethics, etc. of Europe are being characterized by high political participation considering all discussed forms of political participation. The situation is quite opposite in the ex-communist countries, where civil society remains weak. Low levels of trust in civic and political institution may influence the persistence of friendship networks and networks of instrumental connections (Howard 2003) that function in a private sphere as opposed to participating transparently in the public sphere. There is a significant literature concerning the issues of democracy building in post-communist countries, stressing the influence of communist legacy on citizen apathy and lower levels of political participation (see for example Mihaylova 2003; Tomšič 2011; Plasser et al. 1998; Jelovac et al. 2011). Political participation may also be influenced by the perception of the openness of the political system by the people, the perceived efficiency of participation and possibilities for political change. As pointed out by Smith (2009: 514) an important task for future leaders in CEE would be to improve the quality and opportunities for political participation so that the political arena is open,

inclusive and accessible to all citizens regardless of their social background, as his research shows, the current political participation in post-communist countries is more stratified then in the West, despite relatively similar laws for participation. The citizenry itself is not represented enough while political processes are being managed by elites, neglecting the interests and views of populations, since the "meso-governments of social and territorial actors are weak" (Agh 2010: 78), and people have no means for manifesting their dissatisfaction with the senilised political elites.

Finally, we should ask ourselves, whether there is a lesson from this analysis for the advocates of participatory democracy in the new member states. The first conclusion may be that simply copying and applying mechanisms that exist in older member states (like the Scandinavian or central-European states) does not necessary provide positive effects. Certain mechanisms of participatory democracy may work well in a state, where people actually massively participate in influencing political decision-making, while in the states, where this is not the case, it could even lead to undemocratic forms of monopoly or oligopoly, where a minority of "very interested and active expert citizens" may influence the decision-making process on behalf of the passive majority of the citizens. Consequently, when considering new mechanisms and institutions of participatory democracy one should also realistically consider the cultural traints and the context of the society, these mechanisms are being applied to.

As for the European Union – even though the diversity is one of its characteristic and accepting these diversities an important value of coexistence – when it comes to the values underpinning the political participation, active citizenship and democracy, the citizens of the new member states and some of the southern ones still strongly lag behind in their capacity to influence decision-making processes both in their own countries as well as at the EU level. After the fall of socialism in the ninety-nineties, post-socialist states were "flooded" by donors, programs and initiatives with an aim to enhance democracy in such states. More than twenty years after, when these states are full members of the EU, the need for such initiatives remains. Values, underpinning activity in a society and political culture seem to change slowly.

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