PART III

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE
A. Introduction

Democracy is a powerful normative concept inherently linked to citizens’ participation. A polity with no meaningful citizens’ participation we cannot call a democracy. Given the reality of today’s mass democracies, government of the people is, however, a requirement never met in a direct sense. In mass democracies legitimacy via delegation of power to elected and accountable representatives is the key mechanism to accomplish the goal of government by the people.

Representative democracy, however, has been harshly criticized for a number of shortcomings, such as political apathy, low participation rates, predominance of party politics, elitist tendencies, lack of responsiveness, under-representation of minorities, etc. Criticisms are raised by diverse schools of thought such as participatory, radical, and also liberal democratic theory. Dahl (1994), for instance, emphasizes the need to balance citizens’ participation and system effectiveness. Theorists of radical or participatory democracy emphasize the role of active citizenship whereas theorists of deliberative democracy focus on the quality of public deliberation. According to them, more inclusive politics can lead to better results, because more voices and arguments can be heard and addressed.

Ever since the 1960s, this critique is accompanied by a good deal of ‘democratic experimentalism’ (Dorf and Sabel, quoted in Papadopoulos & Warin 2007: 445) in order to improve citizens’ participation: sit-ins, public inquiries, citizen juries, negotiated rulemaking, collaborative planning, mediations, right-to-know legislation, deliberative opinion polls, focus groups, consensus conferences, and the like. Governance, a concept that has come to the fore both in modern social science and in modern politics, responds to the issue of citizens’ participation in a specific way. Instead of focussing solely on