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Thesis**

Organizing Citizen Participation:

An Explorative Systematic Review of the Universality of
Recommendations

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Abstract *Citizen participation in political and administrative decision-making is a global phenomenon. This breadth of cases allows both participation enthusiasts and critics to use empirical studies to further their arguments. This article explores whether and how conclusions and recommendations given in empirical case studies on the organization of citizen participation change according to context. It explores what themes participation organizers should pay attention to according to different contexts. It does so by performing a systematic literature review of empirical studies of citizens' participation and subsequently comparing the frequency with which certain themes can be found in different contexts. It finds that studies conducted in different contexts do not offer contradictory conclusions and recommendations, but also do not offer universal ones. What themes are emphasized changes mostly according to how developed the participatory culture is. Variables such as participation form, policy subject, and scale matter primarily when comparing between similar developmental contexts. It also shows that over half of all conclusions and recommendations given deal with process design, with the other half made up of conclusions and recommendations relating to context, education, expectations, civil servant behavior, and citizen behavior. The article concludes that conclusions and recommendations on how to organize and improve participation processes are dependent on context, much in the same way that a successful process cannot simply be copied and applied elsewhere.*

1. Introduction

Citizens worldwide participate in policy making, from the most democratic countries to some of the least democratic countries. It should not be surprising therefore that citizens' participation takes many different forms and is used in many different ways. With so many cases to be inspired by, it is appealing, and easy, to cherry-pick examples of successful participation and use them as a blueprint. An example of this is how Alex Brenninkmeijer, former Dutch national Ombudsman, stated that citizens' panels have been successful in France, Belgium, and Ireland, so they should be used on the issue of wind- and solar parks in the Netherlands (Laconi, 2021).

Is this strategy viable? How well does a successful participation process translate into a different context? Research on civic participation is plentiful and it has offered numerous different conclusions and recommendations¹ on how to best organize (civic) participation in (local) government and on what to improve. Multiple different systematic literature reviews have also been done on this topic (Amorim Lopes & Alves (2020); Voorberg et al. (2014);

¹ Hereafter only "conclusions" is used but it always means both conclusions and recommendations.

Ianniello et al. (2019); Honingh, et al. (2020); Schafer (2018). However as Sass & Dryzek (2014) point out, “culture meets deliberation where publicly accessible meanings, symbols, and norms shape the way political actors engage in discourse” (p. 3). Local traditions, norms, and unspoken rules influence participation in such a way that research based on a specific context can have low external validity. Organizing a citizens’ summit on climate change in the Netherlands is not the same as it is for a neighborhood clean-up program in a small town in Taiwan. Both present cases of civic participation but in a completely different context and thus what works best and what should be improved will differ accordingly.

This article explores whether there are universalities when it comes to (improving) public participation processes. It seeks to point future research into the direction of whether there are universal best practices of participation. Considering the wealth of variables that influence participation, the hypothesis is that there are no universalities in how different authors suggest a participation process should be organized or how it can be improved. By systematically reviewing research on civic participation in different administrative, political and cultural contexts, this article shows that certain themes appear in multiple different contexts. However, the frequency with which these themes are mentioned, and the frequency with which different studies mention certain conclusions, is sometimes dependent on variables such as the region in which the participation took place, how developed that region was, whether the participation took the form of cocreation or another form, whether the issue was physical or social, and on what scale the problem is situated.

A systematic literature review is an exploratory tool, often used to create overviews of a certain literature field. In this article, it is used to create an overview of recurring themes in conclusions and to explore the question of whether there are universalities. This method is useful for systematically sifting through large databases to select articles without bias.

2. Methodology

There are multiple steps necessary to conduct a systematic literature review. When looking at other systematic literature reviews on participation, certain steps are always present (see Amorim Lopes & Alves (2020), Voorberg et al. (2014), Ianniello et al. (2019), Honingh et al. (2020), and Schafer (2018)). These steps are: search strategy, eligibility criteria, selection criteria, and data-analysis scheme.

The search strategy explains which terms are used to search for literature, what databases are used, and why. The eligibility criteria explain what kind of literature is searched for, for example, language, format, or publication date, etc. Selection criteria explain which

criteria will be used to select research from the widest population of eligible research. The selected research is then systematically analyzed through a data-analysis scheme. This scheme explains what data is gathered.

2.1 Search strategy

The search strategy takes inspiration from Honingh et al. (2020), in keeping the results coming out of the Boolean operators deliberately broad. Many different names and concepts are used to refer to the participation of the people in politics and policy making: co-production, deliberation, public engagement, public participation, citizen participation or engagement, civil engagement or participation, civic engagement or participation. To capture all these different concepts, the following Boolean search string is used to search for literature:

(civi* OR citizen* OR public OR deliberat*) AND (participat* OR engage* OR coproduc* OR coproduc* OR deliberat* OR co-creat*) AND (policy OR decision OR delivery OR execution).

Both Web of Science and Jstor were searched on 1-12-2020. Because this string searches for multiple different concepts, searching with the requirement that they appear in the abstract results in too many hits to feasibly work through. Instead, the search is limited to title only. With this limitation in place, an exploratory search on Web of Science generated 1,625 hits, which was refined to 1,205 hits when only including articles, book chapters, and books. Jstor generated 293 search results. Results are eligible for selection if they were peer-reviewed, journal articles written in English or Dutch after 2005, resulting in 853 hits on Web of Science and 138 on Jstor. An Excel dataset is created by exporting the references from Web of Science and Jstor. This dataset was then checked for duplicate references, which were subsequently deleted. Due to the way the dataset was set up, namely, first all references from Web of Science followed by the references from Jstor, all duplicate references that were deleted came from Jstor. This resulted in a dataset of 926 references, of which 854 came from Web of Science and 72 from Jstor. All 926 entries were in English.

2.2 Selection criteria

The articles that were selected met three criteria. The first two criteria were tested on the title and abstract. The first and main requirement is that the research is about citizens who participate in either policy making, implementation, or delivery. Studies about citizens' participation in healthcare, education, and government are all included to capture a wide

spectrum of contexts in which participation can take place. This criterion excludes research on participation by (e.g.) organizations. 232 articles met this first criterion.

The second criterion is that the goal, or one of the goals of the research, is understanding and improving citizens' participation. Research that only seeks to describe a specific case of participation is not likely to offer conclusions that can be used in the future. 30 articles did not meet this criterion.

The remaining 202 articles were then tested on the last requirement: research is empirical rather than (solely) theoretical. Studies selected provide conclusions on the best way to organize participation, based on empirical research, or contribute to understanding the universality of the best practices. Articles do not have to look at specific cases. The research needs to be about the boundaries encountered and other problems that arise during participation or look at what worked in a specific setting. Articles that only compare participation in different governments do not contribute directly to the review, even though they might contribute to corroborating or contradicting conclusions drawn from the review. This criterion was tested first on the title and abstract, and subsequently on the full text (See Figure 1 for an overview of the selection process). Of the 202 remaining articles, 30 articles met this criterion

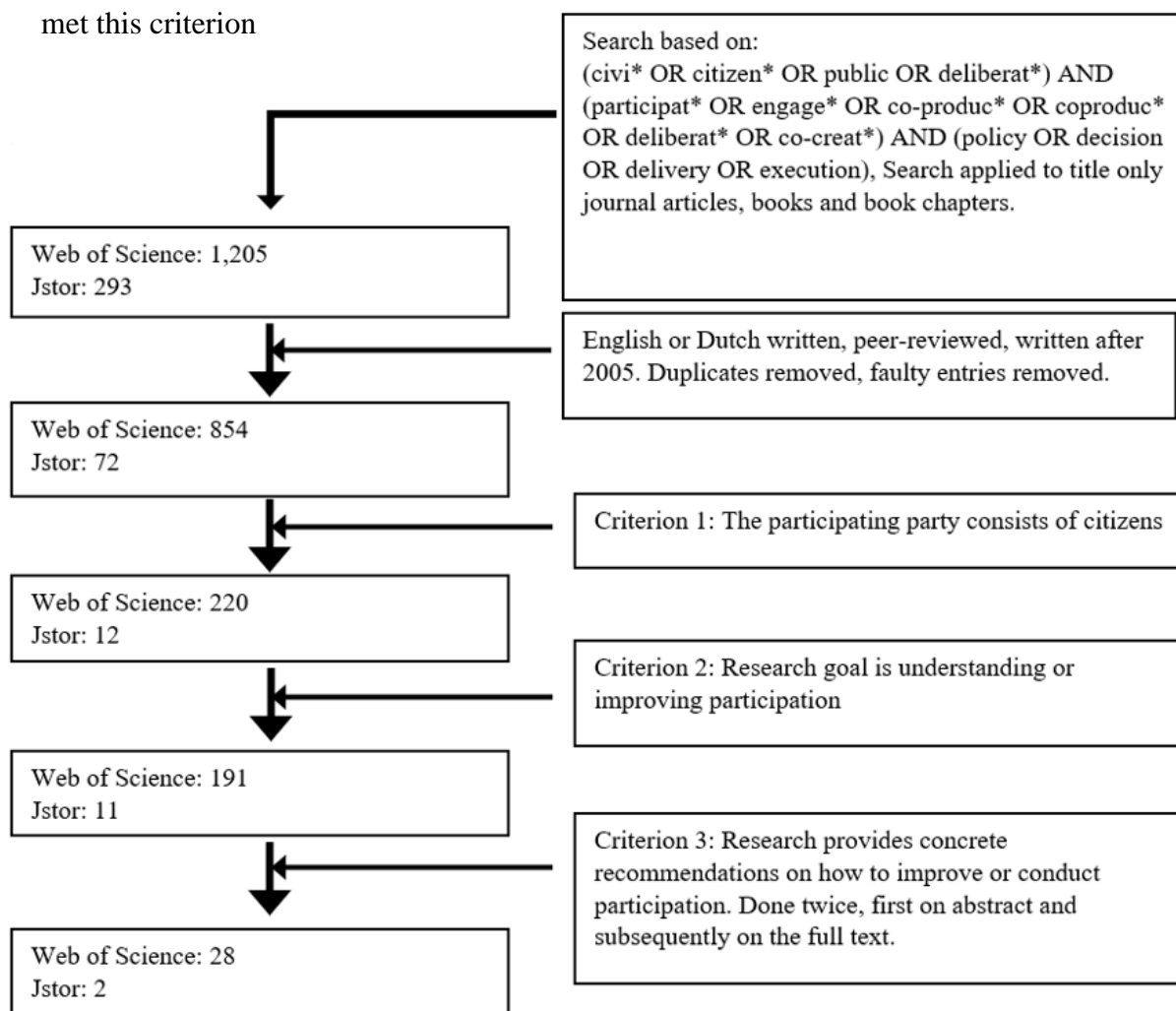


FIGURE 1. Schematic overview of the article selection process

2.3 Variables

The articles are scanned to extract the necessary data. Besides bibliographic information, the articles are scanned for the form the participation takes, the policy subject, the publication date, the years in which participation took place, the scale on which participation took place, and of course the conclusions given in the articles. This data in combination with the Worldwide Governance Indicators project (Worldbank, 2020) and the World Economic Outlook by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is used to create the six following variables: region, participation development index, scale, participation form, policy field, and IMF categorization.

The *region* variable compares research done on participation in “the west” with research on participation in other regions of the world. “The West” consists of the following countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States. This adds up to a total of 18 articles. The research in that category is compared with the research from non-Western countries: Brazil, Chile, Estonia, Indonesia, Romania, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, and Uganda. This adds up to a total of ten articles. Two of the selected 30 articles deal with research on a European scale, which thus includes countries commonly referred to as Western and Eastern countries.

The second variable used is a “Participation Development Index” (*PDI*). This variable is calculated by using the WGI project, which is “a research dataset summarizing the views on the quality of governance provided by a large number of enterprise, citizens and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries” (World Bank, 2020). This database ranks countries on five indices, from 1996 to 2019. Of these five indices, the Voice and Accountability and the Government Effectiveness are used to calculate the PDI. The former index “reflects perceptions of the extent to which a country’s citizens can participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media” (idem.). All these freedoms can be seen as prerequisites for a participation enabling political-cultural environment. The latter index “reflects perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service, the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies” (idem.). The selected articles are subsequently linked to the average ranking of the combined averages of these two indices over the years. This allows for comparison between the ten articles on countries in the 10th decile (so the top 10% in terms of PDI), countries in the 9th decile (9 articles), and countries with lower scores (8 articles). The three missing articles look at multiple countries that are not in the same

decile. The countries from the selected articles in the 10th decile are: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, and the UK. The 9th decile consists of Chile, Estonia, Spain, and the United States of America. This leaves Brazil, Indonesia, Romania, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, and Uganda.

The third variable considers the *scale* on which participation took place. The problem/issue/policy that is the subject of the participation determines the scale. For example, Ureta (2017) looks at participation that is executed locally but was started by the Chilean Ministry of Energy and is about national energy policies. Therefore, in this article participation takes place on the national scale. The scales represented in the selected articles are the local, regional, national and international scales. However, 17 of the 30 articles selected look at participation on the local scale. Therefore, for the sake of comparison, the local scale is compared with the not-local scales, in which the other 13 articles fall.

The fourth variable, *participation form*, compares research on the kind of participation that is looked at: cocreation, coproduction, or a mix of both. Cocreation and coproduction are seen as related and sometimes even interchangeable (Voorberg et al., 2014 p.3). However, in this article they are used to distinguish between different forms of participation, one in which the participants “thinks” and one in which the participants “does”. Here cocreation is when citizens are asked which parks should be renovated, for example. Coproduction is when there is an organized effort for a community park clean-up. A mix of both would be when citizens are first asked which parks need renovation and they subsequently participate with the clean up as well. This is done because “doing” and “thinking” are widely different ways to participate, and will attract different participants. This is how different forms of participation influence the best way to organize it is. 20 of the 30 articles deal with cocreation, 6 with coproduction, and 4 with a mix of both. The three options are compared with each other, but cocreation is also compared to the combination of the other two, for the sake of comparing options with a higher N.

The fifth variable looks at the *policy field* in which the researched participation took place. Instead of comparing the policy fields on the subject matter, the articles are compared on whether the specific participation policy subject is physical (e.g. a wind park) or social (e.g. education). Research from 13 articles regarded a physical subject, 9 a social subject, and 4 both. For the other 4 articles, this distinction was not applicable.

A sixth variable is made up by comparing the IMF’s classification of the countries in the dataset. 19 of the articles selected take place in countries that the IMF classifies as “developed” countries and 8 in what the IMF considered an “Emerging Market”.

As 30 articles were selected and are subsequently divided up into different variables, the resulting variables have low N's. This makes it difficult to determine whether differences are statistically significant. As the goal of this article is to explore biases, it only seeks to point future research into certain directions. Therefore, when comparing the frequency of categories, a difference of ten percentage points is seen as large enough to be noteworthy.

3. Dataset

3.1 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

As was the goal, the selected literature represents a wide range of research on citizens' participation. 10 of the 30 selected works deal with participation in non-Western countries. The 20 other studies represent all continents except for Antarctica. Most of the research is done on participation on the local level but the regional, national and supranational (the European Union) levels are all represented too, but combined as not-local to compare variables with a higher N. Five of the selected works do not mention a specific case of participation (Emery et al, 2015; Baba et al, 2009; Dean, 2019; Garnett & Cooper, 2014 and Kugonza & Mukobi; 2015). The other works together present 102 cases of participation. Some research does not look at a specific policy field (Baba et al., 2009; Kugonza & Mukobi., 2016) or includes cases from multiple policy fields (Beuermann & Amelina, 2018; Emery et al., 2015; Fischer-Hotzel, 2010; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). There is also a wide spread of participation forms present, as cases range from a Citizens Jury (Chuengsatiansup et al., 2019) to different forms of deliberative fora (Boossabong & Chamchong, 2019; Garnett & Cooper, 2014; O'Doherty & Hawkings, 2010; Park et al., 2017) to tokenistic consultation (Jami & Walsh, 2016). 15 articles were published between 2016 and 2021, 13 between 2010 and 2015, and 2 between 2005 and 2010. On average, the research looked at cases that took place around six years before their publication. Table 1 shows the number of research articles per variable. There are certain gaps to be found. For example, two articles are missing in the region variable. All gaps can be explained this way, or by the fact that there are too few articles in the category to justify using it, therefore not all variables add up to 30 articles. There is only one article categorized as "least developed" according to the IMF, so this category is left out.

Table 1. <i>Overview number of articles per variable</i>		N
Region	Western	18
	Non-Western	10
PDI	10 th decile	10
	9 th decile	9
	Bottom 80%	8
Scale	Local	17
	Other	13
Participatory Form	Cocreation	20
	Other	10
Policy Field	Physical	13
	Social	9
	Both	4
IMF	Developed Market	19
	Emerging Market	8

3.2 Conclusion Categories.

The conclusions found are classified into different categories. This eases comparing the focus of different articles. The selected literature offers a total of 184 unique conclusions. Articles have a mode of four or six conclusions, with the extremes being Roets et al. (2012), who offer a single conclusion, and Emery et al. (2015), who offer 19. The categories used are determined a posteriori. They are *process design*, *context*, *education*, *professional change*, *participant change*, and *expectational change*. Some conclusions might be categorized into multiple categories. Conclusions such as these are duplicated and coded as belonging to both categories.

The *process design* category includes conclusions that recommend a specific change to the design and organization of a participation process. Conclusions found in the *context* category warn about the different ways context can influence a participation process. *Education*-related conclusions deal with the skills necessary for effective participation and training. According to some research, government officials should change the way they behave during participatory processes, the way they regard that process, and the legal framework in which participation takes place. Other conclusions focus on changing the attitude of public servants. This is all categorized as *professional change*. Some authors also recommend that *participants change* their attitudes toward the process. The *expectational*

change category is related to the previous two categories in that both the public and public servants sometimes need to re-evaluate what successful participation is.

4. Findings

First, the variables are compared on the relative frequency of the conclusion categories described above. This frequency is the share of a certain category as a percentage of all conclusions in a set of articles. In some instances, this frequency corresponds to only one or two conclusions, but percentages are always used for the sake of comparability. An example of how these frequencies are compared follows. If an article offers ten recommendations, and eight of those are about *process design*, this is a frequency of 80%. If in another article five out of ten conclusions are about *process design*, there is a 30 percentage point difference between the two articles. If in the first article participation had a physical subject and in the latter, a social subject, then this 30 percentage point difference might be because of the difference in subject. Comparing frequencies in this way can be done as there are no real contradictions found in the findings, only differences in focus. So, a higher frequency of *process design* conclusions means a higher emphasis on the themes found in that category. This allows for an overview of whether studies in different parts of the world, on different scales, or in different policy fields emphasize certain categories more or less often. Even though

The selected articles contained 184 conclusions, of which nine conclusions are categorized into two or three categories. This creates a dataset of 195 conclusions. 104 of these conclusions deal with *process design*, representing 25 of the 30 selected articles. The *context* and *professional change* categories have 28 (in 19 articles) and 26 (12 articles) conclusions respectively. There are 10 conclusions related to *participant change* in 8 articles, 15 to *education*² in 7 articles, and lastly, 8 to *expectational change* in 6 articles. Conclusions related to *process design* are by far the most common. This category is therefore further divided into different subcategories: *balance of power*, *communication*, *design*, *inclusion*, and *output*.

First, the variables are studies individually, to see whether Western countries emphasize different things than non-Western countries. Subsequently, the different variables are put into matrices to see how they interact. This will show whether local participation in

² Six out of the in total 15 conclusions related to education are found in Kugonza and Mukobi (2016) in Uganda. The variable matrices will sometimes lead to quite big differences in the education category but this is often because of this single article.

Western countries needs the same thing as local participation in non-Western countries. Lastly, a deeper analysis of themes found in the conclusions follows.

When combining different variables, we also see that variables are not evenly divided across different variables. For example, the 20 articles on cocreation are divided evenly between Western and Non-Western countries but the 10 articles on other forms of participation are not, because 8 of those articles are from Western countries. If there are clear differences in what conclusions are given within the Region variable, then this might influence also the conclusions given in articles on “other” participation. This makes it hard to determine what variables cause what variance.

4.1 Frequencies

4.1.1. Region

What immediately stands out when comparing between Western and non-Western countries, is the influence of the region on the *education* and *process design* categories. Of all conclusions found in studies conducted in non-Western countries, 17% relate to *education*. Only 2% of all conclusions found in studies conducted in Western countries were related to *education*. This makes it clear that *Education*-related conclusions are seen as more important in studies in non-Western countries than they are in studies in Western countries.

Secondly, conclusions in studies in Western countries are one and a half times more often related to *process design* than studies in non-Western countries do (58% versus 39%). Region also influences the frequency of the subcategories of *process design*. Studies in Western countries recommend improving the *balance of power* three times more often. The subcategory makes up 22% of the *process design* category in these studies but only 7% in studies in non-Western countries. Research in non-Western countries gives *design*-related conclusions more often (56% versus 35%).

Where studies in Western countries emphasize *process design* and *balance of power*, studies in non-Western countries emphasize *education* and the subcategory of *design*. This difference in subcategory emphasis might indicate that *process design* conclusions in non-Western countries favor fundamental elements. This is captured by considering the difference between concluding that civil participants should get a say in how output is used and concluding that the optimization of scale, topic, and timing to the relevant policy discussion. Both are related to each other, but the latter should be focused on firstly.

4.1.2. Participation Development Index

There is overlap between the previous variable and this one, as only two of the countries in

both the 9th and 10th deciles are not labeled ‘Western’ under “region”: Chile and Estonia. Therefore, this variable mainly functions as a way to compare between the developed, Western countries. Therefore, *Education* and *Process Design* conclusions are distributed the same way they are in “region”. There is no difference in the frequency of these categories between countries in the 9th or 10th decile but only when compared to the bottom 80%.

Studies conducted in the 9th and 10th decile differ on the importance of *professional change* and *inclusion*. 22% of the conclusions given in research in the countries in the 10th decile of PDI are related to *professional change*, whereas this is 12% and 11% in countries in the 9th decile and the bottom 80% respectively. It seems that the focus on promoting change among civil servants and participation professionals is emphasized especially in the most developed countries. Conversely, research in countries in the 9th decile of PDI is three times more likely to have *inclusion*-related conclusions, as a third of all *process design* conclusions are related to this subcategory. This is 11% in the 10th decile.

4.1.3. Scale

Scale does not influence the main categories, as the frequencies differences per variable are all within four percentage points. It does influence the subcategory *balance of power*. Articles on participation on the local level are three times more likely to recommend improving the *balance of power*. 24% of the *process design*-related conclusions are about the *balance of power*, which is 8% in articles on not-local scales. This may be the result of the skewed distribution of local and not-local research in Western and Non-Western countries (see table 2 on page 14). At the same time, the differences between Western and Non-Western countries in the main conclusions categories were not replicated. So, it might also be the case that the *balance of power* is indeed more important on the local level. Alternatively, the *balance of power* might be easier to improve on the local level because local civil servants have less power overall than regional or even national actors do. Another explanation could be that participation processes on larger scales have more fundamental issues to contend with.

4.1.4. Participatory Form

Studies of cases of cocreation focus less often on *process design*. In these studies, *process design*-related conclusions make up 48% of all their conclusions, whereas it makes up 62% in studies of other forms of participation. This difference of 14 percentage points might be explained by the fact that no articles on coproduction in non-Western countries made it through the selection criteria, only two articles in which production and creation were combined. As the other forms of participation in this dataset are either coproduction or a

combination of cocreation and coproduction, it also possible to compare the three forms of participation. By doing so we see that there is an 11 percentage point difference between research on coproduction cases (56%) and research on cases that combine creation and production (67%). This shows that especially literature that looked at participation processes that combined aspects of production and creation, focused on *process design*. These four studies in this category are evenly divided between Western and non-Western countries, so the *region* variable has not influenced the difference in *process design* frequencies between cocreation and other forms of participation. Organizing a process that combines both cocreation and coproduction would be more difficult than organizing only a cocreation or coproduction process. This might explain why these articles focus heavily on *process design*.

4.1.5. Policy Field

A participation process can be about a physical issue, a social issue, or an issue that combines both physical and social elements. What kind of issue is at hand influences whether *process design*, *education*, and *context* are especially important.

The greatest differences in frequencies can again be found in the *process design* category. *Process design*-related conclusions are more frequent (60%) when the subject is social compared to when it's a physical subject (49%). The region distribution is comparable in both options, so that does not explain the 11 percentage point difference. When the subject matter is not clearly one or the other or combines both, 71% of the conclusions are *process design* related. The four articles in the latter category deal with participatory budgeting, a citizens' hall, a deliberative forum, and online participation through leaving comments on a website. For all four of these cases, it can be said that the focus of the study is primarily on the process, rather than the subject they discuss during the process. This also explains why there is such a focus on process design. There is no significant difference in the subcategories of *process design*.

Education is emphasized more often when an issue is social. One might expect that *education*-related conclusions are more likely in research with a physical participation subject. Participation in the planning of wind farms and solar parks and other forms of infrastructure design is quite knowledge-intensive, so participation might require more skills than it normally does. Interestingly, there are no *education*-related conclusions from studies with a physical participation subject, whereas a tenth of all conclusions in studies on participation with a social subject is related to this category.

Context matters more when the issue at hand is physical, but only when compared

with the articles in which the issue is both physical and social. There is a 10 percentage point difference in the *context* conclusion category when comparing studies with a physical subject (22%) with studies in which the subject is both physical and social (12%). In studies with a social participation subject, *context* makes up 15% of the conclusions given. Interestingly, in Beuermann & Amelina (2018), one of the four studies in which the subject is a combination, one of the main conclusions is *context*-related. This seems contradictory considering the relatively lower emphasis on context and the high emphasis on *process design* in these studies.

4.1.6. IMF

The IMF variable gives the same variance on frequencies as the Region and PDI variables did, so this variable can be ignored hereafter.

4.2. Variable Combinations

By combining different variables, we can assess whether, for example, coproduction in Western countries should focus more on *context* than coproduction in non-Western countries should. This results in several interesting observations. For the sake of comparability, options with less than four studies will be disregarded. For example, there are only two articles in the dataset that research participation with a social subject taking place in a non-Western country. Moreover, as mentioned previously, the variables could not be determined in all studies. For these reasons, not all variable combinations add up to 30 articles.

Table 2 shows the number of articles that correspond to certain relevant variables combinations. The variable combination of *Region* and *Participatory Form* is not considered relevant, as combining the two variables does not influence the frequencies in any meaningful way. We also see that, for example, six of seventeen articles research local participation in a Non-Western country. As observed previously, studies in Western countries give more *process design* conclusions. To prevent this from overshadowing the influence of the scale variable, all observations made are the result of the combination of the two variables. They cannot be explained by the observations previously made on the variables individually.

Table 2. Overview numbers of article per (relevant) variable

		Region		PDI			Scale		Participatory Form	
		Western	Non-Western	10 th decile	9 th decile	Other	Local	Other	Cocreation	Other
Scale	Local	11	6							
	Other	7	6							
P. Form	Cocreation			7	4	7	10	10		
	Other			3	3	1	7	3		
Policy	Physical	9	4	4	6	2	9	4	9	4
	Social	7	2	5	2	2	5	4	4	5
	Both	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	4	

4.2.1. PDI x participation form

Combining these two variables shows an instance of a difference that is disregarded in the following analysis. Comparing cases of cocreation with cases of other forms of participation taking place in 10th decile countries, show that the latter cases emphasize *process design* more often. This effect was already noted for participation form on its own, so unless the effect is greatly changed, which it is not in this case, it will not be noted here.

Research on coproduction in this dataset takes place in a developed context, as the lowest PDI ranking of a country in which there is a coproduction process in this dataset is still 85 out of 100. Comparing the average PDI between coproduction and cocreation shows a 17 percentage point difference. The cases of coproduction in the dataset took place in countries with an average PDI of 91.

Combining PDI and participation form has the greatest effect on the frequencies of the *professional change* category. As was observed previously, this category was emphasized more in the most developed countries. There was a 10 percentage point difference between the 10th decile and the bottom 80%. This is increased to 21 percentage points when only looking at cases of cocreation.

The same is true for the *balance of power* subcategory. There was an 11 point difference when comparing between the 10th decile and the bottom 80%. This is increased to 33 when only looking at cases of cocreation. Combining PDI and participation form did not influence the frequency of *balance of power* conclusions on its own, so the combination of PDI and participation form is responsible for this increase.

It seems that there is a large difference between what studies on cocreation in countries in the 10th decile emphasize and what studies of cocreation in the bottom 80% conclude. The former studies focus comparatively much more on *professional change* as well as *balance of power*. Alas, with this dataset it is impossible to see how other forms of participation influence. It remains to be seen whether cocreation is unique in how it changes between PDI deciles.

4.2.2. PDI x Policy Field.

Combining PDI and policy field affects the frequencies of *professional change*, *context*, and *process design*. In countries in the 10th decile of PDI, there is a higher emphasis on *professional change* when the participation subject is physical. In four studies with a physical subject, 28% of the conclusions were related to the *professional change* category. This was only 8% in the five studies with a social subject. The frequency difference was only 5 percentage points when only comparing policy fields. Without taking PDI into account, the frequency of *professional change* conclusions in studies with a physical subject is 16%. This decreases to 12% when only looking at countries in the 9th decile of PDI. While combining PDI and policy field clearly increases the emphasis on *professional change* in 10th decile countries, it slightly decreases it in countries in the 9th decile.

When the policy subject is physical, *Context* is seemingly less important if a country is more developed. In countries in the 9th decile, almost a quarter of all conclusions are related to *context* but this is only 9% in studies in the 10th decile. In the former studies, the difference in frequencies between social and physical subjects is also increased from 7 percentage points to 17 percentage points.

Another observation is that when considering *process design*, the difference in frequencies between studies with physical and social subjects change according to the development of the country they took place in. There is a 25 percentage point difference in the *process design* category in the 9th decile, whereas this is only 12 points for countries in the 10th decile. In both cases, the studies with a social policy subject emphasize *process design* more often. We saw previously how these studies emphasize *process design* 60% of the time, but in countries in the 9th decile, this is 71%.

This is reversed when it comes to *balance of power* as there is only a 1 percentage point difference between physical and social studies in the 9th decile, but as a 19 point difference in the 10th decile. Such differences can also be found in *context*, 6 percentage points in the 10th decile and 17 in the 9th, and *professional change*, 20 point difference in the

10th decile but only a two point difference in the 9th decile. Participation organizers need to take the development of their country and the policy subject into account together.

4.2.3. *Region x Scale*

In this dataset, studies in Western countries favored the local scale and non-Western countries did not favor a specific scale. Combining scale and region shows that *context* conclusions change the most. When comparing not-local scales, a tenth of all conclusions from the six studies of participation in non-Western countries relates to *context*, whereas this is a quarter in the seven studies in Western countries were related to *context*. So, on not-local scales in Western countries, *context* is 2,5 times more important than it is in non-Western countries. When comparing on the local scale, the difference is seven percentage points. So, when it comes to context, the local scale is comparable between regions but the other scales are not.

The distribution of *education* conclusions between Western and non-Western countries has already been discussed, but it might be interesting that both *education*-related conclusions in Western countries come from studies on the local level (3% of all conclusions in this category).

Whether *communication* conclusions are more frequent on the local or the not-local scales depends on whether the participation took place. In Western countries, *communication* is more important on the local level (16% versus 5%). In non-Western countries, it is the opposite (6% vs 21%).

The same is true for conclusions relating to the *design* subcategory. Conclusions related to this subcategory are more frequent in studies on the local level in non-Western countries, but more frequent in studies on the not-local level in Western countries.

4.2.4. *Region x Policy Field*

When only looking at Western countries, there is a greater difference between the frequencies of *context* conclusions in studies with a social or physical subject than there was previously. There was a seven point difference between the frequency of *context* related conclusions when only looking at the policy field variable, which increases to 12 when only looking at Western countries. *Context* is still more important in studies with a physical issue, but the change is primarily made up of the studies with a social issue giving *context* conclusions less often in Western countries than they did in general.

4.2.5. *Scale x Policy Field*

Distinguishing between policy subjects and scale changes something in the *professional change* category. If the subject is physical, studies on the local scale emphasize *professional*

change more often than studies on the not-local scale do. This difference is 12 percentage points, where it was 5 and 1 percentage points in the individual variables respectively. Almost a quarter of all conclusions in studies of not-local participation on physical issues are about *professional change*. In the four studies on the local level, this is 12%.

This difference is even more profound for studies with a social policy subject, as there are no *professional change* conclusions found in the four studies of not-local participation on a social subject. Comparatively, a fifth of all conclusions in the five studies of local participation with a social subject are related to *professional change*.

The lack of *professional change* conclusions in not-local participation with a social subject is related to the increased emphasis on *process design*. In the same four studies, 68% of conclusions are related to this category, a 34 percentage point difference compared to studies with a physical subject. This difference is only 5 points on the local scale. Moreover, in the latter studies, those with a physical subject gave slightly more *process design* conclusions, rather than those with a social subject.

When comparing studies with a social participation subject the same big difference can be found in the subcategory of *inclusion*. In studies on the local level, *inclusion* makes up 8% of the *process design* conclusions, but it makes up 40% in studies on the not-local scale. This difference is only 2 percentage points when comparing studies with a physical subject. Both participation with a social subject as well as not-local participation slightly mention *inclusion* more but that does not explain the major emphasis it has in studies of social participation on the not-local scale.

4.2.6. Scale x Participation form

Due to a lack of applicable studies (see table 2), we can only see the influence of scale on cocreative participation, and vice versa, but not on other forms of participation. The studies on the local scale gave conclusions related to *process design* 12 percentage points more often. This difference did not exist when looking at scale without the context of the participation form, where it was only a single percentage point. The 21 point difference in the subcategory *balance of power* is along the lines it was when comparing just scales, so here distinguishing between cocreation or coproduction and a mix does not influence the frequencies.

4.2.7. Participation form x policy field

Almost a quarter of all conclusions in studies on cocreation on a physical subject are related to context. This is an 18 percentage points difference, compared to cocreation with a social subject where this is 6%. In studies on other forms of participation, this difference is a single

percentage point. The mentioned 6% is the clear outlier here, so it would be more accurate to conclude that in studies of cocreation with a social subject *context* matters less.

The reverse is true for the *expectational change* category. There is no difference in frequency in studies on cocreation, but a 14 percentage point difference in studies on other forms of participation. Within these latter studies, only those with a physical participation subject mention *expectational change*. So in both the previous two cases, studies with a social participation subject are the outlier.

Studies on cocreation with a physical subject more frequently give *balance of power* conclusions. The reverse is true for other forms of participation, where they are more common in studies with a social subject.

Studies on cocreation mention *inclusion* more often if the subject is social (30% versus 17%). Again, this is switched in studies on other forms of participation, where studies with a physical subject mention it 33% compared to 22%.

4.2.8 Discussion

As the above discussion is a large collection of facts, a small overview of what has been found will be provided here. Most variables do not influence frequencies that much. The exception is primarily *process design* conclusions, which might be because it is by far the most populated conclusion category. However, we also see some obvious differences in its subcategories which are more comparable to the other main categories in size. The frequencies of *professional change* and *education* are also influenced by the variables, in both cases by PDI but the latter also by region.

A recurring theme is the difference in the frequency of conclusions related to *process design* and its sub-categories. Data shows that studies on Western and developed countries, on participation that combines coproduction and cocreation, and participation with a social subject, the latter especially in combination with a not-local scale, all give more *process design*-related conclusions, and also more *balance of power* conclusions.

What this means is that organizers of a German nation-wide neighborhood safety protocol, in which residents help create and help execute plans, should focus more on *process design* and *balance of power* than civil servants organizing a voluntary park clean-up by residents in Brazil should. However, the dataset does not really point to where the focus should be in the latter example, only that *education* is important.

There are also some minor themes to be found. When participation concerns a physical subject, the *context* seems to matter slightly more, which is the case regardless of whether the

participation is cocreative or another form. In both cases, studies with a social participation subject give fewer *context*-related conclusions. The studies on coproduction all take place in a highly developed context, which influences the findings.

Professional change conclusions are found more in studies in developed countries, especially if participation concerned cocreation, a physical subject, and took place on the local scale. *Expectation change* conclusions are also used only in studies from the 9th and 10th decile, but they make up less than a tenth of all conclusions in the studies they came from.

4.3. Common Conclusion Themes

What follows is an in-depth analysis of the conclusions found in the selected articles. Where previously only the category they were classified as was used, in this section the actual message is analyzed to see if there are common threads or disconnects. For example, we know that studies in Western and developed countries recommend *process design*-related conclusions more often. So what are some of the themes of *process design* that designers of participation processes in these countries need to take into account?

4.3.1. Process Design

As the *Process Design* categories make up over half of all found conclusions, it is more likely to have discrepancies as well as discernable themes in messaging. Conclusions in the *balance of power* subcategory recommend ways to make the process climb Arnstein's (1969) participation ladder. For example, Garnett & Cooper (2014) argue that the design of waste management participation in England in certain cases should take a "more collaborative approach" (p. 2718). Conclusions about the *communication* within the participation process range from governments making clear from the start how citizens' input is going to be used (Michels & De Graaf, 2010) to making sure the design ensures "that participants can express the values they feel are most relevant" (O'Doherty & Hawkins, 2010 p. 204). The subcategory of *design* is not about conclusions on whether to organize a participatory policy council or a deliberative policy analysis, but rather about the proceedings or physical aspects of the process. For example, Emery et al. (2015) recommend that public servants engage with participants in informal settings rather than formal settings (p. 439). Most *process design* conclusions belong to this subcategory. *Inclusion*-related conclusions are about recruitment, ensuring the inclusion of citizens with the highest stakes, as well as making sure the relevant subject matters are included in the process. Chuengsatiansup et al. (2019) note that in the participation process which was the subject of their research, some participants canceled at the last minute, leaving no time to recruit new participants. They argue that this might be

because the participation form in question, a citizens' jury, was not understood well enough and needed to be better explained during the recruitment drive (p. 388). Recruitment problems are a common problem when using citizens' juries in health policy decision-making (Street et al., 2014). An example of a conclusion in the *output* subcategory is to use "transparent procedures ... for tracking the use of [public engagement] derived evidence in policy-making" (Emery et al. 2015, p. 439).

Several themes can be distilled from the many conclusions dealing with process design. The clearest of which is the idea that "one size does not fit all", which is the conclusion that Drazkiewics et al. (2015, p. 221) come to. Their research on four cases of participation in Germany shows that all four cases have a different pathway to "successful" participation (p. 221). All four cases are cases of cocreation on a physical subject and take place on the same scale. These four issues at hand are: a nature conservation project, a river revitalization, and pollution reduction project, the development of a green urban area, and another case of river revitalization. Two cases took place in central Germany (Hessen), one case in southern Germany (Bavaria), and one case in Eastern Germany (Brandenburg). Considering the political history of Germany, this might explain the variance in pathways. The issues themselves are also not completely the same, so it might be something in the individual context of the issue that explains the different pathways.

Similarly, Boossabong & Chamchong (2019) conclude that the design of the process (Deliberative Policy Analysis in this case) should be sensitive to geographical, temporal, and contextual factors (p. 488), which indicates that the design may need to be different each time a new process is initiated. One way to ensure that is to allow participants a say in how the process is designed, which is a different theme found in the dataset.

Webler & Tuhler (2006) distill and compare four different perspectives participants have of public participation. Between the four perspectives, there is overlap and differentiation. Overlap consists of the idea that "good processes reach out to all stakeholders, share information openly and readily, engage people in meaningful interaction, and attempt to satisfy multiple interest positions." (p.718). Differences include "how strongly to emphasize science and information, how much leadership and direction the process needs, what is the proper behavior or participants, the role and importance of trust, how power is distributed, and what are the outcome-related goals of the process." (p. 718). The idea that people have different perspectives on what a good participation process entails is supported by Dean (2019). They show the existence of differences in how people prefer to participate and argue that these different preferences should be taken into account while organizing and design a

process. That way a broader population might be attracted to the process (p. 184). This is supported by multiple authors who recommend that processes should aim to incorporate multiple perspectives, as a way to prevent the domination of the ‘usual suspects’ (Garnett & Cooper, 2014; Albert, 2017; Boossabong & Chamchong, 2019) Moreover, Suškevičs (2019) argues that process designers should not just look at *who* they include but also at *what* they include. Participative decision-making should also value rationales other than substantive argumentative discussion. Chuengsatiansup et al. (2019) saw how personal narratives can help understand the problem or issue at hand, which should lead to better decision-making. The same is true for using a broad spectrum of information sources to cater to a range of cognitive abilities (Garnett & Cooper, 2014). All these conclusions point to the idea of an adaptable process design to attract a larger and more diverse population of participants.

A slightly different view is provided by Bryer (2013). They study a form of e-participation in which citizens could comment on proposed regulations and argue that making it too easy to participate might be more harmful than beneficial. What matters is that the costs of qualitatively high participation are lowered. These costs are on the citizen-side. Bryer argues that allowing everyone to participate may end up clogging the system, and if the quality of the input is too low to be of use, the process ends up frustrating both citizens and civil servants. Therefore, citizens should “pay” with time or effort in order “to ensure that citizens are prepared to engage in a manner relevant to the process” (p. 277), but these costs are often too high.

Three different articles (Jami & Walsh, 2016; Malfait et al., 2018; Chuengsatiansup et al., 2019) conclude that some sort of third party is necessary. This third party acts as a mediator or moderator and works to overcome (knowledge) barriers between citizen participants and professionals, translate legal jargon where necessary, and in general act as support. The participation in these articles were wind parks, patient and public involvement in hospital policy-making, and eldercare. It could be argued there is a theme of the participation subjects being at least somewhat knowledge-intensive. However, these are not the only cases of knowledge-intensive participation, and the other papers did not argue for third-party involvement.

Another theme is the conclusion by Michels & De Graaf (2010) that “citizen participation serves an instrumental” (p. 488) purpose when the process is designed to primarily gain information and Albert’s (2017) conclusion that the public should be included “at all stages of policy development” (p. 163). These conclusions deal with the *balance of power* and with the *design* of the process respectively. Both these conclusions can be related

to Arnstein's (1969) message that genuine participation involves the public from start to finish, including determining when to start and if, when, and how the process should finish. By doing this there is a shift in the power balance between citizens and civil servants. This theme is also related to the multiple conclusions found that warned about participation being tokenistic (Sutcliffe & Cipkar, 2017; Emery et al., 2015; Porter & Ashcraft, 2020) since that term is derived from Arnstein (1969). Two of these three articles looked at participation in Western countries, whereas Emery et al. looked at participation in Europe. Thus this theme suggests that genuine participation involves sharing some power with the citizen.

4.3.2. Context

Beuermann & Amelina (2018) provide an example of the influence of the political context when they conclude that it matters if the participation happens in a region that has (long-term) experience with decentralized policy-making. Baba et al. (2009) note the importance of the extent to which participation is integrated into the legal framework.

Conclusions based on context differ because the research itself takes place in different contexts but a common thread is that “an inclusive process is only as good as the context permits” (Drazkiewics et al., 2015 p.221). Two of the cases described by Drazkiewics et al. had problems stemming from respectively “a sudden change of context, and top-level political power play” (p. 220). This leads Drazkiewics et al. to conclude that even if the process design itself is perfect, there needs to be political will on the higher governmental levels to follow through on participation results. Otherwise, the participation is rendered insignificant. Sutcliffe & Cipkar (2017) show that their research suggests that how good participation is designed is irrelevant if the context prevents participants from reaching agreement and develop policy prescriptions: context may render participation insignificant “regardless of the type, amount, and quality of participation (p. 47). Emery et al. (2015) conclude that policy-makers must see public engagement as legitimate and that it is formally attached to the political agenda (p. 439).

Research in the USA (Steiger-Meister & Becker, 2012), the EU (Emery et al., 2015), Romania (Baba et al., 2009), and Brazil (Albert, 2017) all conclude that the relation between participation and the legal framework in which it takes place can be improved. The framework is seen as a barrier in itself (Babe et al., 2009; Steiger-Meister & Becker, 2012), and sometimes it also actively limits participation efficiency by reproducing the “legal and operational conventions” (Albert, 2017) through which “established patterns of administrative power” (p. 164) influence the participation.

The subject central to the participation also influences the process. Garnett & Cooper (2014) conclude that the “appropriate level of public involvement depends on the nature of the ... problem and the policy context” (p. 2718). O’Doherty & Hawkins (2010) also argue that “the nature of the problem from a policy perspective” (p. 205) should be taken into account. This especially the case when the subject itself may have problems with free-riding. In Steiger-Meister & Becker (2012), this issue is problematic. Residents living along the lakes in Michigan, USA may participate in Lake Improvement Districts, but Steiger-Meister & Becker conclude that it is impossible to incorporate recreational water users from the cities, thus free-riders, into the participation process (p. 612).

4.3.3. Education

Education-related conclusions mostly argue that there is a baseline of skills necessary for participation to yield results, so training might be necessary where these skills are not present. There is some discrepancy on whether better education, or integrating training within a participation process, is worthwhile. While conclusions from Kugonza & Mukobi (2015) include promoting multilingualism and information dissemination, and training people in information literacy skills, research in Russia by Beuermann & Amelina (2018) concluded differently. In their study, they show that providing training for participants in public budgeting, consisting of 36 hours of theoretical sessions on the public budgeting cycle, did not lead to better implementation by itself. It did so only in combination with firstly, consistent technical assistance and secondly, only in municipalities with ten years of experience with decentralized policy making. In general, the literature argues that there is a baseline of skills necessary for participation to work but it isn’t clear whether an integrated training process can make up for a lack of those skills. Only one conclusion related to education is about public service deliverers as Potter (2010) concludes that civil servants need additional skills to make civic-based partnerships work. This is one of the two *education*-related conclusions from a Western country. All other *education*-related conclusions pertain to the public, as Baba et al. (2009) state that the public has too little knowledge regarding participation opportunities (p. 11). There is a definite difference between the two, as the former conclusion is about people skills and the latter is about very concrete, matter-of-fact knowledge.

4.3.4. Professional Change

Ureta (2017) argues that in Chile, officials should recognize that their “very identity might become an issue, they need ... to be a parallel ‘public’” (p. 133). Radnor et al. (2014)

conclude that government officials working in public service delivery should recognize “the inalienable role of consumer co-production ... [as] a necessary but not sufficient condition” (p. 421). According to Ureta, public servants need to recognize that a “real” participation process means sharing power with participants. However, even if they do so, this might not matter when there is no political will at higher levels (Drazkiewicz et al., 2015).

A common theme found in this category is that professionals should realize that they do not (or should not) completely control a participation process. O’Doherty & Hawkins (2010) put it best when they say that civil servants “do not understand the world view of those they are consulting. If they did, consultation would be superfluous” (p. 205). In other words, if civil servants do not take the process or participant input seriously, there is no point in participation. To make sure this does not happen, civil servants need to understand that arguments about plans are not merely a negative expression (Ureta, 2017 p. 133), that they should form a parallel “public” (idem.), that consumer coproduction has an inalienable role in public service delivery (Radnor et al., 2014 p.421), that a significant and long-term shift in professional culture is necessary (Garnett & Cooper, 2014; Wetterberg et al. 2018), and they should take the process seriously (Jami & Walsh, 2016; Park et al., 2017; Baba et al., 2009; Emery et al., 2015).

4.3.5. Participant Change

Sometimes it is those who participate that need to change the way they regard the process. Steiger-Meister & Becker (2012) conclude that the use of participatory Lake Improvement Districts is often reactive and that it remains unclear whether citizens would still participate in the absence of a threat. Kugonza & Mukobi’s (2015) research in Uganda and Baba et al.’s (2009) research in Romania find that citizens seem to lack awareness and/or interest in participating. Fischer-Hotzel’s (2010) study on participation on the EU level showed that online-based projects could not attract enthusiasm.

Three articles argue that the public should, like the professional above, take the process (more) seriously. The research in these three articles took place in countries that are on the lower end of PDI: Baba et al. (2009) in Romania, Kugonza & Mukobi (2016) in Uganda, and Wetterberg et al. (2018) in Indonesia. There is no common thread found in countries with a higher PDI ranking.

4.3.6. Expectational Change

Michels & De Graaf (2010) warn that a “common pitfall is having too high expectations, through which the subsequent disappointment leads to giving up” (p. 489). However,

according to Dean (2019), participation organizers should also take into account that different people have different expectations for participating. In general, what is regarded as “successful” participation needs to change (Ureta, 2017) or refined (Webler & Tuler, 2006), and expectations from both officials and the public need to be made explicit (Suškevičs, 2019).

Organizers should make clear what they hope to achieve prior to the start of a participation process (Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Suškevičs, 2019) or a discussion on what “success” entails should be part of the process itself. (Ureta, 2017; Michels & De Graaf, 2010).

4.3.7 Discussion

As mentioned previously, different articles focus mostly on different things. In general, conclusions point to the idea that processes will and should be different in different contexts. Three themes came up that do warrant further research. Firstly, whether workshops work, secondly, whether a carefully designed process can overcome a disadvantageous context, and lastly whether participation should be accessible to everyone even if it lowers the quality of the output.

If in future research the themes can be linked to strong statistical analysis, it might be possible to adequately argue which *professional change* issues process designer should solve in a certain context, rather than only being able to tell that *professional change* is important. It gives clues to the issues that are important rather than just to the category to which they belong.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore whether there is universality to how best to organize participation. It did so by performing a systematic literature review, to create a dataset of conclusions on how to organize and improve participation processes given in case studies on participation in many different contexts. The dataset shows several themes that span multiple studies. Almost no contradictions are found in the findings, only differences in focus. Combined with the discussion given on frequencies, this study shows that while there are no universal best practices when it comes to citizens’ participation, the opposite is also false. There are no universal best practices because the context is too different, which is shown by the differences in the frequencies of the conclusion categories. The fact that common themes do exist means that similar problems are found in different contexts, but they vary in size and are not mentioned universally. While this means that these themes are not universal, there is

still common ground to be found. The importance of discussing what “successful” participation entails is true regardless of context.

It might be expected that there are differences between developed and lesser developed contexts in what to focus on when starting or improving a participatory process. This study shows, however, that when comparing studies in similar developmental contexts, there are still differences. The scale, the participation form, and the policy subject all influence what needs to be improved. One process blueprint might not work for all instances of participation, but there are still certain generalities that can be observed. For example, the increased focus on the *balance of power* conclusions in Western countries, compared to non-Western countries, is true regardless of which other variable is taken into account.

An obvious conclusion of this research is that most of the found conclusions are about *process design*. One explanation might be that the process itself is the easiest to change, and it does not require practitioners to change their roles, which in turn makes the changes easily acceptable. Another explanation might be that the process itself has the most influence on how successful participation is. In that case, the focus should be on improving the design. It could also be researcher bias or search bias, as the conclusions found are based (mostly) on specific cases. This makes it less likely that conclusions are general rather than specific. Conclusions related to the education or professional culture of a country are less likely to be given if the research was done on a specific case.

That the more developed countries focus more on both *balance of power* as well as *professional change* is not surprising, as the two are most likely connected. Giving citizens more power during participation may offend some civil servants, and they need to let some of their power go for the balance to be more even. Combined with the idea that *process design* conclusions in lesser developed countries are more fundamental, and the conclusions that there are certain basic skills needed for participation, this does give the impression there is a certain progression on what studies recommend and conclude, depending on how developed the context in which the participants took place is. This would also explain why *education*-related conclusions are primarily found in lesser developed countries. This reinforces the idea that, while there are no universalities, there is still common ground between different contexts.

5.1 Further Research

One goal of this study was to explore avenues for future research. Certain questions arose from the research, but the research itself can also be improved upon. The skewed distribution

in the region and PDI variables due to a lack of articles made it harder to compare the influence of the other variables between these two variables. Due to a lack of studies that made it through the selection criteria, only cocreation could be compared between Western and not-Western countries. The same was true for studies with a physical subject. Future research should focus on creating either a larger database with more studies or use less strict selection criteria. The goal should be to make sure the distribution is less skewed. Also, by creating a much larger dataset, statistical analysis and chi-square tests may be used to see whether there are statistically significant differences in frequencies.

The conclusions and results found also raise some questions. For example, what is the effect of education, (a lack of) skills, and workshops on participation? While multiple articles claim that certain skills need to be present and certain education thresholds need to be met before participation can be successful, can that be done through workshops? The one article that featured a workshop stated that it did not improve the implementation of the participatory process on its own.

Another question not answered is the role of mediators and moderators during participation. The research that recommended the use of these third parties was conducted in different contexts, but an avenue not explored here is the role of the knowledge intensity of the issues at hand. Participation on issues and subjects that are technical and require specific knowledge or uses a lot of jargon might benefit from a translator between civilian participants and civil servants.

The role of context is also not entirely clear. The question of whether a carefully designed participation process can subvert adverse conditions and context remains unanswered. This is important because it determines the focus for improvements if participation is unsuccessful. Regardless of this unanswered question, context should always be taken into account

5.2. Tips for practitioners

What does this mean for practitioners of civic participation? The main lesson to be learned from this research is that a participation process that has been successful elsewhere cannot simply be copied into a different context. The participation initiators should ask the following questions and let the answers guide the process: in what political and developmental context will the participation take place? Has the issue at hand a physical or a social nature? Should participants help create plans, execute them, or both? Depending on answers to these questions, the focus should shift between the themes found in this research.

By doing so initiators can prevent focusing on the wrong thing. Improving the balance of power is always important, as is ensuring that all relevant populations are reached and not just the usual suspects. However, there might be bigger issues to tackle first if participants are illiterate for example. Conversely, if the process is to take place in a country in the 10th decile of PDI, they can allow themselves to focus on making sure there is a beneficial balance of power within the process. They do not have to worry about fundamental questions regarding education. Whatever the case may be, however, context is always important. Questions regarding education and the skill set of participants might still arise in developed contexts if the issue at hand specifically concerns citizens with a learning disability or those who are not fluent in the language. By understanding the different ways in which the participation process is and can be influenced, it can be made more likely to succeed. And paraphrasing O'Doherty & Hawkins (2010), why bother with participation if you do not do everything you can to make it successful?

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