Strengthening Political Participation as a Policy Issue in Finland

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Summary

The article is an effort to analyse one particular policy-making process. The case deals with the policy of strengthening political participation in Finland. The data is based on two recent policy programs on developing democracy, the first between the years 1997-2002 and the second between 2003 and 2007. The data consists of policy documents, reports, and the parliamentary documents connected to these policies. In the first part of the article the author discusses alternative delineation of the policy-making, in other words, how policy processes usually look like. The second part is devoted to the question of policy-making and information. Policy-makers use different types of knowledge, political, economical, research and so forth when designing the policies. The third part is a study of the policy-making concerning political participation in Finland between the years 1998-2007. During this time period there have been three different policies and a number of measures. However, the concrete steps seem modest. The fourth part sums up the findings and connects the case study to the conceptual debate on policy-making.

Key words: Finland, policy making, democracy improvement, political participation, local councils

1. Introduction

Policy-making in governments requires information and analytic skills. Seasoned civil servants often possess these skills, but policy analysis is also done by politicians and outside experts. Who the actual policy-makers are is often an empirical question requiring a comprehensive analysis of the identification, formulation and implementation of particular policies. A central,

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related question concerns the nature of policy-making. A narrow interpretation of question of policy-makers, i.e. a formal model, fits better with the rational model of policy-making, whereas the more actors, the more the process becomes a power game rather than rational analysis. The question of "who makes the public policies" has recently been touched upon by a number of authors (Radin 2000, Colebatch 2006). At the same time and in relation to this, the question of the proper model of the policy-process has been asked by others (deLeon 1999, Howard 2005). Public policy-making aims at rationally solving societal problems, but the means to do this are not necessarily corresponding with a rational model of decision-making. In an interesting way, identifying the real actors is not merely an empirical task but entangles normative values too. Hence the so called stagist model of the policy process is defended despite the contradicting empirical observations because of its value in delineating the politico-administrative system as it ought to be.

The case deals with the policy of strengthening political participation in Finland. The data is based on two recent policy programs on developing democracy, the first between the years 1997-2002 and the second between 2003 and 2007. The data consists of policy documents, reports, and the parliamentary documents connected to these policies. Prior to that I shall briefly discuss the alternative delineation of the policy-making, in other words, how policy processes usually look like.

The article proceeds in the following way: the second chapter is devoted to the question of policy-making and information. Policy-makers use different types of knowledge, political, economical, research and so forth when designing the policies. Policy-making is however not merely combining these elements but rather involves choosing between the elements. The third chapter provides a study on the policy-making concerning strengthening political participation in Finland under the years 1998-2007. During this time period there have been three different policies and a number of measures. However, the concrete steps seem modest. How can this be explained? The fourth chapter sums up the findings and connects the case study to the conceptual debate on policy-making.

2. Policy analysis: what and by whom?

Public policy-making is about making authoritative decisions, which often either regulate or creates incentives for the civil society and/or the economic system (Laver 1986, Pollitt 2003). The fact that the decisions are, at the end of the day, made by authorities, the legislatures in particular, does not mean that it is only the formal actors which participate in the policy-making. Governments require information on both policy problems and pol-

icy solutions. This is the raw material for making public policies. Secondly, politicians are in many ways bound by the public opinion and by an aggregation of various, at times contradictory, interests.

There have been a number of efforts to see public policy-making as a more or less rational decision-making (Parsons 1995). The question of rationality has for decades been the central issue for modelling decision-making. A number of rational models urge persons in charge, usually officials, to evaluate the costs and benefits or different reforms. On the other side we have models which point to the political nature of decision-making, to the constraints and obstacles of information seeking. Policy-making is also to a high degree a question of consulting and compromising. Models can be made to identify costs and benefits, but at the end of the day, policy-making involves negotiating and finding solutions, which the models do not provide. At the opposite end of the continuum there are models which neglect the orderly, logical sequence of policy-making and rather describe it as a garbage can (Parsons 1995).

To what extent governments then use external information? The literature suggests that problems can exist. Modern governments benefit from outside information to a growing degree. In fact, ministries and agencies do not live in isolation but usually make up their own policy communities (Kettunen & Kiviniemi 2006). External information can consist of different kinds of perspectives on the policy in question.

Political parties play a particular, assumingly ideological role in preparing public policies. In a conventional way we could say that competition between political ideologies and victory in elections shows the way to reforms, but in reality ideology is but one factor amongst others. This can be arranged for example by arranging committees which consider various aspects of the issue and finally reach a compromise on the issue. New governments also publish a program, which includes the most important political goals for the election period. Finally, politicians also have the opportunity to discuss the policies in the legislature.

Interest groups, close to parties, have a narrower aspect to policies, representing particular clients, or constituency. Interests groups as such are a necessary element in the government-society-interaction, as they literally structure the various interests. The adverse side of this interaction is that interest-groups are not in equal position towards the government and thus the aggregation of interests may easily become biased.

The research community plays a somewhat different role. As Aaron Wildawsky (1989) formulated it, the research community can be seen as "speaking truth to power". It is, however, not obvious that the formal policy-makers will see the scientific input as "truth". The research community can

be seen as internally divided and seen from the traditional twofold politicians-bureaucrats-division, it is the latter that already represents knowledge. "Speaking truth" can also have a legitimising effect. If research results say that Finland should belong to NATO then it is easier for the advocates of the membership to argue for this option. The government can argue that its policy is based on independent evidence, or that its policy has met with the expert seal of approval (Parsons 1995, 393). We however live in an age of information overload. Thus the problem with research might be that the pace of government work does not digest the analytic reports made by the scientific community. As Heineman et al (1990, 62) put it, analysts lack a power base, the experience of experts in the policy process tends to be too weak *vis-à-vis* the political and bureaucratic interests. In addition we must point to the growing importance of EU, and other multinational organizations.

Finally, we can argue that to a certain extent the targets of public policies, enterprises and individuals, also appear in a role of policy-makers. Colebatch (2006, 16) argues that in for example anti-smoking policy the impacts are not all accomplished by "the policy-makers", but reflect a gradual transformation of social values of which the articulation of anti-smoking policies was an outcome as much as it was a cause. The work of changing policy had been accomplished by a range of actors, not all of them paid and acting under direction, and the policy which emerged had been the outcome of their diverse efforts over the years,

All in all, this interaction between the various actors produces the public policies. Making public policies does not resemble assembling machines. Nor is it characterized by constant conflict and antagonism. Good societal solutions need to be feasible; usually, there is an existing implementation structure and support for the policies. As Kingdon (1984) argues only proposals that are feasible, approved by the ruling elites and resistant to future constrains survive.

How public policies are made is also an elementary question from a normative viewpoint.

Democracy as the rule of the people by the people demands that problem definitions and solutions follow the majority's view. Politically this paradigm is incorporated in government programs, which set the targets for the mandate period. The principles of democracy require that different interests are given equal access and that research information is impartial. In addition, policy-makers often have to choose between different alternative sources of information. Interest groups advocate their own view, political parties may emphasise ideologies, and research its own views. Policy-making is about aggregating interests. Although the formal actors, politicians in particular, would not be the sole policy-makers, we would from a democratic viewpoint demand that they are the decisive ones. This requirement has been ques-

tioned by a number of researchers. A corporatist model suggests that strong interest-groups of the economic sphere capture the political actors and leave the national parliaments the role of rubber-stamp. A Marxist theory questions as well the independent role of the state (Parsons 1995). As often, a reliable way to analyze this issue is an empirical one. This is because the policies and situations can vary. At the end of the day, public policies are collective solutions to collective problems. Thus the challenge of any decision-making is to assess the pros and cons of alternative decisions.

The politico-administrative rules of the game give a particular role to the politicians. They are at the end of the day the gate-keepers of the collective decision-making controlling the law process and budget. The interaction takes place both before the parliamentary process, and within the process. A realistic conclusion from this is that research and other influences to policy making play a role only if they are furthered by politicians. The adverse side of the mechanism is that some issues lacking the political backing end up in a garbage can.

In the following I take the analysis towards empirical observations. It is impossible to give a full account of the policy process; rather the practice consists of myriads of specific processes. The main questions in the following parts are firstly, how the policy in question is formulated, who are the actors participating in the formulation and finally, how are the results of the policy evaluated and used for reformulating the policy. Democracy as a policy area is not typical for government activities; rather it is concerned with the government itself. However, as the preliminary analysis shows the Finnish government has had an active role in improving democracy. Thus there is good opportunity to see in this particular case how and by whom the policy-making is accomplished.

3. Case study: improving democracy

Policy can be defined as a line of action. Thus democracy as such is not a policy but covers research, the status of relationship between the government and the people and so forth. Thus in the following the explicit focus is on the improvement of democracy. Even this can be an academic goal: to find ways of transforming the system in order to make it more democratic. But the term policy, as above, refers to public, authoritative line of action. Indicators of this are for example whether the issue is on the political agenda, and whether there are goals and measures connected to the issue. All political systems are in some way concerned with democracy, but it is a different issue to initiate government measures in order to improve democracy. This, however, has been the case in Finland the last ten years and the following is an analysis of

this very policy. In other words, what kind of policy-analysis has there been in the background and in connection to the improvement of democracy?

The policy

In the following the analysis focuses mainly on the government activities in developing citizen participation. Democracy as such is a wide area and for example political science as a discipline is very much focused on democracy. Dahl (1998, 38) defines democracy as requiring five conditions: i.e. democracy provides opportunities for effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising final control over the agenda and inclusion of adults. The question is thus, to what extent can the government enhance and improve these virtues, and citizen participation, and how to do it.

In recent years, the Finnish government has been engaged in developing democracy. The development has focused on both the state and local government levels. The co-operation with academics has been very close in the process. However, when it involves local governments, the state cannot directly impose its view on democracy, since the local governments have an autonomous position.

In order to introduce a policy, the government has to have a reason for it. In Finland, as in many western countries, the reason is the diminishing interest by the people in politics. Democratic societies have particular features but in recent years we have been witnessing a common trend of weakening democracy. The citizens have been less engaged in politics, in party activities and in polls (Pesonen & Riihinen 2002). However, even this formulation leaves plenty of scope for different measures. The scope and focus of democracy can be on the citizens, elections and the input side of the process, but also on the government, and the governance side of the process. Briefly put, a democracy improving policy is about narrowing the gap between the decision-makers and the citizens, bringing the two closer. This definition, however, leaves plenty of leeway for the measures. In the selection of measures, it is important to assess the problems in a proper way. At the same time the measures ought to be feasible. Defining measures for developing citizen participation faces the dilemma of which way to proceed. Government activity cannot solve everything. In principle it is a question of choices.

When it comes to improving democracy, it takes two to tango. In other words, one can encourage, mobilize and allocate resources to the citizens in order to bring them closer to the government, or, one can bring the politicians and bureaucrats closer to the citizens. The difficulty with the latter is that the political process is complicated and, from the viewpoint of state, one is more used to deal with NGO's and interest groups than individual citizens.

From these premises we can anticipate that the policy of democracy is not an easy challenge.

The study of democracy is closely linked to political science and its sub disciplines. So, the government, if it considered it appropriate, could find information, especially because at the time when the participation program was conducted, the Finnish universities were strongly focusing on democracy.

The process

Democracy has been high on the Finnish political agenda the last ten years. The main reason seems to be the declining turnout in municipal elections: from the peak of 1964 (79.5%) to 70.9% in the 1992 election, further 61.3% in 1996 and the record low turnout in year 2000 (55.9%). Although there has been some growth in the recent years, 58.6% in 2004, and 61.3% in 2008, the fear that the turnout would go under 50% has been the engine for bringing the issue of participation on the agenda.

First, there was a large program for citizen participation, which was mainly implemented by local government experimental projects in the years 1998-2002. The Participation program was evaluated and the evaluators made a number of proposals, which were also discussed by the Parliament. In the years 2003-2007 the government introduced for the first time four policy-programs. These were for the information society, for entrepreneurship, for work and unemployment and, finally, for citizen participation. The results of the participation program have been documented in a number of reports. This time, however, the parliament did not discuss the results. Finally, in 2007 the Ministry of Justice established a democracy unit for further work in this field.

Thus we can argue that there has been a policy for improving democracy all this time, or as I interpret it, there have been efforts to initiate a policy for participation. Looking at the measures as such, we see that there has been action, but the changes have been rather incremental. The issue has been on the agenda, but that is not a sufficient condition to make it a policy.

The Participation program

Looking the process more in detail we can start with the 1998-2002 program and the final evaluation of the program. The contents of the program mostly dealt with delivering support to local governments to develop direct participation. Most of the projects, however, worked with mobilizing citizens, young people in particular, and the contacts to local council members

or bureaucrats were marginal (Kettunen & Osenius 2002). After the program period was over, the Ministry of the Interior summed up the results and drew up the lines for future work (Valtioneuvosto 2002). The final part of the report (reference) focused on three types of proposals:

1. Legislative changes: a proposal to widen and strengthen the responsibilities of the municipalities.

2. Resources: electronic networks were seen to form an important basis for participation and thus it was suggested that distant, rural municipalities should be financially supported to build up the infrastructure.

3. Widening of and developing the participatory culture: the Ministry of the Interior should spread information of the best practices to all municipalities, The Ministry of Finance and the Municipal Central Association should take care of the education of civil servants in state and local administration, and Ministry of Education should prepare a program to be included in the primary schools' curricula.

As mentioned above, this report was dealt with by the Parliament in spring 2002. The process was relatively short, and in the following the focus is on the political interests, and how the Parliament reacted. As the process rules order, the report was firstly discussed by the MPs, thereafter sent to a committee and finally discussed a second time in the plenum. Politicians as policy-makers can have a plenty of roles. The government-opposition division, various personal profiles and so, affect the way the MPs behave. In the case of the Participation program, the debate was active and not highly partisan. Although the Parliament has the last word, the law proposals are de facto prepared by bureaucrats in different ministries (Wiberg 2006, 167). The comments of the MPs are made in publicity, in the plenum debate. This means that the media and audience can spread the information wider. Speeches were also directed towards fellow MPs and parties, the fact whether the MP belongs to a government or opposition party also played a role. From the 80 individual speeches the majority simply showed support for the issue. Below are some examples of speeches, in which alternative proposals or criticism was put forward (Eduskunta 2002a).

Biased emphasis

- We need a bridge between representative and direct democracy.

- The report does not give enough weight to the role of associations.

- The school programs should already have citizen education, no separate program is needed.

- The report focuses on municipal participation, but we need to increase democracy in the whole society.

- The political parties should play a more active role in the development of democracy; the existing projects are led by the state.

- We should use all means to increase the legitimacy of representative democracy.

- We need differences between the parties, ideological debates.

Insufficient measures

- Although the report says that there is enough legislation, these isn't, the citizens need to be connected to decision-making that involves them.

- The report is bleak and doesn't give proposals how to develop direct participation.

- The report is disappointing, it merely describes the existing situation and does not make progress.

- Unfortunately the report is toothless and does not target obvious problems in democracy.

- The municipal decision-makers are more interested in listening to the inhabitants afterwards than involve them in planning.

All in all, those MPs discontent with the report preferred to see stronger measures instead of beautiful targets. As one of the speakers put it: "One problem is that the civil servants are afraid of active citizens, and, for example, young people's or disabled people's boards are often left without influence. Thus, the attitude of the politicians and leading civil servants should be more open". Although the MPs are the formal policy-makers, and in the above debate there were quite a few discontent ones, they need to work in consortium. Thus individual criticism does not lead very far. The discontent in the reactions of the MPs indicates that the issue was brought into political debate relatively late, and that there existed a number of different views and interpretations what the policy should be.

In the next phase the government report was submitted to the committee of administrative issues, which also asked statements from other committees. The committees are central policy makers in the Finnish system. They divide into expert areas; they have resources and can listen to experts. However, usually there is a time limit, as the statement needs to be followed by a particular law-making process. The committee (of administrative issues) convened a number of times and it took no less than six months before the issue

came back to the plenum debate. The members of the committee represented the parties having seats in the parliament in relation to their size. The committee also listened to a number of experts: representatives of ministries, the evaluator of the participation program, a public research institute, the municipal central association, local governments, association, and three professors (two of law, one of social policy).

In the case of citizen participation the Committee of Administration (Eduskunta 2002b) stated that:

- The research findings indicate that there are problems and challenges in democracy and thus we need new channels at the side of the representative democracy.

- The committee agrees with the report that both direct and representative democracy is equally important and that they complete each other.

- Because the emphasis in the program has been on developing direct channels of participation, the representative side of the process has been less focused on. The committee proposes that in the next phase this will be the focus. At the same time also questions such as the municipal cooperation and privatization need to be targeted.

- The committee did not consider it necessary to propose legal changes, because the existing legislation does not prevent the municipalities to engage in activities, which the increasing of participation requires, and thus no specific legislative changes are seen as necessary.

- The committee was critical that the report included very little of concrete examples. It also lacked examples of senior citizens' experiences.

- Finally the committee asked the two ministries to prepare a report (by the end of 2005) on how the committee's proposals and standpoints have been taken into account.

Of the six statements the one dealing with local government legislation is of particular importance. This is because the starting point of the participation program was the lack of interest by the municipalities to initiate new forms of participation. Now suddenly the committee saw the existing legislation as sufficient to enable local governments to develop participation. A possible and plausible explanation is that the MPs, themselves connected to constituencies, are not inclined to increase compulsory tasks for the municipalities. In addition, changing the emphasis to representative democracy seems to indicate that there have been enough measures to improve the direct participation of the citizens, which is not the case. Thirdly, asking the ministries to follow-up the development and report later on indicates that the parliament lacked a clear view on how to tackle the declining turnouts.

At the following phase the report together with the committee statement was debated by the plenum. In this debate, again lively, the MPs had a chance to give support to the committee statements, change them or altogether reject these. Below are some of the speeches divided into different themes (Eduskunta 2002c):

Insufficient measures

- There is a particular need to develop participation and interaction in state administration. In this sense the report is vague and does not offer concrete examples. If the ministry is not keen on improving the situation, then who is?

- The political parties and (we) politicians should also look in the mirror, how we could carry our responsibility and how we could increase in our own work interaction with the citizens.

- It is not that central that how many persons come to a debate, but they need a response that the decision-makers are prepared to really listen to the opinions of the citizens and when needed also take these opinions further.

How to go forward

- The program could continue with a project in which the focus would be to make representative democracy more attractive.

- The problems are not so much in legislation as in attitudes. The alienation of citizens from the political parties, the weakening of trust, the diminishing turnout, there must be more concrete answers than the report gives.

- The question is about changing the administrative culture and that change takes a very long time.

- I hope that the negative reputation of political activity could be changed with citizen education.

All in all, developing democracy seems to be a great challenge. The political element of the challenge is not so obvious. As one of the MPs put it "This issue does not wake big political passions, it is our common goal to get the citizens to participate in decision-making". The minister who was listening to the MPs replied that "the local government act gives enough support, if the measures are used in full, but we need further experience, and this part can be returned to when the act is renewed". Another MP stated

likewise that "The report does not put forward concrete examples and should neither, there has to be will at the local level".

In an interesting way, the policy of democracy can be debated from a high number of viewpoints. It is not only whether the emphasis should be on the representative or direct democracy, or both, but also whether to focus on the state administration, local administration, party politics or education. The urgency of the policy can also be seen differently, as for some of the speakers the proposed reforms were toothless and for others too much, the latter opinion based on a belief that democracy cannot be imposed from above. The committee for example considered that making democracy efforts in local governments more compulsory was not needed. The committee considered that the existing legislation is sufficient. This was contrary to the original report which clearly stated that the local governments have not actively used these opportunities. A second type of issue was the concern different groups of citizens have received. Thirdly, the committee argued that for the time being the representative democracy has not been developed enough. Questions as the authority of the local assembly, the opportunities of the local councillors and so forth were argued to require more concern.

The parliament asked the government and the relevant ministries to report to the Parliament by the end of year 2005 what has been done in order to implement the proposals of the Parliament. This took place so that the board could give its statement in early 2006. As had been asked, the ministries of interior and finance had reported over the measures. The committee was also content that the policy program, which began in 2007, in fact included many of the measures put forward earlier. The committee however also made some critical remarks (Eduskunta 2006). The brief statement shows enough content with the measures. The policy program initiated at that time included many of the proposals put forward by the parliament in 2002. Secondly, the state administration had been developed towards interactive forms of government as there had been various projects to develop electronic hearing etc. Thirdly, the Ministry of the Interior had initiated a project which focused on how representative democracy and municipal service production under the pressure to outsource can be integrated. An additional perspective was to see how municipal cooperation and regionalization affects democracy. A number of law amendments had in addition already been implemented.

The committee stated that the various measures have a good chance to further participation at local and state level. The report also emphasised the plurality of the concept and its challenges. The report was however argued to lack an assessment of the impact of these measures. Some of the measures are too early to assess, but in some cases such information could have been collected. All in all, the committee stated, there are a number of laws sup-

porting participation. What is essential is to develop the transparency of administration at all levels and assess this. At the local level the council is the key player, it should develop measures and design indicators to follow-up the development. The committee further stated that it is important to develop channels for both representative and direct democracy, also that different kinds of groups in the society, young, disabled, elderly, immigrants and other need specific measures. Finally the committee saw it important to assess the possibilities of electronic voting and was happy that it can be experimented in three municipalities in the local election in autumn 2008.

The policy program 2003-2007

Compared to the specific proposals of the first program, the second program was more cautious. Nor did the report conclusions receive a parliamentary discussion. The summary of the report states that the policy program forwarded active citizenship, and the vitality of the citizen society, the social influence of the citizens, and the functioning of representative democracy. There were a lot of projects in several ministries, and in cooperation with the scientific community and civil society within the horizontal policy program.

The most important reforms were dealing with increasing citizen- and democracy education, improvement of interaction between the civil society and administration, the advancement of municipal democracy and enablement of better functioning of the assembly, and the assessment of legislative reform needs. There was a particular emphasis on the information basis of democracy, and the arrangement of a recurrent set of indicators based on that. The policy program also developed a plan of a democracy policy, with which the public sector can forward citizen participation within the constitution. The summary also concludes that there is no quick medicine to problems of democracy, but a long term work is needed. This requires stable interacting between the ministries and with the civil society. This will be coordinated by the new democracy unit in the Ministry of Justice (Oikeusministeriö 2007).

The background of the program was, in addition to the government program, information concerning the Scandinavian experiences. The issues of democracy and active citizenship were in the turn of the millennium also topical in the European Union, and in a number of member states. Important work was also done in the OECD and its Citizens as Partners program (Oikeusministeriö 2007, 2). According to the report, the government can affect active citizenship through creating the conditions of influence by education and by regulating the framework of citizen activity. However, the report states, democracy and citizen influence are not suitable for formulating per-

formance goals as some other policies. The transformation process is a slow one and one government mandate is a short time. Hence an elementary goal of the program is to create a mental and organizational basis in the emphasis areas, and through these to work for a longstanding democracy-improving policy.

The program has supported for example democracy work in schools, the development of the municipal democracy account, the development of debate groups, media education and election information. In addition a new national web site for democracy was established and the state administration's feed-back web site was renewed. One important partner of the program was the Youngster's participation program by the education authorities. In the coordination work the central focus has been to produce research information, which was argued had for some time been neglected. This was the way to make a comprehensive basis for assessing democracy and citizen influence. At the same time it was possible to accomplish a basis for administering democracy-policy.

The report gives a detailed account of the various measures that have been active during the four-year-period. It appears for example that various research projects have been supported financially. This is interesting. Usually we think that the government should receive impartial, objective information. But, the same applies to academia. Scientific research produces inventions which occasionally are feasible, but this is not their principal target. Public finances should thus not interfere with scientific reasoning. The program for example partly financed the research project *Elections and democracy in Finland*. The work to create democracy-indicators, and information basis led to cooperation with the researchers and finally to a book on the indicators. A group of scientists also proposed how to follow-up the indicators. During the last years, and especially in connection to the EU structural fund programs, the issue of quantitative, measurable information has grown in importance. The need is understandable from the viewpoint of last materials, comparative needs, follow-ups and so forth. At the same time it is obvious that the indicators contain a risk of narrow, biased account of real-life development which does not do justice to the richness of the phenomena. For example in regional and cohesion policy the quantitative indicators include new work places, but no concern in making a difference between temporary and steady work places.

In a recent book the general secretary of the program (Niemelä 2007) sums up the experiences and emphasises the importance of further engagement. Niemelä (ibid. 73) argues that the policy program did not find a major reason to correct the representative system. Thus the problems of democracy should rather be targeted through making direct democracy stronger, by using, for example, more referenda. All in all the argumentation reflects a be-

lief, that the policy program has been doing pioneer work and that the process is in the beginning. The author considered it of utmost importance to develop citizen education towards the goal of active citizenship, which seemed to be too easily mixed with illegal activist activities.

In sum, the policy of democracy is a vast policy area demanding the activity of a plurality of actors. The two programs, which we described above, differed somewhat in their basic contents. The first one was more focused on practical experiments with participation, while the latter opened the policy to include support to other public actors, research and civil society organizations. Despite the wide focus in the policy the government aimed at developing a set of indicators which would form the basis for a follow-up of future policy work.

The issue of citizen participation has been on the political agenda for some time but only minor steps have been taken. There seems to be a discrepancy between the expectations and results. As a government policy, the policy of democracy-improving is of crucial importance, because of the centrality of the legitimacy of public policy-making. However, the plurality of choices within democracy-policy makes it cumbersome. Has this ten-year-period of debating democracy changed things in reality? First we have to consider what kind of changes we can expect. The various measures of the central government and the municipalities can be seen as an output, whereas the goals of the policy rather deal with the outcomes, i.e. election turnouts, trust, legitimacy and so forth. At the same time, these kinds of impacts may take a long time to develop. Perhaps the slow way of developing and nurturing the civil society, accumulating the social capital, has to be done prior to opening up the politico-administrative decision-making.

As was said earlier on, we can divide the target area of democracy policy into two, the policy process and the citizens. In the case of the first one, it is difficult to see any big changes occurring. Rather we can argue that the question has been debated and some marginal and sporadic efforts to increase the citizen input have been experimented with. In the case of the citizens the same conclusion applies. All in all, developing democracy seems to be a continuous process. As the program manager put it (Niemelä 2007, 54), the program only touched upon the surface and there is a long road ahead.

The civil servants and politicians face difficult decisions. How can one increase the participation rates without changing the rules of the game? A sarcastic observer could simply say that the best way to increase participation is to make it more welcome by the politicians and civil servants. It is here that the unclear nature of the measures lies. One of the proposals was to make improvement of democracy a compulsory task for the local governments. The autonomy of local governments however has been strong in Finnish politics, and subsequently the proposal did not receive support in the

Parliament. This indicates that political decision-makers need to consider a number of criteria when making the final decisions. It is not only the objective information, but what is feasible.

In sum, the area of democracy is large. Hence also the measures to improve democracy can disperse to a number of directions. This also provides the government with a good reason to be active but not to improve democracy in an efficient manner. A political economy perspective on politics and administration pinpoints the rationale of the actors. In other words, politicians think easily about their own support, political future and working conditions. In a similar way for the bureaucrats the relationship to the public is not irrelevant. This could explain why we can anticipate more rhetorical level enthusiasm than real progress in the work for democracy. An additional viewpoint is that not everybody shares the enthusiasm for direct democracy. This was also pointed out by one of the MPs in the parliamentary debate. The difficult question is to what extent the citizens are in real terms frustrated.

4. Discussion

It was states above that "democracy and citizen influence are not suitable for formulating performance goals as some other policies, and the transformation process is a slow one". Although the starting point is a simple one, declining turnout, the selection of measures is far from simple. The crucial question is which factors affect the low turnouts. Here, it seems that the choice is between strengthening the representative democracy, or alternatively, opening up more channels for the direct participation of the citizens. Unable to make a choice governments in Europe have tried to develop both the representative and direct democracy, and not necessarily worked strongly to advance either of those (Denters & Rose 2005; Kersting & Vetter 2004; Smith 2005). Finally, we can for a good reason ask, whether it is the task of the politicians and bureaucrats to launch policies if the citizens are not inclined to vote? As some of the speakers in the parliament suggested, changing political campaigns and political debate towards a more citizen-friendly, or more ideological direction (in order to emphasise the differences between political parties) would be more obvious and less cumbersome road to proceed.

The above case illuminates the complicated nature of policy-making. Although the research community offered the policy makers a lot of advice, the political decisions were meagre. On the other hand, the results can also be difficult to measure and developing in the long term rather than immediately. However, the discrepancy between policy advice and decisions was obvious. What explains the lukewarm attitude of the policy-makers? In the case of

democracy the policy area as such is a vast one. Thus the alternative ways of proceeding are endless. This also entails a risk that the policy-makers can rather point to others rather than "clean their own nest", or choose the easy roads not leading to major progress. A common way to define the problem is to talk about voting and how to increase the turnout. But if the problem behind the diminishing turnouts is the politics and public administration themselves, then obviously the measures have to focus on this level. This point was raised in the parliamentary debate, by urging the politicians to look at a mirror too, but the political process was left much untouched.

In the final report for the democracy program (Oikeusministeriö 2007, 14) the text states that "although the fulfilment of democracy depends on the citizens themselves, the public authority can, and according to the constitution it should, further participation and citizen influence. The current government continues with the theme in a more narrow form. The Ministry of Justice has a new unit for democracy, and the work continues at the point where the policy program stopped. The democracy indicators are continuously seen as important, but there seems to be lack of resources to collect them. The new unit aims at making concrete measures in the field of democracy. The fields of action encompass democracy amongst youngsters and associations, politics in school and, what comes to the policy process the largest challenge is electronic hearings. The unit also aims at letting the parliament to discuss the contents in 2009, in other words, in half-way of the current government.

So, who made the policy? There were a number of actors. Using the division to the policy process and the civil society, we can say that in the first mentioned both the civil servants preparing the policy, and the politicians, making decisions, have been involved. But, these actors only cover the tip of the ice-berg. Developing democracy involves also interest groups, local governments, and the media. The civil society is both a target and a partner. The above findings pinpoint to the direction of relatively close connection between research and policy-making. Is this then a sign of rational or consensual policy-making? If rational analysis aims at finding out the pros and cons of alternatives, and defines the likely consequences, then consensual policy-making on the other hand is more focused on making compromises, on finding alternatives which suit all the major actors. In this particular case the political element was not a very strong one. Rather, the majority of both politicians and bureaucrats considered the policy to be important, but the direction of the way ahead was problematic.

The government decisions vary a lot from the viewpoint of implementation. Some policies simply require activities of a state organisation and the output is clear. Other types of policies are more complicated concerning the output and also more complicated concerning the implementation. A good

example of the latter is the large area of welfare policies, which in the Scandinavian welfare model are produced by local governments and regions. Democracy-improvement as a government policy belongs presumably to the complicated ones. In principle it covers not only the politico-administrative system but the civil society and, arguably, the economic sphere too. Thus the classical situation of "who comes first" is here. Should the active citizenship rise from the civil society through education, support to associations and grass-roots activities? Or alternatively, should a potential active citizenship be encouraged by opening up the decision-making and by inviting the citizens as partners? Progress has been made but there is a long way ahead.

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POLITIKA JAČANJA POLITIČKE PARTICIPACIJE U FINSKOJ

Sažetak

U članku se analizira politika jačanja političke participacije u Finskoj. Koristi se građom povezanom s dvama nedavno provedenim *policy* programima, prvim između 1997. i 2002., te drugim između 2003. i 2007. Podatci sadržavaju *policy* dokumente, izvješća i parlamentarne rasprave povezane sa spomenutim *policy* programima. U prvom dijelu autor raspravlja o različitim razumijevanjima javnih politika, odnosno, opisuje kako obično izgleda proces stvaranja javnih politika. Drugi je dio posvećen problemu korištenja informacija u procesu stvaranja javnih politika. Kreatori javnih politika koriste se raznim vrstama informacija, političkim, ekonomskim, te informacijama dobivenim u znanstvenim istraživanjima. U trećem se dijelu analizira politika jačanja političke participacije u Finskoj od 1998. do 2007. U tom razdoblju nastale su tri različite javne politike i brojne druge mjere. U četvrtom se dijelu sažimaju rezultati, te ih se povezuje s načelnom raspravom o procesu kreiranja javnih politika.

Ključne riječi: Finska, kreiranje javnih politika, razvoj demokracije, politička participacija, lokalna vlast

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