

Power and Citizenship

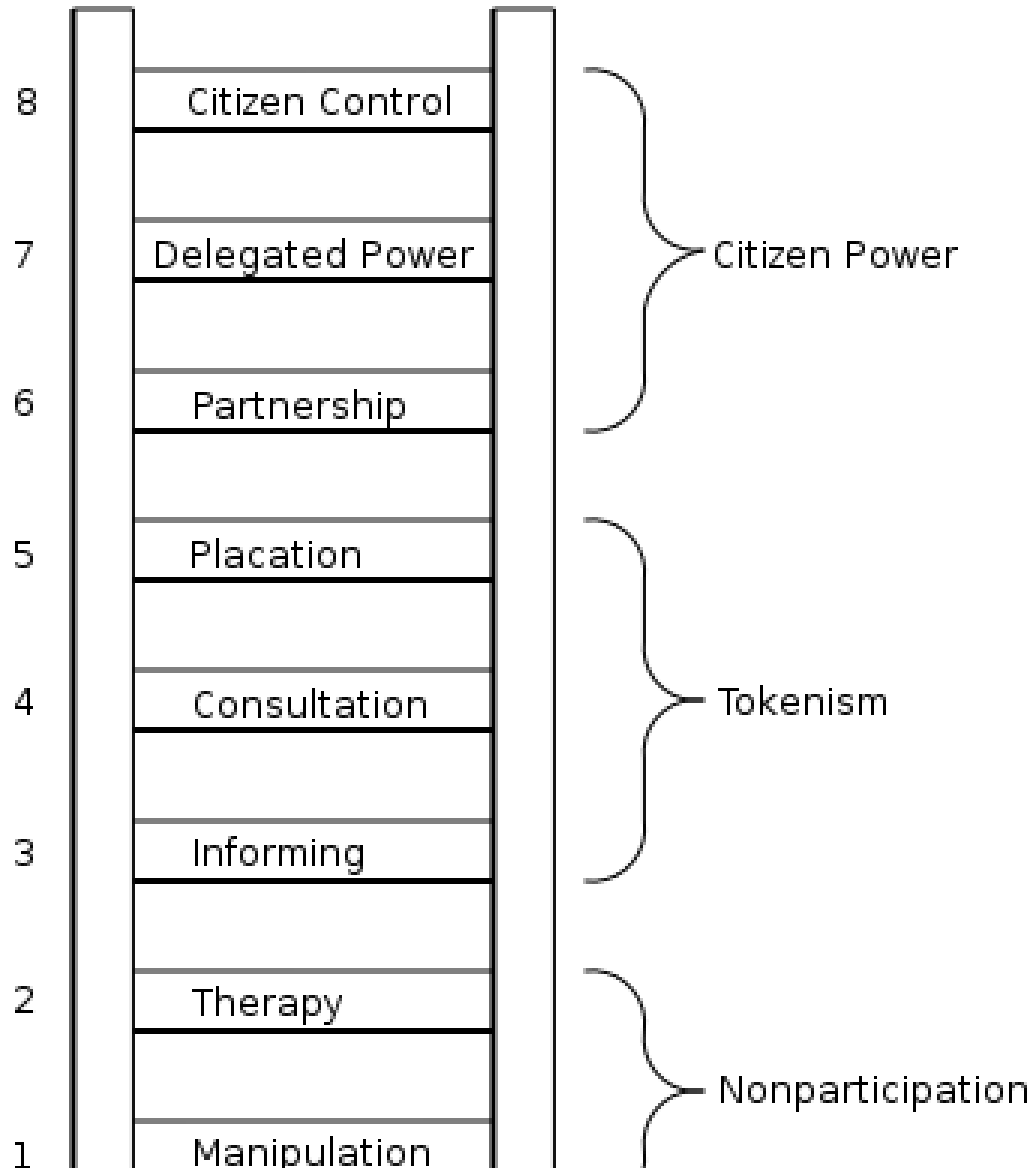
A Ladder of Citizen Participation

Citizen participation is citizen power

- Citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out.
- In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the society

Types of participation and

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Participation & Non Participation

- The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) **Manipulation** and (2) **Therapy**. These two rungs describe levels of "non-participation" that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to "educate" or "cure" the participants.

Participation & Non Participation

- Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of "tokenism" that allow the have-nots to hear and to have a voice: (3) **Informing** and (4) **Consultation**. When they are proffered by powerholders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, no "muscle," hence no assurance of changing the status quo

Participation & Non Participation

- Rung (5) **Placation** is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow have-nots to advise, but retain for the powerholders the continued right to decide.
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Participation & Non Participation

- Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter into a (6) **Partnership** that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost rungs, (7) **Delegated Power** and (8) **Citizen Control**, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.

Characteristics of power and powerlessness

- **Manipulation:**
 - In the name of citizen participation, people are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of "educating" them or engineering their support. Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders.

Therapy

On this assumption, under a masquerade of involving citizens in planning, the experts subject the citizens to clinical group therapy. What makes this form of "participation" so invidious is that citizens are engaged in extensive activity, but the focus of it is on curing them of their "pathology" rather than changing the issues that create their "pathologies."

Informing:

- Citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information - from officials to citizens - with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation. Under these conditions, particularly when information is provided at a late stage in planning, people have little opportunity to influence the program designed "for their benefit." The most frequent tools used for such one-way communication are the news media, pamphlets, posters, and responses to inquiries

Consultation

- Inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. But if consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account. The most frequent methods used for consulting people are attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings, and public hearings.
- When powerholders restrict the input of citizens' ideas solely to this level, participation remains just a window-dressing ritual. People are primarily perceived as statistical abstractions, and participation is measured by how many come to meetings, take brochures home, or answer a questionnaire. What citizens achieve in all this activity is that they have "participated in participation." And what powerholders achieve is the evidence that they have gone through the required motions of involving

Placation:

- It is at this level that citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent. An example of placation strategy is to place a few hand-picked "worthy" poor on boards of Community Action Agencies or on public bodies like the board of education, police commission, or housing authority. If they are not accountable to a constituency in the community and if the traditional power elite hold the majority of seats, the have-nots can be easily outvoted and outfoxed.

Partnership

- At this rung of the ladder, power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders. They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses. After the groundrules have been established through some form of give-and-take, they are not subject to unilateral change.
- Partnership can work most effectively when there is an organized power-base in the community to which the citizen leaders are account-able; when the citizens group has the financial resources to pay its leaders reasonable honoraria for their time-consuming efforts; and when the group has the resources to hire (and fire) its own technicians, lawyers, and community organizers.

Delegated Power

- Negotiations between citizens and public officials can also result in citizens achieving dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program.
- At this level, the ladder has been scaled to the point where citizens hold the significant cards to assure accountability of the program to them

Citizen Control

- People are simply demanding that degree of power (or control) which guarantees that participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which "outsiders" may change them.

Discussion Questions

- Which form of Citizen participation is most common in your context and why?