Citizen participation in the development of sports programs: Case Study of the Strasbourg area (France).

MORALES Valérie¹, MASSIERA Bernard², GRAY Laura³

^{1,2,3} LAMHESS, Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis, FRANCE

Published online: September 26, 2016

(Accepted for publication August 25 2016)

DOI:10.7752/jpes.2016.03135

Abstract: The participatory process is decisive to understand the diffusion of physical practices with health goals. This research explored the social interaction system of citizens that conditioned the emergence of the "sport prescription" project in the city of Strasbourg. In this way, we participated in the project "Etats Généraux du sport de Strasbourg" (General Estates of Sport of Strasbourg (named SGES) aimed at developing a municipal sports policy considering the opinion of the population. Our study described the integration of empirical views of ordinary citizens, and the importance of an anthropological vision on behalf of elected officials (Habermas, 1962). Our exploration mobilised the concepts of social configurations (Elias, 1985), and social capital (Bourdieu 1980; Putnam, 1995). The method of exploration crossed data from an ethnographic approach during 17 months in qualitative interviews conducted with local officials. The results demonstrated how to build networks of public action with citizens (practitioners and representatives of sports movements). The exploration showed the establishment of a participative local sports policy for health. It participated in the legitimacy of various types of usage knowledge (common sense, sporting and professional experience) and through the support of social ties developed by the SGES project.

Key words: Sports, health, participation, social demand, local action

Introduction

Almost everywhere in Europe, consequently to the aging of the population and due to the spreading of various pandemics (H1N1, Ebola, E. Coli, Zika virus ...) citizens are more alert. More concerned, they inform themselves more and more. They wish to take part in health debates. For these reasons the local health policies evolve. The field of public health has often been criticized for its obscurantism (due to medical confidentiality, the difficult recognition of legitimate some other knowledge in this sector....) but also for its complexity (multiple health professionals and diplomas and for its difficult technical terms...). Locally, health policies have also suffered from increased distancing between local policy-makers and ordinary citizens.

Theoretical foundations

The combination of these factors demonstrated a context facilitating the use of a participatory democracy. According to Guillaume Gourgues, "participatory democracy is the set of institutional arrangements formally implemented by public authorities, at all levels, in order to combine totally – of part of the totality - of a public exchange with the best possible quality, to make them stakeholders in decision-making in a particular sector of public action " (Zoungni, 2013). This social application for participation implied more responsibility and more education attendance for ordinary citizens. The rise of knowledge in society (Bacqué & Sintomer, 2011) facilitated the inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes. Despite this capacity growing within the population, political impediment persists like subjectivation (Delmas, 2011b; Fraser, 2005) and the psychologising of decisions (Cantelli et al, 2006, Fassin. 2004). Other researchers have seen a centralisation around the patient and his relatives in these processes. A remodeling of fiefs and institutional approaches judged as being too bureaucratic.

The institutional top-down dynamics generated reciprocal effects, called "bottom-up". This effect consequently appeared through the creation of social ties between the actors. In order to describe this process, we summoned theories of "empowerment" (Rappaport, 1984). The notion of "empowerment" means a social process of recognition and promotion of people in their ability to confront their needs, solve their problems and to mobilise resources in order to feel in control of their own lives (Gibson, 1991 p. 359). Furthermore, other theoretical frameworks explained the rationalisation of public action through the inclusion of ordinary citizens in public health policy (Bourdieu 1980; Elias, 1985; Putnam, 1995).

Our study verified that the social link effectively participated in the development of a local health policy in the sports sector. To address this issue we recalled that the woven social ties among the participants of the "Etats Généraux du sport de Strasbourg" (Sports General Estates of Strasbourg (named SGES)), particularly during debates on sports health, were plurals. We questioned the fact that social ties could be strong connections or conversely weak links. Moreover, our work initiated from a distinction between social ties uniplexes and multiplexes. The first is based on a unique situational context, the latter are developed in different settings. Finally, we focused on the value of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). This confirmed our thinking that through engagement in an ephemeral social configuration, links are forged and thus contribute to the legitimisation of certain types of knowledge. Entering into a network could suggest a flattening of the codes of the studied group and contribute to the learning of behaviours and knowledge conveyed in the various speeches. On the other hand, the voice can be sanctioned.

Method:

In view of our object, we used methodological tools for capturing the subjective aspects of the observed social scene. We used a qualitative approach to collect our data. To facilitate the value neutrality (Weber, 1965), we made a remotely engagement (Elias, 1993). The proximity promoted the internalization of social relationships (Paugam, 2008). Detachment is a condition that allows for an epistemological separation (Bachelard, 1938), a detachment from cognitive and emotional links as well as praxis, promoting the process of theorising. The emergence of a specific sport health-care policy in Strasbourg took place on different levels, including participation in public meetings and carrying out interviews with elected representatives.

Concerning data collection, we worked on public meeting re-transcriptions and individual interviews. To achieve our observations, we have seen the various levels of the "Etats Généraux du sport de Strasbourg" (Sports General Estates of Strasbourg (named SGES)); in questionnaire surveys, in public meetings and by reading various contributions (from informal speeches, emails or messages written in a guestbook). Thus, we used an ethnographic book to identify the empiric information. For achieving the results, the researchers collected data from two audiences: the local population and elected policy-makers, the ones who invited us into their offices. The local population was partially present at the public meetings. In this case study, the research team used a gathering place for asking questions from the interview grid. At other times, researchers have gone to the people. We went into the living areas of Strasbourg: hall of buildings, markets and supermarkets, municipal swimming pools, squares and streets, etc. For data analysis, we conducted a thematic analysis to achieve our demonstration. Also, our thinking was based on social configuration analysis. In both approaches, we focused on empirical data.

Results and discussion

At public meetings, institutional organisers knew the majority of participants, representing the Strasbourg population, including the local policy-maker in charge of sports. Sometimes previous relationships arose. These hypertext relations explain how the past social ties influences the present interactions (Morales, 2013).

Frame 1 : Transcription analyze of public meetings

Extract 1: Local policy-maker in charge of sports, *"Thank you for the question. So I'll take this opportunity to welcome the presence of the Director of the CREPS, I see at the back"*.

This excerpt shows the presence of social connections before the public meetings.

Extract 2: Sports Director: *"We can applaud (name of club president)."*

Local policy-maker in charge of sports: *"Yes, a president who has lived in Koenigshoffen for the past 25 - 30 years"*.

Sports Director: *"30 years"*.

Local policy-maker in charge of sports: *"Yeah I know, since I was young"*.

In these extracts we observed to which extent the peoples' words have been canonised; people who have previously registered in networks in which institutional representatives have invested. This prior knowledge gives them a greater legitimacy and gives the impression that they observe a community. Moreover, the presence of prebuilt links induced a transformation of the earlier social configuration (to suit the SGES), not the initial development of this: local officials mostly knew the defended interests of each party. Thus, we observed a strengthening of previous networks. This involved creating multiplex associations. These networks involved the position of players wanting to trace requests.

We can hereby affirm that the restructuring of social configurations facilitates social bottom-up dynamics. However, we also noticed that a top-down dynamic in the local policy-makers is necessary for the realisation of bottom-up processes. The interactions observed during the SGES contributed to a better

interdependence between the population of Strasbourg city and local policy-makers. In fact, it reduced the distance between representatives and the represented. This social proximity is of higher importance than spatial proximity in this project. Indeed, representatives of sports associations, as well as the relaying actors (those who have developed relationships with policy-makers and who play the role of informal delegates) became citizen experts. Policymakers summoned the citizen expertise to vehicle their point of view. Furthermore, through crosschecking information of individual participants, we observed a saturation of the ideas that participate, through data of better quality in the rationalisation of public action. It would be interesting to develop some networks through participatory mechanisms to improve public decision in the field of sports with health orientations.

Conclusion:

Can we observe a crisis of representative democracy? Can participatory democracy compensate the criticism of representative democracy? We observed that within the SGES project, policy-makers showed some interest to co-develop a sports policy for health in the city. Through old and present interactions, we have seen the advent of social configurations (Elias, 1985). These particular forms of social networks have positioned the participants as expert citizens (Morales, 2013). Finally, we observed the development of social capital (Bourdieu 1980; Putnam, 1995) among the different participants. Allowing the use of social ties to develop some effects in other social environments. To conclude, the project on "Sports Prescription" which was the bottom-line for the recent French law on medical prescription was constructed from a participatory approach based on "bottom up" dynamics.

Reference:

- Bachelard G., (1938), « la formation de l'esprit scientifique », Paris : Vrin
- Bacqué M.-H. & Sintomer Y. (dir.), (2011), *La démocratie participative. Histoires et généalogies*, Paris : La Découverte, coll. « Recherches », 320 p.
- Blondiaux L. & Fourniau J.-M., 2011, Un bilan des recherches sur la participation du public en démocratie : beaucoup de bruit pour rien ? *Participations*, 1 (1), p. 8-35.
- Bourdieu, P. (1980). Le capital social. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 31, 2-3.
- Cantelli, F., Jacob, S., Genard, J.-L., & de Visscher, C. (2006). *Les constructions de l'action publique*. Paris: L'Harmattan (coll. Logiques Politiques).
- Delmas, C. (2011). Subjectivation et responsabilisation des individus. In C. Delmas (Ed.), *Sociologie politique de l'expertise*. (pp. 91-102). Paris: La Découverte (coll. Repères).
- Elias, N., & Scotson, J. L. (1985). *The established and the outsiders. A sociological enquiry into community problems*. London: Frank Cass & Co.
- Elias N. (1993), *Engagement et distanciation : Contributions à la sociologie de la connaissance*, Paris: Arthème Fayard. [Translation from German by Michèle Hulin of *Engagement und Distanzierung. Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie I* and with a foreword by Roger Chartier.]
- Fassin, D. (2004). *Des maux indicibles. Sociologie des lieux d'écoute*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Fraser, N. (2005). *Qu'est-ce que la justice sociale ? Reconnaissance et redistribution*. (E. Ferrarese, Trans.). Paris: La Découverte (coll. Textes à l'appui/politique et sociétés).
- Morales V., 2013, « *Le sport en débat : démocratie participative et politiques sportives municipales* », Thèse soutenue à l'Université de Strasbourg, sous la dir. De W. Gasparini et M. Koebel.
- Nez H., (2011), « Nature et légitimités des savoirs citoyens dans l'urbanisme participatif. Une enquête ethnographique à Paris », *Sociologie*, 4 (2), p. 387-404.
- Gibson C.H., (1991). A concept analysis of empowerment. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 16, 354-361.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.
- Paugam, S. (2008). *La pratique de la sociologie*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65-78.
- Rappaport J., (1984). *Studies in Empowerment : introduction to the Issues*. Prevention in Human Services. 3. P.1-17.
- Weber M., (1965b [1917]), « Essai sur le sens de la "neutralité axiologique" dans les sciences sociologiques et économiques », dans *Essais sur la théorie de la science*, trad. fr. de Freund J., Paris, Éditions Plon, pp. 399-477.
- Zoungni F. T., 2013, « Guillaume Gourgues, Les politiques de démocratie participative », *Lectures* [En ligne], Les comptes rendus mis en ligne le 28 novembre 2013, consulté le 13 juin 2016. URL : <http://lectures.revues.org/12822>