Participation Making a Difference? Critical Analysis of the Participatory Claims of Change, Reversal, and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT: Participation has become very popular as a new strategy and approach in research, in policy, in private and public affairs. As an alternative to top-down approaches participation promises to empower people, to acknowledge and to build competence and (local) knowledge, to recognise and to be responsive to people's different and differentiated needs and interests. The difference participation promises to make concerns above all an engagement with questions of difference.

KEYWORDS: Participation, empowerment, development co-operation, Foucault, difference, change, power, strategies, practices of freedom, mobilisation.

The article seeks to problematise this assumption of difference, both as an intended goal of making a change, and as a means towards reaching that goal of change or transformation. In other words, the article questions what difference participation does make by engaging with questions of difference. In order to problematise participation as such, the article focuses on a major participatory strategy, namely empowerment. More specifically, the article analyses some concrete strategies mobilised to realise participation and empowerment within development settings. Following the analysis, participatory empowerment appears to make a difference by installing a particular mode of self-understanding and self-problematisation, categorising the individual, attaching him or her to a certain identity, imposing a law of truth upon that individual, which she or he must recognise and which others have to recognise in that person. The analysis as such reveals participation and empowerment to make another kind of difference, than the differences assumed in the many written and oral sources on participation and empowerment.

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Introduction: Development as Change

Any attempt to conceptualise development, in whatever specific domain the notion is furthermore applied, inevitably comes across its primary and very deeply rooted relation to the concept of change. Particularly in the domain of development co-operation, development as change, as an objective towards which institutions and individuals claim to strive, as an aim which is seen as inherently good implying a positive change (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, p. 15) is regarded as a well know and well established epitome. Development is assumed to imply change and to strive for change, not only as a response to a general and global condition of "continuous and accelerating change." It also implies a belief in an infinite "potential for deliberate, chosen change" (Chambers, 1997, p. 14). Although the content and object of change in/and development widely vary according to historical, cultural, social, geographical, political conditions, development nowadays seems to have reached a widespread and largely promoted consensus on some general development values, targets and strategies, representing the intended change. One of the most commonly mentioned and widespread changes, in this respect is the appearance and introduction of participation as a method and goal:

> 'Over the last decade, participatory development has shifted from margins to the mainstream.' ... 'It has spread like a chorus of voices from around the world, drawing attention to concerns that have been voiced, in different forms, time and time again over the course of this decade' (Cornwall, 2000, p. 5; Cornwall, Musyoki, & Pratt, 1999, p. 7).

As element and instrument of change participation is represented to be engaged with three premises of change. First, participation is assumed to be a most appropriate tool to implement, enforce and/or encourage change in development. Second, participation is assumed to be able to make a change or a difference compared to the former strategies and approaches of development or the development initiatives that do not rely on participation. Participation is assumed to open up new perspectives. It is considered to represent a paradigm of reversals, whereby these reversals indicate loci of change, places of difference. A third premise of the participation paradigm relates participation's potential for making a change or a difference to its engagement with questions of change and difference and diversity. Participation, in other words, is assumed to inherently engage with difference and change, through its capacity (as a technique) to address and involve with diversity and difference, with differences between people, with

diversities among local contexts and situations (Cornwall, 2000, p. 5). This threefold connection of participation with change not only characterises an emanating discursive horizon of change, diversity. and difference. It also shapes and instigates the (participatory) strategies, techniques and technologies deployed and mobilised to mediate and realise change and development. In this contribution we want to question the changes inherent in participation as a discourse and as a whole of techniques and methods. We do not question whether participation is really able to realise the differences it claims to make. Neither do we question the effectiveness of the claimed differences and changes. Assuming that participation *does* effectively represent changes in its discursive as well as in its technological and strategic practices, we rather question the realities produced by these participatory practices of change. The central question, thus, addresses the realities that are produced by and in the combination of a particular discursive horizon and particular techniques and strategies, which promise to make a change or a difference. Concomitantly, we also address how these discursive and strategic practices affect the individual subject in these realities. As we cannot take up this question in its full width because of the enormous extendedness of the discourse and strategy, we limit ourselves to an analysis of one of the most prominent strategies of participation that is, empowerment.

Participatory Changes in Terms of Empowerment

Emerging shortly after the widespread and influential introduction of participation in the domain of development co-operation, empowerment not only embodies a language shift and technological modification. Empowerment also assumes to be able to deal with one of the most problematic issues of change for participation and in development, namely power. Empowerment assumes to invoke change, to deal with change, to attribute change, and to realise change, by acting upon existing power relations, by changing power, by giving power to the people. Literature,[1] reveals different ways in which empowerment is considered as a major potential for change in participatory development. Empowerment, firstly, assumes to involve an increase in power, more specifically on the side of the subject of empowerment. In this respect, power is conceived as "the capacity of one actor to do something affecting another actor, which changes the probable pattern of future events" (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 51). The intended increase in power, secondly, is supposed to imply an enhancement of one's self-

awareness and self-esteem, on the one hand, and of self-rule, on the other (p. 58). Increase in power is, furthermore, assumed to foster self-development, connoting "a process by which persons gain a sense of personal identity linked with augmented clarity concerning their interests" (p. 29). This emphasis on the self, on the capacities of the self, on the interests which can be at best determined by the individual self, lead Singh and Titi to conclude that empowerment, in fact, can only be self-empowerment (1995, p. 34). As empowerment assumes to strengthen subject power, it also assumes to involve a decrease or a countering of imposed, dominant, and often oppressive power from outside, from external sources: "As people begin to self-develop in ways not envisaged by the models, ideals and ideologies traditionally handed down to them, so they discover their capacities" (Flood & Romm, 1996, p. 189).

The opposition to external power indicates a third assumed potential of change by empowerment. External power, thereby, is denounced in as far as it is assumed to prohibit or to hinder maximum self-development, in as far as it keeps the subject from being empowered, from determining its own interests, from developing its own capacities. The trumps related to empowerment as major potentials for change are presented, in sum, as an increase of subject power in favour of a maximisation of self-development, of the enhancement of self-awareness and of the development of a sense of personal identity, aiming at a neutralisation of another kind of negative and oppressive power. The combination of these different trumps for change can, according to our foucauldian inspired analysis, be considered as a very specific pattern of bringing freedom into practice.

Inspired by Foucault's work[2] we try to develop two arguments: (a) that the difference made by (participatory) empowerment does not concern a reduction of power, but a transformation of it; and (b) that, rather than increasing one's capacity to act, empowerment alters and shapes it (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 71). The first argument is substantiated by problematising empowerment's assumption of neutralising negative and oppressive power, whereas the second argument objects to the assumption of increasing subject power. The central line of reasoning in the analysis of the two arguments relies on a conceptualisation of power, not as a force which opposes to freedom, but as a *productive* force, producing possibilities for actions "whereby a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible interventions may open up" (Foucault, 1982, p. 220). Power is, in line with this foucauldian account, understood as a specific practice of freedom, as a way for *bringing freedom into*

practice, as a way for realising freedom within a field of possibilities. Analysing empowerment (for participatory development) from this concept of productive power leads to its consideration as a specific way of bringing freedom into practice. Such an analysis reveals that empowerment is not just a general way of bringing all kinds of freedom into any freely chosen practice. The analysis, in other words, problematises the suggestion, (re-)produced in discourses as well as in techniques and strategies, that empowerment *freely* offers *free* opportunities, which can be freely chosen by free subjects which are *naturally* free (i.e., whose freedom appears naturally once the power mechanisms have been abolished). The analysis, in contrast, shows how empowerment is not about restoring and respecting *the* freedom everyone has (or should have), but how it calls itself for just one particular way for bringing freedom into practice. Our analysis, as such, indicates how empowerment as a specific way of power exercise produces itself specific possibilities for bringing a particular kind of freedom into practice, whereby it excludes others. Or formulated from the perspective of the subject of empowerment: empowerment exercises power upon the way in which the subject of empowerment can bring freedom into practice, embracing "the ways in which one is urged to and educated to bridle one's own passions, to control one's own conduct, to govern oneself, to behave" (Rose, 1999, p. 3).

The analysis of empowerment in terms of productive power, determining a specific way of bringing freedom into practice, is not problematising the oppressive nor negative character of this power, but is rather questioning its assumed neutrality as subject empowering mechanism. As Cruikshank argues:

> The operations of power which promote subjectivity are neither benign or neutral. Critically examining the will to empower requires recognizing that despite the good, even radical, intentions of those who seek to empower others, relations of empowerment are in fact relations of power in and of themselves. (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 70)

The problematisation of this neutrality emanates in two forms. *On the one hand*, it emphasises the inextricable relation between the production of specific opportunities by/in the process of empowerment and the exercise of power upon the way in which a subject ought to understand or behave oneself in order to be able (to enable oneself) to seize these opportunities. If the subject, in other words, understands oneself in this specific way, she or he will be able to seize the opportunities for empowerment. *On the other hand*, it problematises the

presentation of the assumed self-understanding as coinciding with a natural, universal (and hence neutral) characterisation of the human being. The presentation of the solicited (and not natural) self-understanding as a universal truth (i.e., assuming that every free empowering individual naturally identifies with the proposed self-understanding) is undermined by its presentation as a particular and very determinate correlate of a particular and determinate power exercise in the process of empowerment. Both of these problematisations are summarised in Hunter's argument that "the capacity to choose for oneself is not therefore itself chosen by oneself" but it is, instead, "the product of specific historical disciplines of self-problematisation and a particular kind of 'work of the self on the self'" (1994, p. 174). This clarifies the critical point of the process of empowerment by emphasizing that empowerment indeed implies power and determines a very specific exercise of freedom, proposed as a choice which, in fact, is not chosen itself. Re-formulated in terms of the assumed changes, the critical point implies that empowerment for participatory development is not registering changes, but creating them, emanating in a very specific profile of the *participating and empowering self*. The description and outline of this profile will be deployed in the further paragraph, along the analysis of three concrete empowerment strategies. These strategies, moreover, indicate that empowerment does not only represent a mere abstract or ideal rationality epitomizing the higher principles of empowerment and development, but that it is also associated with concrete programmes and techniques.

Empowerment's Strategies

Interests and Needs

A first generally adopted strategy in the process of empowerment consists of the assessment of needs and priorities of and by those for whom empowerment is initiated. This empowerment strategy not only instantiates a particular (historical) understanding and self-problematisation of the individual. It also provokes the establishment and realisation of this process of (self-)problematisation. The strategy that is referred to here, provoking a certain "problematisation" encompasses the detection and assessment of "powerless" or "weak" people's needs and interests; it comprises "listening to the voices of the poor" (Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher, & Koch-Schulte, 1999, p. 6), looking at the problem from their perspective instead of from the expert perspective. In the name of participation and empowerment this strategy criticises commonly used but deficient expert approaches in

favour of an alternative, reversed approach, starting instead from a problem definition (and, furthermore, also solution) by the local people. The implied reversal or change is twofold: "to enable the poor and weak to express their reality" and "to put that reality first" (Chambers, 1995, pp. 35-36) or to recognize the strength of indigenous knowledge. More specifically, by this strategy empowerment aims at enabling local people to detect and express their problems, to formulate their needs and priorities or, as Bachrach and Botwinick (1992, p. 31) argue: "participation [and empowerment] facilitate individuals' discovering who they are and what they want." Through the strategy of assessment of needs and interests, empowerment leads to a cultivation of self-discovery and self-description. In opening up specific opportunities for self-description and self-discovery, empowerment cultivates and/or produces a certain self-understanding of the subject, namely as a subject of individual needs and interests which can be discovered and described in categories offered by the tools and the methods of the empowerment strategy itself.

Tools and methods accounting for this empowerment strategy are for example: participatory poverty assessments (PPA), participatory rural appraisals (PRA) and – to mention just some of them - their "siblings" DRP (diagnostico rurale participativo), MARP (méthode accéleré de recherche participative), RAP (Rapid Assessment Procedures), REA (Rapid Ethnographic Assessment). As clusters of methods they comprise and combine different (overlapping) tools to collect and analyse data for assessment or appraisal. These tools include drawing, mapping (making visual representations), ranking, listing, scoring, observing, comparing, diagramming (seasonal calendars, flow and causal diagrams, bar charts, Venn diagrams), interviewing, village meetings, participant observation, and so forth (Chambers, 1997, p. 102ff; Narayan, et al., 1999, p. 14ff; Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesh, 2000, p. 306). The tools not only claim to be able to address local people, a deficiency criticized in the expert tools (such as large-scale surveys, household questionnaires, economic profile sketches), which are often based on written and verbal language, containing highly culturally biased and/or gendered concepts, denying or ignoring local sensibilities. The participatory empowerment tools also claim to be capable of providing detailed accounts of what local people want, what they think, of how they assume problems, in short, of their *real* needs and interests.

The World Bank, for example, has conducted a large scale participatory research, reported in a three-volume book *Voices of the*

Poor, "bringing together the experiences of over 60,000 poor women and men[3] from all over the world, entirely based on the realities of poor people" (Narayan et al., 2000, p. 1). Methodologically, the research combines comparisons of standardised quantitative measures which "by definition do not reveal location specific variations neither the more subjective elements of poor people's experience," with participatory approaches which "have proven to be effective in capturing the multi-dimensional and culturally contingent aspects" and which, "though difficult to quantify, provide valuable insights into the multiple meanings, dimensions, and experiences" of the primary stakeholders (Narayan et al., 1999, pp. 15-16). The open-ended methods of semi- or un-structured interviews, discussion groups, and a whole variety of visualisation methods[4] aim at collecting data, which are assumed to represent directly and correctly people's most different and most individual needs and interests. Besides representing needs and interests, they also, however, "interpellate" or invite people to problematise, to understand themselves in a specific way: as holders of individual needs and interests and as being capable of detecting and describing oneself in terms of needs and interests. The change or difference that might be installed with these participatory methods and tools are then formulated in terms of power shifts. In reality, however, they actually take shape in a renewed, created (and hence, not neutral or natural) form of self-understanding and self-problematisation.

Chambers (1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1997) provides a large number of other examples of participatory approaches, tools and methods, which equally claim to empower people by assessing and appraising their needs and interests, by interpellating them to assess and appraise their needs and interests. He gives a more explicit clarification of how assessments and appraisals of needs and interests are assumed to lead to people's empowerment:

> The challenge is then so to introduce and use PRA that the weaker are identified and empowered and equity is served. Fortunately, the tools available suit this task. Sequences, such as participatory mapping leading to household listing to well-being ranking and then to livelihood analysis, can identify groups distinguished according to local values. Focus group discussions can then be convened to enable different categories of people, including and especially the disadvantaged, to identify their priorities and interests. The contrasts [between different categories] can be sharp. Differentiating by groups, interests and gender can empower the poorer and women in several ways. It can give them

> collective awareness and confidence to confront others and argue their case. (Chambers, 1994b, p. 1445)

Chambers substantiates his promotion and support for empowerment and participation by arguing that the assessment of people's needs and interests reveal differences, which yields the basis for discussing these differences and for re-considering power attached to these different positions. According to our analysis, however, the differences in needs and interests are not simply emerging from an assessment conducted by the different involved people. By and in the specific constellation, characterisations and legitimisations of the tools and methods of empowerment, these differences are, instead, somehow produced. They are cultivated and as such considered to be capital resources for empowerment. Difference and diversity (in needs and interests) are, in other words, capitalized as resources for the process of empowerment. Instead of being a major hindrance in the delineation and determination of manageable, fair and equal, and empowering development programmes, differences are considered to offer a basis for discussions on power and, hence, for power redistribution and empowerment. Differences are no longer considered as obstacles but they are, instead, assumed to offer opportunities for the satisfaction of needs and interests. As Cornwall argues:

> In practical development terms, this implies more of a role for participatory approaches to explore, analyze and work with differences that people identify with, rather than for identifying the 'needs' of predetermined categories of people. (2000, p. 28)

The empowerment strategy of needs assessment and interests appraisal is nothing more than entirely oriented towards capturing the opportunities offered by differences and, hence, it perfectly resonates the actual development (and/or participation) assumption and goal of making a difference or, of "mak[ing] more of a difference" (Cornwall, 2000, p. 29).

As a strategy for empowerment, the assessment or appraisal of people's needs and interests involves the use of tools cultivating or mobilizing people not only to identify their needs and interests, but also to identify *with* their own needs and interests, different from anyone else's, as a major capital or resource for empowerment and, furthermore, also for development. Put differently, individual differences in needs, priorities and interests, gained through individual self-description and self-disclosure, are not merely to be observed but they are, instead, produced in order to be managed. This implies that people *are* not simply different, but through difference revealing self-

descriptions and self-disclosures, they are mobilised to make more of their differences. People are mobilised to produce differences, to make their differences (their different needs and interests) manageable and to understand themselves as holders of different needs and interests. In this sense, the empowerment tools and methods for assessing needs and interests, produce a certain kind of subjectivity, with a specific kind of freedom, namely the freedom to assess one's own different needs and interests.

Assets and Capabilities

A second interrelated strategy for empowerment and participation involves the development of assets and capabilities:

> Empowerment has to be a multifaceted, multidimensional process involving the mobilisation of resources and people's capacities to enter the transition towards sustainable development. (Singh & Titi, 1995, p. 14)

The assets and capabilities, mediated by processes of empowerment and participation, are not only assumed to play an essential role in the determination of one's individual needs, priorities, and interests. They are also considered to enable individuals to alleviate their own needs, to satisfy their own interests, to realise their own priorities (and, hence, to make a difference or to induce a change for development).

Assets stimulated and developed in the process of empowerment refer to "a broad range of tangible and potential resources, both material and social, that individuals, households, and communities draw from in times of need or crisis" (Narayan et al., 1999, p. 39). From these assets, Narayan, Stern, and Nakani argue:

> Such assets, including land, housing, livestock, savings, and jewellery – enable people to withstand shocks and to expand their horizon of choices. The extreme limitation of people's assets constrains their capacity to negotiate fair deals for themselves and increases their vulnerability. (2002, p. 11)

In line with their definitions assets, thus, are of a tangible, determinable and, hence, manageable nature. They can be managed in view of a better development. Empowerment emphasises the importance of the management and control of assets and resources by the people themselves, by indicating that this control and management can provide important conditions for the development of capabilities. On the one hand, so the argument goes, the extension of assets and commodities increases one's choices and, hence, also augments one's freedom to choose and to act, enhancing capabilities of acting, planning, problem-

solving. Control, management, and maximisation of assets, on the other hand, also involve some personal and social capabilities, such as analysing and planning, the capacity to organise, to produce means of living, the capacity to develop a sense of identity.

Contrary to assets, capabilities are defined as being inherent in people (Narayan et al., 2002, p. 11). According to Chambers they indicate:

> What people are capable of being and doing. They are means to livelihood and fulfilment; and their enlargement through learning, practice, training and education are means to better living and well-being. (1997, pp. 10-11)

Capabilities are, following World Bank accounts, to be divided into different categories: human capabilities include good health, education, and production or other life-enhancing skills; social capabilities include social belonging, relations of trust, a sense of identity, values, and the capacity to organise; political capability includes the capacity to represent oneself or others, access information (Narayan et al., 2002, p. 11). Capabilities are considered, on the one hand, to serve the assessment and appraisal of needs and interests. On the other hand, the acquirement, or better extension and strengthening of capabilities is considered as being essential for empowerment and development as such. Thereby, participants in the process of empowerment are not considered to be completely devoid of capabilities and skills. They are rather regarded as disadvantaged and, therefore, not able to expose, mobilise, or use and strengthen capabilities. In other words, rather than being without capabilities, empowerment assumes people to have limited capabilities which, hence, through the process of empowerment, have to be maximised and/or released (Rahman, 1995, p. 25). What goes for the strategy of needs and interests also applies to this strategy of assets and capabilities: the assumptions on assets and capabilities represent a certain understanding about individuals, which not only involves but which, by means of particular tools and methods, also produces a certain kind of subjectivity.

The tools that are proposed to release capabilities and to produce and maximise assets (thereby also establishing the production of a certain kind of subjectivity) are very similar to the tools for appraisal and assessment of needs and interests. These tools are above all conceived as instruments mobilising people to participate in practices which are assumed to have a liberating influence on capabilities and assets. Participatory mapping and modelling, for instance, are considered to allow local people to express their knowledge and insights

on problems, needs, priorities. The same goes for listing, counting, estimating, comparing, ranking, scoring, and diagramming. Through these tools, people are assumed to show themselves capable of expressing and sharing their knowledge and experiences. These expressions, furthermore, are considered to constitute a basis for analysing and planning, for releasing capabilities to plan and to act. These assumptions on the exposed empowerment tools are based on the arguments that local people analyse, rank, and score problems and opportunities as they perceive them; that they work out their preferences; that they plan and undertake actions to solve problems, to realise preferences (Rahman, 1995, p. 25). The strategies, activities, and methods that are brought into action to mobilise people's capabilities are, moreover, based on the principle of people's active involvement (participation!). Involvement or active participation, in other words, is assumed to suffice for people to discover and release their own capabilities that, on their turn, guarantee the provision and increase of assets and of control and management of these assets. The outlined tools are, hence, not instructive, in a sense that they directly teach specific required capabilities. The tools are, on the contrary, only engaged as initiators of involvement, and not as direct creators of capabilities. Via their only condition of active involvement, the tools and activities are conceived as providers of situations, of opportunities which enable or facilitate the release of capabilities and, hence, the maximisation of assets.

The empowering approach towards capabilities indicates several changes, mostly formulated in terms of reversals. On the one hand, the approach implies an important professional reversal: from expert to facilitator (Chambers, 1995, pp. 31-32; 1997, pp. 33ff.). On the other hand, it involves an equally important reversal in the conceptualisation of learning: from extracting to empowering (Chambers, 1997, pp. 103, 154). What is actually emphasised by the indicated changes or reversals is that knowledge and capabilities are not longer extracted from or imposed upon people but that, instead, the people themselves are enabled to learn or to acquire them. The capabilities as such are not considered as being very important. What counts, or what is cultivated is, instead, the process of acquiring capabilities or, in other words, the process of learning to learn. Empowerment, in this sense, is not a question of obtaining a fixed set of capabilities which enable, for once and for all, to deal with every situation in every environment. Empowerment, instead, identifies with a never ending process of continual and permanent strengthening and acquiring capabilities for

ever new situations. Not the specific characteristics of a particular capability or of a set of basic capabilities determine one's empowerment, but the acquisition of capabilities as such. For example, not the capabilities of mapping or drawing and their matching methods as such matter, but the fact that the acquisition of those capabilities enables to express and analyse one's own reality and to plan actions for a change. What matters is not *what* one learns, but the learning to learn as a basic attitude in itself. The most important drive for processes of empowerment and participation more generally, hence, are the continual *acquisition* of skills and capabilities, in order to strengthen, provide and/or invoke people's ability to deal with a permanently changing environment. The same goes for the enlargement or extension of assets. Not the assets themselves nor how much of them one produces or maximises reveals to be important (since they differ anyway for every individual and every situation). Only the process of continual maximisation of assets itself is really considered as relevant. Empowerment and participation cultivating a permanent acquisition of capabilities and a continuous maximisation of assets, in this sense, can never be finished. Or, as Bröckling (2003, p. 8) states, one is never empowered enough.

The empowerment strategy of strengthening assets and capabilities in participatory development resonates (as did the emphasis on needs and interests) with a specific way of (self-)understanding and (self-) problematisation of the individual. The outlined strategy of empowerment is namely designed to mobilise people to be oriented towards a permanent acquisition of capabilities and expansion of assets, to identify as someone who continually seeks to acquire skills and capabilities. The strategy with its different tools does not rely on coercion; people are not forced to acquire assets and capabilities. The strategy, on the contrary, relies on people's cultivated motivations and initiatives to acquire and strengthen assets and capabilities. By *enabling* (and not forcing) people to enhance their skills, capabilities, assets, and commodities and by presenting this as a best (and only possible) way to deal with a permanently changing environment, to develop (and for a lot of people: to survive), people are at least interpellated to actively participate and to mobilise themselves in view of acquiring skills and maximising assets, in other words, to behave as entrepreneurs of themselves (Masschelein & Simons, 2002, p. 595).

Partnerships

Unlike the possible impression of a rather one-sided emphasis on individuality and on a specific kind of (self-)understanding of the individual in the previously presented analysis of empowerment strategies, the disclosed and analysed empowerment realities do not only affect the individual as individual. The exposed affection also involves a social component, which is briefly illuminated in the analysis of a third empowerment strategy: the strategy of establishing partnerships. The short analysis of the partnership strategy exposes how individual self-understanding and self-problematisation is also always related to an understanding of the social, or to an understanding and problematisation of the individual according to the social (the individual as a social individual). The analysis, in other words, aims at specifying how the strategies of empowerment also cultivate a certain self-understanding of the individual in a social perspective, of the individual as a social individual. The strategy of partnership is, first of all, based on an assumption of change, more specifically formulated in terms of reversed relationships, initially between the donors (experts, professionals, outsiders) and recipients (counterparts, targets, beneficiaries, insiders), and more generally between all the people (partners) participating in the empowerment process. The reversal of relationships is in literature related to different aspects: reversal from top-down to bottom-up, reversing (as softening or flattening) the hierarchies, reversal from suspicion and reserve to confidence and fun (Chambers, 1994a, p. 1264). The reversal on which the concept of partnership is based is even more radical. It assumes to reverse (ultimately aiming at its expulsion) the dichotomy underlying the previously common, but now deficient perceptions and conceptualisations of development relationships. Instead of dichotomising, everyone involved in the process of development (on an individual as well as an institutional level) is considered to be an equal partner, related to the other in a partnership. Crewe and Harrison define partnership as "a process of cooperation between equals" (1998, pp. 70-71), whereby "those on the receiving end of aid are portrayed as if they were on equal terms: they are partners – with implicitly the same objectives, and the same ability to articulate these as the donors."

Partnership, according to Crewe and Harrison, emerges as a language shift simultaneously with the appearance of empowerment as an important object for development. The establishment of partnerships is assumed to be one of the more important, effective, and genuine vehicles[5] to initiate, support, or stimulate empowerment. This

assumption not only counts for the former experts of development, but is assumed to resonate with the needs and assessments of all equal partners, such as:

> *The Poor People*
>
> Poor people know their needs, problems and priorities. However, they almost always state that they need partnerships with governments to solve many livelihood and community problems in equal partnership. Equality, however, does not translate into doing half the work, but rather a partnership of mutual respect, with each partner contributing resources appropriate to particular problems and contexts. (Narayan et al., 2000, p. 212)
>
> *International Organisations (as witnesses a quote of the OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)*
>
> Acceptance of the partnership model is one of the most positive changes we are proposing in the framework for development co-operation. In a partnership, development co-operation does not try to do things for developing countries and their people, but with them. It must be seen as a collaborative effort to help them increase their capacities to do things for themselves. In a true partnership, local actors should progressively take the lead, while external partners back their efforts to assume greater responsibility for their own development. (OECD, cited in Crewe & Harrison, 1998, p. 70)
>
> *Supranational structures or groups of countries, such as the European Community and the ACP (Africa-Carribean-Pacific) group in the "ACP-EU partnership agreement signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000:"*
>
> The new Agreement proposes a global strategy for development, which will require the Community, Member States and ACP partners to work together to establish a consolidated and operational cooperation framework. (ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, 2000, p. 8)

Besides, also the NGO's, governments, civil society, local communities, individuals themselves testify in literature to the same and equal desirability and positive functions of partnerships. Partnerships are assumed to achieve sustainability (contrary to former approaches), to be able to mobilise skills or responsibilities, and to enhance self-reliance through capacity building (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, p. 70). Partnerships, in other words, are assumed to directly lead to empowerment, to offer the perfect vehicle for partners to be empowered, or better, to empower themselves. Unlike the emphasis on differences in needs and interests and differences between individuals, the strategy

of partnerships presupposes and, thereby, establishes a specific equality among individuals: they are all equal in being different and in desiring partnerships for dealing with these differences, with each other and with development.

We believe that the establishment of partnerships as a strategy for participation and empowerment, cultivates and mobilises self-understanding and self-problematisation (of the individual as social invididual) in the same way as the formerly analysed strategies do. Partnerships as an empowerment strategy invite the involved to act and behave, and to relate to each other as equal partners in a particular way. Behaving as a partner, relating to others in a partnership, and considering the others as equal partner imply certain very specific commitments on three different fronts: for the partner[6] towards him or herself, towards the other as partner, and within the relationships the individual establishes as a partner.

The first commitment of the partner towards him or herself is described in partnership literature in terms of a very specific profile, implying specific qualifications and engagements. The "ACP-EU Partnership Agreement" as a very expressive example of the implementation of the partnership strategy lists several features characterising a partner profile:

> Actors shall, where appropriate:
> be informed and involved in consultation;
> be provided with financial resources;
> be involved in the implementati on of cooperation projects and programmes;
> be provided with capacity-building support in critical areas in order to reinforce the capabilities of these actors.

Other examples of partnership promoting strategies and/or projects define, besides some general characteristics, specific roles for different kinds of partners. Core partners, in-country partners, additional partners (Reich, 2002, p. 4), for example, are defined and determined and, hence, are inclined to define and understand, and problematise themselves, as holders or representatives of specific characteristics and specific roles. The second commitment concerns the way in which partners mutually see, understand and, based hereupon, approach and consider each other as colleague partners. Also these possible ways of mutual consideration are very much determined and restricted by the above mentioned determinations or classifications, laid down and approved for by all partners at the official or officialised start of a

partnership. Partnership strategies are indeed very often inaugurated or officially announced and established. Inaugurations or announcements of partnerships, thereby, circumscribe a third kind of commitment for the partners: the commitment to establish a certain kind of partner relationship. The ACP-EU Partnership for example is officially established and sealed with an Agreement, signed by all partners and assigning several articles which specify the principles and provisions of the commitment. Although the establishment of a partnership is not always that official, it nevertheless always implies an expressed commitment as a kind of contract between the involved partners. The contract form of the partnership strategy, in this sense, determines the form of the relationship between partners, whereby this determination creates a certain space for the partners to relate to each other, opening up certain possibilities for developing and attaining specified goals. At the same time, however, this determination also restricts or excludes other possibilities for relating, for establishing and/or forming social relationships. The partnership strategy for empowerment, in that sense, designates a specific way of organising social relationships, whereby it also mobilises people and groups of people to understand themselves as partners and their relationships in terms of partnerships. In fact, as partners people are mobilised to be interested in establishing 'equal' partner relationships, in the same way as they are mobilised to be oriented towards the assessment and the satisfaction of different needs and interests, by means of strengthened and/or acquired assets and capabilities. Equal partner relationships are simply assumed to provide the best conditions for making more of a difference, for bargaining one's needs and interests, for strengthening and/or releasing capabilities, for empowerment and, hence for development. Looking at social relationships as partnerships, implies their consideration in terms of contracts and agreements, that is, as relations of exchange between independent, autonomous, free and responsible empowered subjects, who are able to fully express their needs and to take into account their different kinds of capital. Looking at social relations in this sense is looking at them as calculable, calculating and calculated relations (which is, we repeat, a very particular way of approaching others and ourselves). In this sense, one is mobilised to understand one's own social relationships in terms of partnerships, not because partnerships are imposed, but because partnerships are assumed to offer the best assets and conditions for organising one's life as a ('capitalist') enterprise, oriented towards

maximisation of assets and capabilities (one's capital) in view of satisfaction of needs and interests.

Empowering Participation: Does it Really Make a Difference?

We have tried to explore what it means for participation (and participatory development and empowerment) to make a difference: a) what realities are produced by a particular discursive horizon and particular techniques and strategies which promise to make a difference, and b) how these practices affect the individual subject within these realities.

We first explored the promise of participation to make a difference. This revealed that participation indeed represents a change or a difference for development, formulated and conceptualised in terms of empowerment as a changing of power relations. With this different conceptualisation pointing at making a difference in power relations, participation, at least, installs a difference in language, it establishes a different vocabulary for development. This language shift, however, also brings about other differences, distinguishing the empowerment and participation approach from other, former approaches.

Whereas the most important difference participatory empowerment promises to make relates to a shift in power relations, the analysis revealed that this shift does not comprise an increase of individual and a decrease of external power but that it involves, instead, a transformation of power. This transformation of power involves a very specific mode of self-understanding and self-prolematisation, appearing in and reproduced by different strategies and techniques, involving or making possible a specific practice of freedom. The analysis of several strategies and techniques specifies this particular practice of freedom as a cultivation of self-descriptions and self-discovery of one's needs and interests, as the mobilisation of a continual and never-ending learning process for individuals in view of maximising their assets and capabilities, and as a stimulation of the establishment of partner-relationships between individuals and between individuals and institutions (as active agents of change, entrepreneurs of themselves). The analysis of the strategies, in other words, indicates how power relations are determined in the process of empowerment. It tries to make clear that the power relations re-produced by empowerment processes are not opening up general opportunities, involving natural ways of bringing freedom into practice. Our analysis indicates that

empowerment, on the contrary, involves the production of particular and very determined opportunities, implying a specific self-understanding of the subject. Although the opportunities offered by and in processes of empowerment are not imposed or enforced, the creation of opportunities for the individual to behave and to understand oneself in a particular way, also always closes down opportunities for other behaviours and other ways of being. Although the specific exercise of power displayed in the process of empowerment is by no means to be interpreted as an obligation (to take the proposed opportunities) or a prohibition (to leave other opportunities), it always somehow implies a strong prescription. People do not have to participate, they do not have to empower or develop themselves in order to be empowered. They are never forced, *but* if they do not take the offered and cultivated opportunities, they (will understand that they) lack development, they miss development opportunities, which obviously implies a threat. This threat gives a quite imperative reason for seizing the determined opportunities of empowerment, if only by the fact that for a lot of people life and/or surviving appears as depending on it. This means that empowerment mobilises people to empower themselves, not by obliging them, but by relying on the assumption that they owe it to themselves. Or, as Bröckling argues (2003, p. 13), empowerment relies on the assumption that people cannot (longer) be held responsible for their poverty, for their own underdevelopment, but they are still assumed to be very much responsible for their development. As quoted by Jackson in Bröckling (2003, p. 13): "You are not responsible for being down, but you are responsible for getting up." If empowerment and participation make a difference, this adage might represent its clearest definition. It would imply that empowerment indeed changes power and/or power relations, but only by replacing its focus and actually not by fundamentally increasing power. The difference made by empowerment, in other words, does not concern a reduction of the power exercise, but only a transformation of it whereby this transformation takes also a very specific shape. The same argument is stressed in Cruikshank's citation:

> Understood as a means of combating exclusion and powerlessness, relations of empowerment are, in fact, akin to relations of government [power] that both constitute and fundamentally transform the subject's capacity to act; rather than merely increasing that capacity, empowerment alters and shapes it. (1999, p. 71)

The analysis of the difference(s) assumed to be made by participation, *casu quo* empowerment, has opened up a specific perspective for considering empowerment/participation, as involving a specific mode of self-understanding and self-problematisation. This analysis has not been made to denounce the indicated power mode implied by this self-understanding and self-problematisation. Neither has it aimed at mitigating or even deconstructing their claim to make a difference. The critical analysis has not been oriented towards unmasking participation and empowerment as violently subjectifying forms of the power exercise, towards denouncing them as perverse (transformed) forms of the power exercise. The article has, on the contrary, attempted to focus upon the interpretation and the putting into perspective of the rather vague claim of making a difference. The analysis has tried to indicate and clarify the outlined power transformation in order to allow the question to appear, whether we want to accept this specific transformation or not? We therefore conclude with the question, not whether we want to be empowered at all, whether we want to empower ourselves. The article only questions whether we want to empower ourselves in the specific way offered by the strategies of empowerment? Or, in terms of difference, in how far does the outlined difference accord to what we really want, to what we might expect from ourselves and not to what we are cultivated to expect from ourselves?

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1. Exemplary accounts of definitions and determinations of empowerment, as it appears in literature, are given by Bookman & Morgan, 1988, p. 4; Cleaver, 1995, p. 5; Narayan, Chambers, Shah, and Petesh, 2002, pp. v, vi;

Oakley, 1995, p. 22; Onyx & Benton, 1995, p. 48; Dimensions of empowerment, 1998.

2. The presented analysis of power and empowerment is largely based on Foucault's account of power and on his notion of 'governmentality' indicating combinations or 'assemblages' of forms of government and certain mentalities (or forms of knowledge), see Foucault, 1978, 1981, 1982; Bröckling, Krasmann, & Lemke, 2000; Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1999.

3. See http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices/reports.htm

4. See the World Bank Participation Sourcebook, 1996, pp. 181-204.

5. This refers to the strong moral dimension, inhering the concept of partnership (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, p. 70).

6. The indication of 'partner' in this strategy takes into account not only individual subject partners, but also institutional partners or groups of individuals, of nations, of NGO's, and so forth, which in their function of partner are, nevertheless, addressed and comprised as individualised entities.

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