

## The Emergence and Impact of Participatory Ideas on Swedish Planning and Local Government

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During the late 1960's and 1970's, quite a large amount of research has been devoted to documenting and analyzing various aspects of the citizen

participation phenomenon. The American Poverty Programmes of the 1960's (Community Action Programmes, Model Cities etc.) gave rise to a large number of research projects trying to pin point the roots of the participation concept, its function for the authorities, and its impact on the local political process. (See e.g., Bachrach and Baratz 1971, Kramer 1969, Levitan 1969, Marris and Rein 1972, Moynihan 1969, Piven and Cloward 1971, and Rubin 1969). In Britain research into citizen participation was triggered by community oriented social welfare programmes like the Community Development Projects and by the provisions for citizen participation written into the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act. Researchers have posed questions about the political function of citizen participation and about its impact on the decision-making process. British studies of participatory community programmes include Cockburn (1977), Higgins (1978), Jones and Mayo (1974), Lambert et. al. (1979), and National CDP (1977). Work on citizen participation in local authority planning includes Broaden et. al. (1979), Fagence (1978), Long (1976), and Thornley (1977).

In Sweden, although citizen participation has been discussed and practiced both in connection with local authority planning and social welfare programmes, only a small amount of research has been done.

One reason for the relative dearth of participatory research may have been the fact that participation never became as great a political issue in Sweden as it did in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Sweden did follow the international trend towards increased local citizen action during the late 1960's and 1970's. In 1971 the country was shocked by the violence of the 'Battle of the Elms' in Stockholm, and the most important occurrence in the local politics of Gothenburg in 1976 was the occupation of a central square, Kungstorget, to prevent the building of a parking garage. For several months in 1978, the local lead story in the Stockholm newspapers was the occupation and violent evacuation of a block in the central city.

But *institutionalized* citizen participation has been held within stricter bounds in Sweden. It has been made abundantly clear that citizen participation is an exercise in information exchange which will not be allowed to impinge upon the parliamentary decision-making process. Furthermore, although citizen participation has certainly been absorbed into the official planning and social work rhetoric, it has not been formalized in legislation. In this short paper I shall try to describe the circumstances and context in which participatory ideas emerged in Sweden, why citizen participation has been incorporated into state ideology and policy, and what the impact of government participatory strategies has been or is likely to be.

## 1. What is Citizen Participation?

Building on Verba and Nie (1972), Alford and Friedland (1975, 430) have constructed the following definition of political participation:

‘those present or past activities by private citizens and private or public organizations and groups that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government structures and personnel and the actions they take or do not take.’

They stress the importance of historically created societal structures for participation and the differential effectiveness of participation by powerful economic interests compared with that of less influential groups or individuals.

‘For dominant interests, participation communicates and reproduces power. For non-dominant interests, participation has been a symbolic substitute for power, a means of reproducing the *absence* of power’ (op. cit., 474).

It is semantically important to distinguish between citizen or political *participation* on the one hand and citizen or political *action* on the other. All action is not participation. In traditional usage, participation – the act of partaking of or sharing in – implies acceptance of the rules governing the activity in question. Political action on the other hand is a more all-encompassing term which includes modes of action which exceed the bounds of legitimate political activity as established by the dominant political force in the specific society. Occupations, rioting, civil disobedience, or bribery are examples of defiant or surreptitious political action. To exclude these types of political action from a definition of political or citizen participation is *not* a moral judgement, nor is it an evaluation of the effectiveness of the various modes of political action. It is simply an attempt to construct a consistent and stringent definition in line with the traditional usage of the word participation. Verba et al. (1978, 1–2) make a similar distinction.

*Citizen* participation is a specific form of political participation. It is initiated by or co-opted by the state, and it can be defined by reference to its *subject*, its *scope*, and its *modes of action*. The subject denoted by ‘citizen’ is most often meant to be ‘ordinary men and women as distinguished from officials and elites’ (Bachrach and Baratz 1970, 203). Their participation is legitimated through basic democratic principles, and not on the basis of specific rights such as property rights or expertise. The scope of the participation is the local political process and the modes of

action are most often direct, locally based, and not directly related to the electoral process. They include such activities as the formation of block and neighbourhood councils, consultations, etc.

## 2. Participation and Local Politics in Sweden

What characterizes the political process in Sweden? First and most obvious is the high rate of voter participation in general elections: approximately 90% of the eligible voters vote every three years. Second, the existence of stable, class-based political parties has given the working class greater incentive for participation in electoral politics (at least on the national level) than in countries (for instance the U.S.) where the working class is excluded from influence in partisan politics. A third and related characteristic of the Swedish political scene is the strength of national interest groups – trade union federation, employers' associations, etc. – in the state policy formation process. (See Elvander, 1969; Anton 1975.) Interest organizations are highly centralized and membership levels are high. In an international perspective, Swedish working class organizations have a great deal of influence on national policy formation.

A further characteristic of the Swedish political process has particular relevance for this paper, namely the alleged apathy of Swedish citizens with regard to local politics. Writing in the early 1970's the American political scientist Thomas Anton passed the following judgement on local politics in Sweden:

'For most Swedes, influencing public decisions is either impossible because they do not think of themselves as competent, or unnecessary, because they believe public matters are being handled well enough by those whose job it is to look after the public interest' (Anton 1975, 23).

Furthermore, he continues,

'From a citizen point of view, certainly, attempts to influence local decisions will be very much like punching a ball of dough: the system absorbs every blow without ever changing its character' (op. cit, 29).

Especially when seen in an American perspective where pressure group activity is often a dominant feature of the political process, Swedish local politics prior to 1968 can indeed have appeared to be lacking in citizen input. The Research Group on Municipal Politics (kommunforsknings-

gruppen) found very few activist community groups in the Swedish municipalities in the mid 1960's (Bergquist 1969). In another study Örtendahl (1969) observed that the Swedish people's interest in and knowledge about local politics was scanty.

Several observers (see, for instance, Anton 1975) attribute this lack of local political activity at least partially to one of the characteristics of the Swedish political scene mentioned above: the key role of national interest organizations in state policy formation. Local autonomy is said to be constricted by the fact that policies are formulated and key political decisions are made centrally through negotiations between state agencies, national political parties, and the leadership of national interest groups.

Be that as it may, the era of citizen apathy in Swedish local politics ended abruptly in the late 1960's in a flurry of critical debate and militant protest. With spontaneous community action in the form of ad hoc groups, tenants associations, local political parties, there followed institutional citizen participation.

### 3. The Emergence of Participatory Ideas in Swedish Local Politics

The first spate of public discussions about citizen participation took place during the 1940's. In 1946 the government had proposed a reorganization of local government to create larger municipalities. The social welfare sector was being built up during the 1930's and 1940's, and the state needed more effective control and more effective local administration of the programmes. These goals could, it was felt, be achieved by merging small units of local government into municipalities large enough to have professional staffs. Professional officials would be more competent than part-time politicians, and they would more readily follow central government directives (see Kommunindelningkommittén 1945 and Riksdagsproposition no. 236, 1946.03.299).

In 1952 the first local government reorganization resulted in a drastic reduction in the number of local government units (from 2,218 to 816). By 1961, however, a further reduction in the number of local authorities was deemed necessary. A new reorganization was proposed by the government and implemented in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and today there are only one-tenth as many local authorities as there were prior to 1952. Two major consequences of this administrative reform are that the number of elected officials is much smaller today, and that many small,

self-governing local units have been swallowed up by large heterogeneous municipalities.

In the debates following the reorganization initiatives, members of parliament and local politicians pointed out the negative effects for citizen involvement and influence which the reorganization could have. It was feared that local autonomy would be reduced and that citizen influence would be weakened by the professionalization of local politics. A number of bills were submitted to Parliament with proposals for neighbourhood councils and other measures to strengthen 'citizen participation in local government affairs'. (Kommunalrättskommittén 1965).

The criticism was sufficiently intense to be observed and commented on in the press, and a parliamentary committee was charged with investigating ways of strengthening local influence on municipal politics, for example through the delegation of certain activities to local community bodies. A major research project 'Local government autonomy – local government reorganization' was also initiated in 1965 to study the effects of the reorganization on political activity in the municipalities.

But in retrospect it seems clear that the debates of the 1950's and 1960's were mainly internal discussions between local government politicians and officials, members of parliament, and a small number of academics. The general public was by and large left untouched by the debate.

Citizen participation first became an 'idea in good currency' in Sweden in the period 1967–1970. The emergence of participatory ideas in Swedish public debate is intertwined with the outbreak of criticism of the built environment, planning and regional policy, and the outgrowth of activist community groups which took place after 1967. The rapid dissemination of these interrelated sets of ideas – environmentalism, community action, and citizen participation – is illustrated by the dramatic increase in the number of articles and editorials published on these subjects. In 1966 no articles on citizen participation or community action appeared in Swedish journals, and only two articles were published which were critical of planning or the urban environment (Svenska bibliotekstjänst, 1966).

The change began in 1967, but was not generally noticeable until the following year. In 1967 the first article about citizen participation and community action appeared in the Swedish press (Dunér, 1967). It was an account of the work of the ARCH group in Harlem, describing how architectural students helped ghetto residents fight destructive plans and produce their own alternatives. Seven articles were published the same year criticizing the Regional Plan proposal for Stockholm which had just been made public. The proposal, which projected a massive centralization

of population and resources to the Stockholm region, is generally credited with being the spark which set off the debate on planning, the built environment, and regional policy.

By 1968 the mass-media debate about the built environment was in full swing with over 40 articles being published in journals and many more in newspapers. Stockholm's regional planning, the heavy-handed renewal of the business district, and the sterility and inhumanness of its new housing estates were major targets of criticism. Several young reporters on the leading Stockholm daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, began specializing in environmental and planning critique, and the paper opened its columns to the debate. Several well-known authors and politicians entered the fray, thereby increasing the impact of the criticism.

The members' journal of the Swedish Architectural Association (*Arkitekten*, after 1970 *AT*) which was now edited by radical young architects, also became a forum for criticism of planning and the built environment. A special issue (1968:16) contained ten articles on 'planning and politics' and environmental criticism.

In 1969 Sherry Arnstein's influential JAIP article 'A ladder of citizen participation' was translated and published in *Arkitekten*, and a number of articles appeared about participatory community work (see, for example, Lindholm 1969). By 1970 the number of journal articles criticizing the built environment, planning, and regional policy had swelled to fifty, and sixteen articles on citizen participation in planning were published.

It would seem that the basic ideas of community action and citizen participation were taken over from the American and British contexts. This hypothesis is supported by a survey of the literature and by interviews with key figures in community action. It would also seem that three overlapping groups of actors were instrumental in disseminating participatory ideas in Sweden, namely 1) lower and middle echelon planners and social workers, 2) community activists, and 3) political activists of the 'New Left'.

During the late 1960's local authorities greatly expanded their planning and social work staffs, and many young planners and social workers, influenced by the participatory and activist ideas of the student movement, were brought into the bureaucracy. They were introduced to American and British citizen participation experiences by articles in Swedish and Anglo-American professional journals. These radicalized architects, planners, and social workers worked with community groups, wrote articles, and agitated within their departments for the democratization of planning and social work.



using dramatic, highly visible modes of action to emphasize their demands. In 1968 the first community action groups were formed to fight the bulldozing of inner city neighbourhoods and for the improvement of dangerous traffic conditions. By the end of 1968 there were at least thirty community action groups in Stockholm, and by 1974 over 100 groups were active in the Stockholm region with an additional 500 scattered throughout the country (Häggroth 1971 and 1975; Gidlund 1979). These groups were usually structured on participatory democratic principles, and their working methods were influenced by the successful Vietnam solidarity movement and other political direct action groups. At the time, the use of demonstrations, occupations, and other more flamboyant modes of political action was unusual in Swedish local politics. The groups were therefore afforded relatively extensive mass media coverage, and they had a strong impact on Swedish public opinion.

The New Left also played a major role in the dissemination of participatory ideas in Sweden. Leftist writers contributed to the public debate, and as already mentioned, both bureaucrats and community activists gleaned many of their participatory ideas from the student movement. The first direct reference to citizen participation in planning in the Swedish journals appears in an interview with the former chairman of the Swedish Communist Party, C. H. Hermansson (*Arkitekten*, 1968:12).

In 1969 on the crest of the wave of participatory rhetoric and citizen action, the first attempts were made to institutionalize citizen participation in planning and social work. The National Bureau of Planning sent a circular letter to local authorities recommending that they improve information and publicity in planning matters, and that they arrange consultations more frequently. The towns of Nacka, Skellefteå, and Järfälla were among the first to organize planning consultations and exhibitions (Blücher and Nilsson 1971; Wettergren 1969), and community work projects with client participation were initiated in Stockholm and Malmö in the early 1970's.

By 1971 at least two parliamentary committees (the Committee on Municipal Democracy, 'kommunaldemokratiutredningen', and the Committee on Planning and Building Legislation, 'bygglagutredningen') were considering measures to increase public participation in planning and local affairs. It appears that most local authorities increased their output of information and publicity about planning proposals during the 1970's. In the early part of the decade, the dominant forms of information exchange were exhibitions, brochures, and other printed material as well as surveys.

By the mid-1970's, consultations, public meetings, reference groups, and study groups were becoming increasingly common. In many local authorities, tenants associations and some community groups were added to the lists of organizations to which planning proposals were submitted for comment.

By the late 1970's, a number of local authorities – most notably Stockholm, Haninge, Nacka, and Hedemora – had made consultations with community groups an established part of the community planning process. Others like Kungälv had revived the town meeting form (Sölvesson 1976), or like Gothenburg had instituted advisory neighbourhood councils. Interestingly though, no legislation has yet been passed concerning citizen participation measures in local government.

Very few systematic evaluations of the effects of the citizen participation exercises on the political process have been made in Sweden. Available studies indicate, however, that initiatives or changes effected in plans and policies have most often been marginal and rarely of a structural nature (see Blücher and Nilsson, 1971; Sölvesson 1976; Miller and Österberg 1977; Miller and Burell 1978; Dufva 1979).

Furthermore, it appears that the participants in Swedish citizen participation exercises most often have been recruited from groups already in possession of substantial political capabilities. Statistics from a large number of exercises show that, with few exceptions, the participants have been organizationally active, middle-aged, middle-class males. (See for instance Ek and Svenilsson 1971; Häggroth and Wallin 1973; Becker and Fried 1975; Stockholm fastighetskontor 1975; Sölvesson 1976; Miller and Burell 1978.) Whatever influence was won by these participants in the citizen participation process could most likely have been exerted through other channels had the participation exercises not taken place.

#### 4. Why Citizen Participation?

What was it that caused local authorities and national government agencies suddenly to become interested in citizen participation? Some researchers have interpreted institutionalized citizen participation in the light of the major role played by middle echelon local authority officials such as planners and social workers in initiating participation schemes. Several reasons have been offered to explain why officials promoted citizen participation.

In the late 1960's, many planners, social workers, and other local authority officials had awakened to some of the more unpleasant realities

of post-war capitalist development. They were concerned about their own roles and the roles of their agencies in this development. Many of these officials felt themselves to be powerless within the conservative bureaucracy, and they saw citizen participation as an effective way of mobilizing external support. By bringing the public into planning discussions, bureaucratic decision-making would be transformed. (For evidence of this type of attitude see any of a number of accounts of participation exercises in Sweden, for example Blücher and Nilsson 1971; Miller and Osterberg 1977.)

Damer and Hague (1971, 224) suggest a quite different motive. A major purpose of participation exercises was, they write, 'to make life easier for the planners'. Thornley (1977, 37) maintains that the British planning profession was enthusiastic about citizen participation because it could be used to 'improve their tarnished image', and to 'educate the public into viewing their own problems through professional or technocratic eyes'.

Unquestionably, middle echelon officials have played a great role in initiating participation exercises, but the question remains why these initiatives were approved by their superiors. One answer to this question is the more or less official explanation of the adoption of citizen participation by government – that the state is simply acceding to demands forwarded by individuals, groups and political parties.

There is a serious objection which can be raised against this hypothesis. While it is undoubtedly true that government participation schemes were to some extent a response to demands, the citizen participation that was implemented was often quite unlike the participation which was being demanded. What community groups were demanding was political influence, but what they were getting was just more information. While the name was the same, the content had been altered, and thus in actual fact the demands had not been acceded to.

But while citizen participation in its more restricted form may not have satisfied community groups, it could still be an effective strategy for dealing with a number of structural problems facing the state. A number of fruitful hypotheses about citizen participation as a state policy strategy have been developed, mainly within a Marxist perspective. They focus on problems of state *legitimacy*, *social control*, and administrative *efficiency*.

Starting from the Marxist concept of the basic contradiction of the capitalist state – that it must ensure the continued accumulation of capital while maintaining its own legitimacy as class-neutral power – Claus Offe (1975, 248) describes how post-war capitalist development has disturbed the delicate balance between the state's efficiency (as guarantor of capita-

list accumulation) and its legitimacy ('the essential and indispensable basis of political authority'). Offe mentions for example the way increased state intervention in various societal activities makes the state itself the focus of conflict about the utilization of society's resources. It becomes increasingly difficult for the state to carry out its economic role effectively and simultaneously maintain acceptance of the legitimating rules of society. Offe sees citizen participation as one of the strategies which can be used by the state to try to reestablish its own legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens.

There is indeed some evidence that would indicate that the legitimation motive has some validity in the Swedish case. The dramatic increase in protest activity in the late 1960's and early 1970's with wild cat strikes, anti-government demonstrations and militant community action seemed to demonstrate the growth of a more critical attitude towards government. A recent survey established that public confidence in government and the political parties has diminished.

'The number of voters with a high level of confidence in the parties and politicians has diminished . . . Under the calm surface there is an undercurrent of growing alienation in the electorate . . . Since the late 1960's there has been a steady growth of mistrust.' (Petersson 1977, p. 259).

The strength of the legitimation crisis in Sweden can certainly be debated, but be that as it may, several local authority participation exercises have had the avowed purpose of improving public attitudes towards the local authority and its planning (see, for instance, Kullgren and Lövheim, 1976).

While recognizing the re-establishment of legitimacy as an important motive for governmental participatory policies, several American and British theorists have laid more emphasis on the social control aspect of citizen participation. Piven and Cloward (1971) have interpreted the participation policies of the American Poverty Programmes as an attempt to deal with problems of unrest and protest in the ghettos by absorbing militant minority group leaders into the political process and channeling protest activity into manageable organizational form.

In the same vein, Alford and Friedland (1975, 463) see citizen or bureaucratic participation as 'symbolic politics':

' . . . participation by the poor is encouraged at the points in the political system where policy making does *not* take place, thus limiting the potential effects of participation to spasmodic challenges of the ways public policies are conventionally implemented. . . . Participation of this kind functions to produce political quiescence while societal institutions continue to reproduce inequality and injustice.'

Cockburn (1977, 98) describes the use by the state of participatory democracy as a 'phase of corporate decision-making'. During the 1960's local government was expanding rapidly, and needed to improve its management capabilities. Participation was seized on as a strategy which was attractive to the public as well as effective as a tool of management. The expected benefits to government included improved public image, improved information flow, and incorporation of potential conflict. All of this could be achieved without forfeiting power to citizens' groups or altering established goals.

The social control motive also seems to have been operative in Sweden. Local protest movements have certainly not been major threats to the stability of local or national power structures in Sweden, but they are a disturbance which must be dealt with. As a trend and an example, militant community action has dangerous implications for the state and political parties.

Institutionalized citizen participation has been recognized in Sweden as an effective way of counteracting militant community action. The participation process would encapsulate, institutionalize, and thereby limit the effects of conflict. Local political issues could be depoliticized through consultation instead of confrontation. The institutionalization of the local political debate would also isolate militant opposition and assert the primacy of the representative system. Many politicians have acknowledged that citizen participation exercises have been initiated as a response to militant community action (see for instance Miller and Burell, 1978).

A third type of interpretation of government participatory policies concerns problems of administrative efficiency. Several authors (including Piven and Cloward 1971) have referred to burgeoning welfare costs as a motive for participatory community work. A number of British researchers point to development and planning bottlenecks as a reason for initiating citizen participation in planning. Damer and Hague (1971), Long (1976), and Thornley (1977) maintain that British government strategy to reduce bottlenecks was based on reducing the right to appeal planning decisions. Increased public participation in the planning process was to compensate for the reduction of the right of appeal. The Skeffington Report on Public Participation in Planning pointed out that eliminating or anticipating objections would lead to a less contentious and speedier planning process (DOE 1969, 5).

Welfare costs were not a major political issue in Sweden in the late 1960's, and development bottlenecks were not a serious problem. However, increasingly numerous protest activities were increasing the amount

of time needed to implement plans, and the Elms Battle, which delayed completion of an underground line in Stockholm in 1971, dramatized the effects of last minute protest. Government publications (*Kommunaldemokratiutredningen* 1974) pointed out that citizen participation at an early stage could avoid this type of delay, thus increasing the efficiency of the planning process.

## 5. The Impact of Citizen Participation on Swedish Society

In 1968 the first activist community groups were forming in Stockholm, the first articles about citizen participation were appearing in the journals, and, for the first time, local authorities were arranging public participation exercises. The first participatory community work programmes had not yet been started. By the mid-1970's there were several hundred community action groups in Sweden, citizen participation had become a commonplace concept, and local authority participation exercises were a dime a dozen. More than 80 community work projects were underway in 60 different municipalities.

This would seem to indicate that the concept of participation in local government affairs has had a substantial impact in Sweden, but in an international perspective the effects appear much slighter. In the U.S. and Britain – the countries from which the ideas seem to have emanated – mandatory legislation was passed, the public debate was heated, and a great amount of research was carried out. In continental Europe, countries like Denmark, West Germany and, most recently, France have passed legislation relating to citizen participation in municipal planning, and participation has been the subject of academic debate.

The institutionalization of citizen participation in Swedish local government and public and academic interest for participation appear to have been limited by two factors: weaker motivation and stronger constraints than in the other countries. I have tried to establish that a major reason for the adoption of participatory policies by government has been their usefulness as a strategy for coping with problems of legitimacy, social control, and administrative efficiency. I maintained that the state in Sweden was indeed troubled by problems of shrinking public confidence, increasing protest and inefficiency, but that these problems were considerably less severe than those facing governments in, say, the U.S. with its ghetto revolts, Vietnam War and political corruption, or Britain with its faltering economy. Because of the relatively mild nature of the challenges to the

state in Sweden, there was little motivation to make radical changes in institutions in order to increase citizen participation.

Moreover, I maintain that the ideological constraints on participatory programmes were greater in Sweden than in many other countries. The doctrine of citizen participation, with its inference of non-partisan political activity, threatened violation of the dominant democratic paradigm. In addition, and in part because of this violation, citizen participation was viewed skeptically by the powerful Social Democratic Party. A statement of the mainstream Swedish democratic paradigm can be found in the instructions to the parliamentary Committee on Municipal Democracy (Kommunaldemokratiutredningen 1975):

‘The Swedish democracy is a representative democracy where the influence of the citizens is exerted through the political parties. The effectiveness of the system is ultimately dependent on the ability of the parties to formulate and implement policies which are in agreement with the wishes of the citizens.’

The dominant paradigm restricts political activity to party work and parliamentary decision-making and rigidly excludes more direct forms of democratic participation. Outside observers have on occasion been surprised by the naivety and one-sidedness of the Swedish faith in the representative system. In a report from the International Union of Local Authorities on ‘Participation’, the authors comment ironically that,

‘Some countries consider political representation to be the very essence of participation: through their parties the citizens are supposed to be, as the Swedish report states, constantly present in the decision-making process’ (IULA 1971, 21).

This ideology of representative parliamentary democracy does not differ radically from the official democratic ideologies of other Western countries, but what is probably unique is the absence of challenge to this dominant paradigm. It has been supported by the existence of a class-based partisan system which – in theory at least – offered the major social classes and strata programmatic representation. This is quite different from the situation in the U.S. or even in Britain where large segments of the population do not identify with any political party, and where upper class domination of the political system is evident.

The strength and pervasiveness of this representative ideology has, then, constituted a passive constraint limiting the impact of citizen partici-



pation concepts. The only coherent, more active opposition to citizen participation has come from the Social Democratic Party. This does not mean that Social Democrats have always opposed citizen participation initiatives. On the contrary, they have often supported them and sometimes even taken the initiative. But segments of the Party have always been skeptical, and Social Democrats have always emphasized citizen participation's advisory nature.

There are two major reasons for Social Democratic skepticism towards citizen participation. First, citizen participation's non-partisan character threatened the political advantage of organizational supremacy enjoyed by the Social Democrats. This was not only a tactical consideration. Political organizing, they maintained, should not be the duty of the state, but rather that of the political parties (see Miller and Burrell, 1978, 62). Second, Social Democrats have feared that citizen participation exercises would by-pass the political process and would thus tend to 'depoliticize' issues, removing them from a societal context.

In summary the constraints and limitations on citizen participation are most visible in the extremely narrow interpretation of the concept applied in Swedish municipalities. Authorities have anxiously avoided any delegation of power, and have taken pains to make clear that citizen participation means exchange of information and nothing more.

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pation concepts. The only coherent, more active opposition to citizen participation has come from the Social Democratic Party. This does not mean that Social Democrats have always opposed citizen participation initiatives. On the contrary, they have often supported them and sometimes even taken the initiative. But segments of the Party have always been skeptical, and Social Democrats have always emphasized citizen participation's advisory nature.

There are two major reasons for Social Democratic skepticism towards citizen participation. First, citizen participation's non-partisan character threatened the political advantage of organizational supremacy enjoyed by the Social Democrats. This was not only a tactical consideration. Political organizing, they maintained, should not be the duty of the state, but rather that of the political parties (see Miller and Burrell, 1978, 62). Second, Social Democrats have feared that citizen participation exercises would by-pass the political process and would thus tend to 'depoliticize' issues, removing them from a societal context.

In summary the constraints and limitations on citizen participation are most visible in the extremely narrow interpretation of the concept applied in Swedish municipalities. Authorities have anxiously avoided any delegation of power, and have taken pains to make clear that citizen participation means exchange of information and nothing more.

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