
Leadership, Democracy and Participation

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Abstract

This article is about a course (on democracy and participation) to be administered online within the international project funded by the European Union – VirtuEU. This project is directed at involving Western Balkan youths in online exchanges with youths from Portugal and Greece and also youths invited by the Belgian partner EVBB. The topic of this article and course is democracy and participation – which cannot be disassociated from leadership – hence the inclusion of the latter in the discussion. Bibliometric analyses were done (using VOSviewer) and accompanied by a glance at the literature on leadership, democracy and participation. The text also includes excerpts and concepts from the artificial intelligence (AI) platform perplexity.ai, followed by the author's perspectives on the subject, inviting the reader to reflect on certain issues and debates in democratic society today.

Keywords: Cross-cultural leadership; external environment; democracy; leadership evolution; VOSviewer.

1. INTRODUCTION - LEADERSHIP, DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

"Leadership is one of the most complex and multidimensional phenomena. It has been studied extensively over the years and has taken on greater importance than ever before in today's fast-paced and increasingly globalised world. Nonetheless, leadership continues to generate captivating and confusing debate due to the complexity of the subject." (Benmira & Agboola, 2021, p.3). Despite having been studied extensively, leadership continues to be a little understood topic in the social sciences (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Leadership involves influencing others, a smaller or larger group of people, towards the attainment of a goal (Stogdill, 1950). Ethical leadership involves taking followers from A to B where B is better than A (author's own definition).

One cannot speak of democracy and participation without speaking of leadership, in its various forms and across cultures. Was Saladin, that great "'Unifier' of Islam... admired by followers and enemies alike" (Man, 2015, p.319), a modern democratic leader? Man (2015, p.319) writes that one key to Saladin's "success was that he combined two styles of leadership, exercising what modern theorists call hard and soft power". "Leadership has been equated with the ruthless exercise of power... Saladin might have taken the same hard-power approach... But he didn't. He mixed force with persuasion. Such subtly makes him seem an exemplar of modern leadership." (Man, 2015, p.320). Saladin was, however, also brutal at times. So our judgement and analysis is not so simple.

Another great leader from the past is Genghis Khan ("founder of the world's most extensive land empire" (Man, 2004, p.21)) who, legend has it, wished always to do things correctly (Man, 2004) – "asserting his authority but also displaying his generosity... to his loyal generals" (Man, 2004, p.18).

Leadership theory has evolved over time (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). What interests us herein is what makes for an effective democratic leader? In this context, leadership is seen as the art of being able to mobilise others and to get them to want to struggle for shared aspirations (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Leaders should have a vision and a strategy while also being able to put in place mechanisms to manage the group – monitoring and controlling performance (Benmira & Agboola, 2021).

Benmira and Agboola (2021) set forth four main eras as regards leadership theory: trait (focused on natural talent and innate leader characteristics – 1840s and 1930s-1940s), behavioural (focused on leaders being made rather than born – 1940s-1950s), situational (recognising how the environment and situation/context are a significant influence – 1960s) and new leadership (1990s and 2000s) – "the new leadership era, moving away from the above-mentioned traditional theories of leadership, which define leadership as a unidirectional, top-down influencing process, drawing a distinct line between leaders and followers. Instead, the focus became on the complex interactions among the leader, the followers, the situation and the system as a whole, with particular attention dedicated to the latent leadership capacities of followers... success in an organisation is more dependent on coordinative leadership practices distributed throughout the organisation rather than the actions of a few individuals at the top." (Benmira & Agboola, 2021, p.4). In the new leadership era all collaborators are necessary in order to most effectively reach the goals set out. Leadership is about mobilizing others in order for them to want to achieve the extraordinary (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Running a search on Scopus on 17-08-2024, using the keywords leadership AND democracy AND participation, 469 documents were found. Figures 1-3 are the VOSviewer depictions (Overlay Visualization) of the findings regarding cooccurrence of all keywords, full counting. Note how in figure 1 the words cooperativism, confucianism, collective will, public opinion, and American public life appear. In figure 2 one may read different terms, such as community leadership, distributed leadership, digital democracy, public administration, unions, female principals, trust, authoritarianism, civic associations, employee participation, and advisory committee. Finally, figure 3 shows some other terms including social movement, collective action, citizen democracy, meritocracy, conflict resolution, communication, collective impact, participatory process, citizens' participation, and leadership selection.

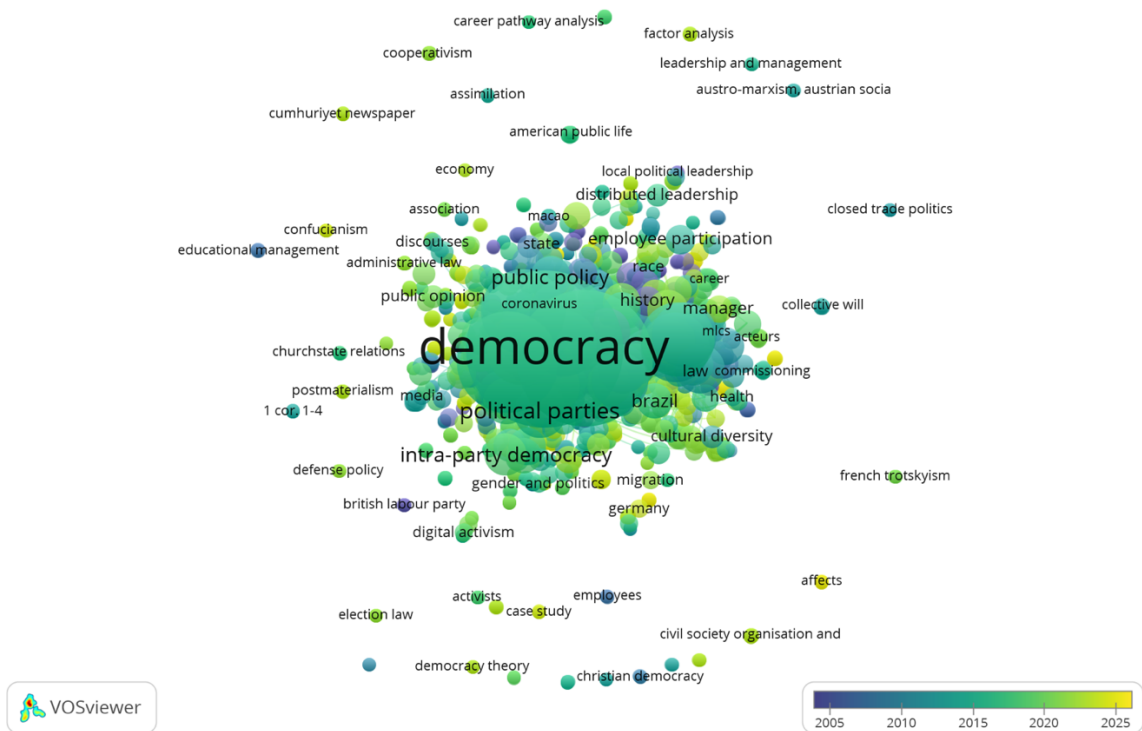


Figure 1 - a search on Scopus on 17-08-2024, using the keywords leadership AND democracy AND participation – a global view

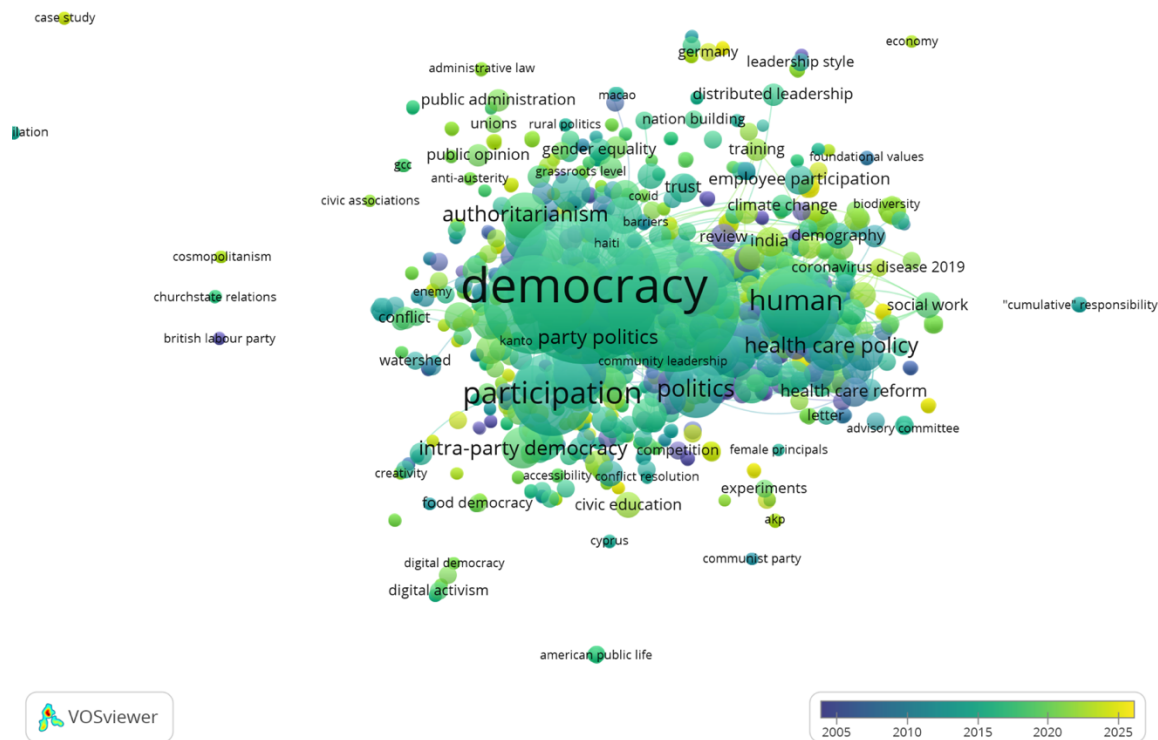


Figure 2 - a search on Scopus on 17-08-2024, using the keywords leadership AND democracy AND participation – a detailed view

The literature on citizens' perspectives on the implementation of direct democratic methods has shown that referendums are generally viewed positively. This is a well-known fact by now, as asserted by Anderson and Goodyear-Grant (2010).

Additionally, according to Neblo et al. (2010), there seems to be a widespread openness to using public discussion to arrive at decisions. According to Bengtsson's (2012) study using Finnish data, it is feasible to identify consistent categorizations in how individuals answer political process-related inquiries. These groupings, known as conceptions of democracy, include representation, expertise, and participation, as they align with established notions in political theory and prior research.

The first aspect that is targeted in this context is representation, which focuses on democratic procedures that involve the selection of representatives through elections. These elected representatives have the mandate to govern on behalf of the citizens, and leadership selection is viewed as the primary objective of democracy.

The second aspect is referred to as expertise, which emphasizes the role of experts rather than elected representatives. Finally, the third aspect is called participation, where democracy is viewed as a participatory concept that requires the active involvement of citizens. This is a prevalent view in academic discourse over the last several decades. This dimension highlights the importance of citizen participation, making it a vital element of democracy (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014).

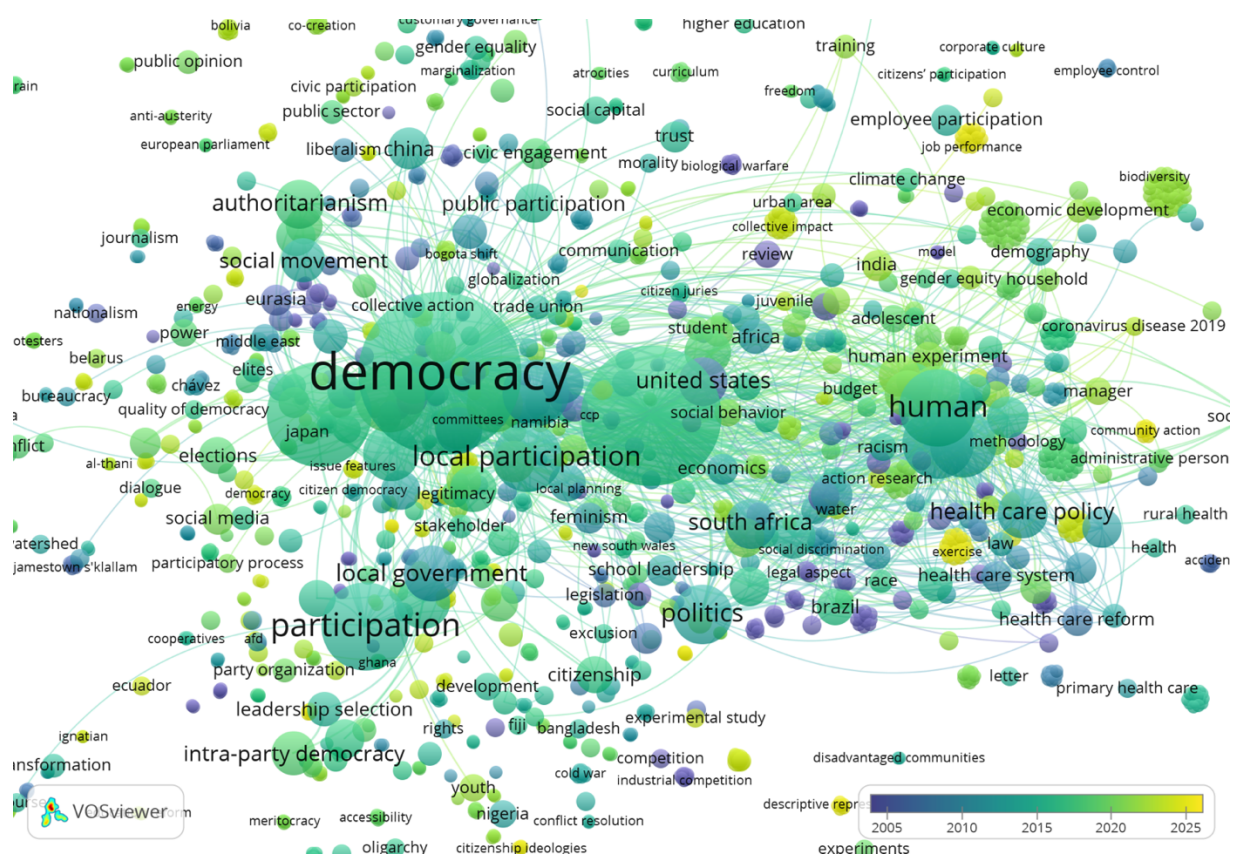


Figure 3 – a search on Scopus on 17-08-2024, using the keywords leadership AND democracy AND participation – a more detailed view

Participatory projects aim to give citizens influence. Additionally, theories of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, and social capital suggest that citizen involvement has several positive democratic effects regarding inclusion, civic skills and virtues, deliberation, and legitimacy. The role of citizens is primarily to provide information on which the government, sometimes in collaboration with other actors, can make decisions. Participatory policy-making thus preserves vertical government decision-making while also

creating more room for suggestions and ideas from citizens. Citizen involvement in policy-making makes people feel more responsible for public affairs and increases public engagement.

A second positive effect of participatory policy-making is that it encourages people to listen to a variety of opinions and thus promotes mutual understanding, which does not necessarily imply that they are willing to change their preferences. Thirdly, it contributes to greater decision legitimacy (Michels & Graaf, 2010).

As Dahl (1956) feared, two potential dangers should be noted here. First, there is the issue of the absence of certain groups from active participation. The result of excluding certain groups are that some quiet voices are never heard, which may ultimately contribute to a decrease in public trust in government and a reduction in the quality of democracy.

A second issue concerns expectations (Dahl, 1956; Michels & Graaf, 2010). Findings indicate that most citizens participate in participatory policy-making projects with enthusiasm, buoyed by the sense that they can contribute to improving their neighborhood. For a healthy democracy, the most crucial feature of public engagement is the absence of actual authority and a say in decision-making. The critical elements of democratic citizenship are civic competence growth, public involvement increase, and the opportunity to discuss and interact about local issues and problems (Dahl, 1956).

Table 1 shows the result of the VOSviewer analysis of all types of keywords. Gender (male and female) is an issue, as is the political system, organization and management, decision making and social participation.

Table 1 – List of most prominent keywords - a search on Scopus on 17-08-2024, using the keywords leadership AND democracy AND participation

| Verify selected keywords | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Selected | Keyword | Occurrences | Total link strength |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | leadership | 100 | 1367 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | democracy | 134 | 1332 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | human | 30 | 820 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | article | 26 | 693 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | humans | 23 | 638 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | political participation | 56 | 445 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | male | 12 | 398 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | female | 11 | 369 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | health care policy | 13 | 357 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | public health | 9 | 320 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | decision making | 23 | 317 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | governance approach | 25 | 301 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | politics | 18 | 285 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | adult | 9 | 246 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | government | 10 | 234 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | local participation | 24 | 233 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | social participation | 11 | 231 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | south africa | 13 | 221 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | united states | 12 | 214 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | election | 16 | 189 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | political system | 9 | 189 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | organization and management | 8 | 181 |

This publication continues with a methodology section, followed by the course description and desired course results. Finally, a reflection is performed and future steps considered.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study incorporates Bibliometric Reviews - derived from the Scopus database and using VOSviewer. “A Bibliometric Review is a method within systematic reviews that analyzes patterns of knowledge production and accumulation by using quantitative software tools to examine bibliographic data from a large set of documents extracted from repositories like Scopus or Web of Science.” (International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition), 2023).

The Bibliometric Reviews were conducted based on the criteria established using the queries: 1) Leadership AND Democracy AND Participation (please see above); and 2) Democracy AND Participation AND “European Union” (please see below). A Co-occurrence analysis of Author keywords (Full-counting method) was performed and portrayed in the Overlay Visualisation perspective on VOSviewer – in both cases. Artificial intelligence (AI) (perplexity.ai) was also used to help define the outline of the course and to define certain concepts discussed in this article. Certain AI concepts were then discussed and debated by the author in his own words, namely to give another perspective on the matter.

3. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Objective - Develop a two-hour online course on democracy and participation with four hours' work offline. We aim for a mix of theoretical knowledge, practical examples, interactive elements, and assessments, for learners to gain a comprehensive understanding of democracy and participation.

3.1. VOSVIEWER – DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Figure 4 is a VOSviewer depiction – first a search was done in the Scopus database using the terms democracy AND participation AND “European Union” - on 29-03-2024 (365 documents found); then a Co-occurrence analysis of Author keywords (Full-counting method) was performed and portrayed in the Overlay Visualisation perspective on VOSviewer.

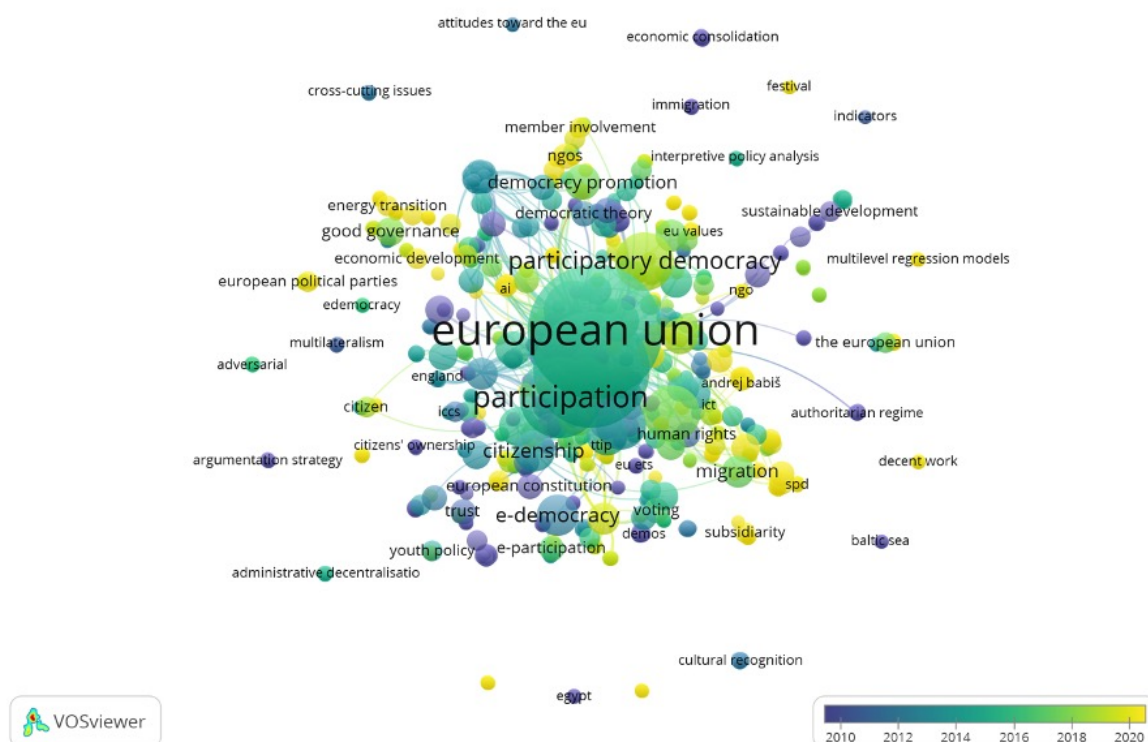



Figure 4 – VOSviewer depiction - democracy AND participation AND “European Union” search on Scopus on 29-03-2024 – Co-occurrence of Author keywords, Overlay Visualisation on VOSviewer

Member involvement appears as a crucial element, in yellow (hence, a recent entry, close to or after 2020). Good governance is a slightly older term in figure 4 (appearing in light green, from circa 2018). E-democracy is an even slightly older term (appearing in green). Economic development, in yellow, appears to be linked to a participatory democracy. Trust, human rights, and argumentation strategy are big words in figure 4, as we shall see below, in the text.

Table 2 shows the most important keywords in the figure 4 search. One such term is “civil society”; yet another is “political participation”. Other terms are “participatory democracy” and “deliberative democracy”; as is “democratic deficit”.

Table 2 - Important keywords in the figure 1 search

 Verify selected keywords

| Selected | Keyword | Occurrences | Total link strength |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | european union | 84 | 449 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | democracy | 62 | 351 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | participation | 31 | 161 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | civil society | 17 | 95 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | political participation | 15 | 79 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | participatory democracy | 16 | 71 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | deliberative democracy | 12 | 70 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | democratic deficit | 11 | 62 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | european commission | 8 | 62 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | legitimacy | 12 | 56 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | electoral rights | 3 | 50 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | european neighbourhood policy | 3 | 49 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | transparency | 7 | 48 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | corruption | 3 | 46 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | european parliament | 6 | 46 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | foreign policy | 2 | 45 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | accountability | 5 | 42 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | voter turnout | 2 | 42 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | governance | 8 | 40 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | representative democracy | 4 | 40 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e-democracy | 8 | 39 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | abkhazia | 1 | 38 |

3.2. ONLINE COURSE ON DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION (2 HOURS)

3.2.1. INTRODUCTION TO DEMOCRACY AND TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy is elusive as it serves to validate the current governing structures of democracy across different levels, while also advocating for alternative decision-making processes that prioritize the involvement of diverse perspectives and dialogue. The significance of participation concepts is growing in importance, not only as a component of deliberative democracy's objective to acknowledge the views of marginalized individuals, but also as a strategy to invigorate conventional representative democracy and emphasize contemporary government's newer service delivery methods. The quality of participation can vary significantly when various consultation mechanisms are employed. While it may be feasible to achieve complete citizen control of public decision-making, similar to the Athenian democracy of old, it is unsure whether such an advanced form of democracy would be workable or acceptable.

Democracy may be defined as follows: “a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives” (Oxford Dictionary).

The key concepts of democracy and participation include:

- Democracy:

- Definition: Democracy means "rule by the people," where those affected by decisions are the ones making them.

- Types:

- Direct Democracy: Involves individuals directly making decisions, as seen in Ancient Athens.

- Representative Democracy: People elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf.

- Features:

- Effective participation before policy decisions.

- Equality in voting with all votes counted equally.

- Informed electorate having access to information.

- Citizen control of the agenda where people decide what matters are addressed.

According to perplexity.ai, an artificial intelligence (AI) platform, democracy is: “A System of government with power vested in the people. A form of government where state power is vested in the general population or the people.”

Personal perspective from the author: A problem with the current democratic model in Europe is that Europeans from smaller and less powerful countries feel less represented in European Parliament – resulting in less people voting at the European Parliament elections and less credibility given to the European Parliament as an institution. Countries such as Portugal feel governed by more powerful countries such as Germany and France – especially visible during the austerity years – imposed on Portugal by the powers to be and following our bankruptcy and lack of national say in major financial decisions (circa 2011).

Key characteristics of democracy include, according to perplexity.ai:

“Features often include freedom of assembly, speech, religion, personal property, voting rights, and minority rights.”

Types of democracy, according to perplexity.ai:

“Includes direct democracy, where people have direct authority on legislation [through voting on specific laws], and representative democracy, where officials are elected to govern [much more common nowadays].”

Personal perspective from the author: Politics and politicians are at an all time low as regards trust in them to lead especially more peripheral countries and economies towards the much sought-after growth and increase in quality of life which economists overtly discuss. We hope to increase civic participation with the VirtuEU project and to increase trust and hope in European political institutions.

The term democracy has a Greek origin. From the Greek words *demos* [people] and *kratos* [power or rule].

According to perplexity.ai:

“Principles of Democracy - Democracy is built on several key principles:

Individual Autonomy: Citizens have the right to control their own lives and make decisions within the framework of the law.

Equality: Every individual has an equal opportunity to influence decisions that affect society .

Legitimacy: Governments must be elected through free and fair elections, ensuring that they have a valid mandate from the people.

Justice: All citizens are treated equally and with respect by governmental institutions.”

According to perplexity.ai:

“Challenges and Evolution - Democracy is not static; it evolves over time and faces various challenges, such as the risk of majoritarianism, where the rights of minority groups may be overlooked. Successful democracies require ongoing participation from citizens, including voting, advocacy, and public discourse .

While modern democracies vary widely in structure and practice, they generally aim to balance the need for effective governance with the protection of individual rights and freedoms.”

Personal perspective from the author: A current risk (and threat) is a turn to the radical right in France, Portugal, Amsterdam, Austria, and Italy, among other European countries. This turn may actually threaten the existence of the European Union. One issue which is sparking considerable debate is the immigration issue and the increase in violent crime all over Europe and in countries where immigration has increased. A wave of opposition to immigration is setting in as crime rates soar. Long-term tourists are also seen to be a part of the problem, meaning tourists who travel for several months or more, often running out of funds to finance their stays abroad and seeking temporary jobs to make amends. Immigration is seen to be necessary as lower level jobs do not find candidates outside the immigration population. On the other hand much of what is going wrong in certain countries is attributed to these immigrants. This issue is dividing Europe and the Europeans.

3.2.2. E-DEMOCRACY THROUGH E-PARTICIPATION

E-democracy plays a crucial role in empowering citizens and ensuring their effective involvement in the governance process. Moreover, it influences the transparency and accountability of governments and politicians. There are two sides to e-democracy, one might suggest. The decision-making process's inputs are comprised of the first one. The other one concerns the demeanor of leaders and the control, supervision, and functioning of the state. The first step involves expressing individuals' interests, opinions, and proposals. E-democracy can have both positive and negative effects, making it a significant breakthrough. E-democracy can be proven to be a positive factor for human development and active engagement as it allows citizens to be more aware, articulate, and involved in public issues in response to global opportunities and challenges. Conversely, e-democracy disregards people who can't afford the necessary equipment as it relies on computers and software for operation. E-democracy needs a cost-effective system that benefits both citizens and governments. E-democracy through e-government is crucial for resolving local, public, and national issues, assisting the business sector, and providing services to the public based on principles, rules, and norms (Spirakis et al., 2010).

3.2.3. IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY

According to perplexity.ai:

“Participation in democracy is crucial as it serves as the foundation for democratic systems and enhances their effectiveness.”

“Overall, participation in democracy is essential for ensuring that citizens have control over political processes, leading to more effective governance and a stronger democratic society.”

Personal perspective from the author: Participation in society by those against immigration and immigrants has become violent at times and the general population in certain countries has been rallied to protest via social media, in many cases. Take for example a multiple stabbing which occurred in the UK, in 2024, albeit by an individual who was born in the UK, against small children doing a holiday activity - and which took on extreme violent characteristics and which involved confrontations with the authorities / police. Such civic

participation is condemned. The frustration of the local communities was visible in their cry for “We want our country back” (fuelled on by far right politics).

Participation in democracy – some key related aspects – according to perplexity.ai:

“Enhancement of Decision-Making: Public participation enriches democracy by ensuring better decision-making processes. It strengthens politicians' accountability to the people and helps build robust democratic institutions, which are vital for peace, development, and respect for human rights worldwide.

Transparency and Accountability: Participation contributes to a more transparent and accountable decision-making process. It allows citizens to be aware of management challenges, create public policies in a collaborative environment, and develop a sense of responsibility.

Empowerment and Education: Through participation, citizens are empowered and educated about the democratic process. It allows them to feel a sense of belonging and influence over decisions that affect their lives.

Diverse Participation Models: Participation is not limited to voting in elections. It includes informal involvement such as political conversations, social media engagement, and tolerance for differing views. This broad participation is essential for a vibrant democracy.

Counter-balancing Power: Participatory democracy helps counterbalance unequal power dynamics by giving a voice to everyday people from diverse backgrounds. This ensures that decision-making is more representative and inclusive.

Innovation and Collective Decision-Making: By engaging a diverse group of citizens, participatory democracy fosters innovation and collective decision-making. It allows governments to gather more information and develop robust solutions by leveraging local knowledge and lived experiences.

Civic Engagement: Effective democracy relies on civic engagement beyond just the electoral process. Establishing communication channels between citizens and representatives outside of election periods helps overcome the crisis of representation in representative democracies.”

Personal perspective from the author: The extent of surveillance by certain governments, while deemed necessary, has led to some groups feeling wary of their own liberties and freedoms. Where is the line to be drawn? How is the freedom of most threatened in the name of freedom? Documentaries have set forth how we are being constantly being watched, our every move registered, in the digital era, and not only by governmental institutions but also by commercial ones (Google, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, Apple, among others).

The ladder of citizen participation:

Arnstein (1969) created a classification system consisting of eight levels of participation that describe a ladder ranging from minimal involvement to complete citizen control (table 3).

Table 3 – The ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969)

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 8 Citizen Control | Degrees of citizen power |
| 7 Delegated Power | |
| 6 Partnership | |
| 5 Placation | Degrees of tokenism |
| 4 Consultation | |
| 3 Informing | |
| 2 Therapy | Non-participation |
| 1 Manipulation | |

According to table 3, we can see three main levels of participation (Arnstein, 1969) (or eight rungs in the ladder).

The first stage of Arnstein's classification system is cosmetic consultation, where citizens can express their opinions but lack the resources to ensure that their views will be taken into account. The ladder then progresses through various degrees of token consultation, where the consulted can advise but the rules still allow those in power to make the final decision. Partnership is encouraged at stage 6, where negotiation and trade-offs between the consulted and decision-makers are encouraged. At stages 7 and 8, citizens have achieved full managerial control and participation is complete and genuine. It is crucial that the decision-making process is designed to maximize its participatory nature and lead to a properly deliberative outcome. At the very least, and in order to substantiate claims of democracy, it is necessary to develop models that consider all possible perspectives and give full consideration to expressed views. Agreement may not always be reached, but ideas of reciprocity require that justifications and explanations are provided for decisions that do not align with the views of those consulted (Morison, 2007; Arnstein, 1969).

Personal perspective from the author: The levels of participation are not clear-cut, at times, and may mix themselves – between different levels. E.g., rung 8 in the ladder (rather utopic) and rung 5 in the ladder (how much power do citizens have, really?). Complaints arise from citizens especially when a meritocracy is not seen to exist and when politicians are seen to be benefiting friends and associates rather than “doing the right thing” for society at large.

4. COURSE RESULTS

4.1. COURSE ACTIVITIES

Activities - online – 30 minutes

Each online participant is to prepare a Word Document with active citizenship ideas for themselves. Time for preparation: 10 minutes. Examples: will vote in the next elections for government; will enter in some competitions organized by the local authorities - please indicate which ones; will promote an environmentally friendly / sustainability event in the local community - please indicate what event that will be; participative budgets - your local town hall may have participative budgets - as occurs in Portugal - for example, how to invest public money - for greater social inclusion, for better education, for more cultural events, for more data privacy.

Each online participant is to read their solutions online after individual time given for writing the list.

Video trailer to be watched online [2 minutes]: The Great Hack (Netflix) [data privacy and data rights].

Comments (5 minutes).

Video to be watched online [8.5 minutes] – enterprise setting: ABC Nightline - IDEO shopping cart [teamwork and participation video on YouTube]. Brainstorming. Meeting(s). Field work. No lone genius work... Enlightened trial and error – in a group and with positive feedback [no criticism of innovative ideas...]. Encourage wild ideas as solutions to a problem.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

- Recap of key points
- Encouragement for continued engagement in democracy

Activities - offline - 4 hours or more.

Each online participant is to describe and elaborate on each idea written during the online interaction (30 minutes).

Current types of issues which may be discussed: abortion, parenting versus work, leadership and women, unequal salaries, greater participation of women in society, international women's day, social inclusion, data privacy and data rights.

An offline forum for debates is to be created. Each participant should contribute with their perspectives. At least two interactions each participant (30 minutes). E.g., answer a question posed by someone else. The forum may actually be in pairs. I analyse something of yours, you analyse something of mine. With specific deadlines for this pair-exchange of perspectives.

Video - full documentary to be watched offline: *The Great Hack* (Netflix) (2 hours). Surveillance, control, and manipulation in democracy?

Homework - read the short book *The Prince* – By Niccoló Machiavelli (4 hours) – a pioneer in political science.

Other ideas for activities (1 day / 8 hours):

Volunteer Activity

- Participate in a local community service project.
- Reflect on the impact of civic engagement.

Also:

- Discuss the importance of elections in democracy.

By combining online learning with offline activities, participants can gain a comprehensive understanding of democracy and practical experience in participating actively in their communities.

4.2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This article is linked to the VirtuEU international project, financed by the European Commission. The project involves ten entities, from the Western Balkans – Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania – as well as institutions from Greece, Belgium and Portugal. The objective of this course in particular is to bring democratic values to the Western Balkans and to increase civic participation in society in these countries. The objectives of this course are to:

1. Clarify what democracy is.
2. Define democracy.
3. Discuss ways to involve youths in online and offline activities linked to democracy and participation.
4. Get youths to lead civic participation efforts in their countries.

“VirtuEu is an international Virtual Exchange programme that aims to engage over 2.500 students of HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) from EU State Members and Western Balkan Countries in activities that will promote active citizenship and civic participation. The consortium of VirtuEu consists of 9 HEI’s from Albania, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Portugal, as well as an umbrella VET (Vocational Education and Training) organisation EVBB which will also guarantee the participation of young students from other European countries. Embodying the European scope of active citizenship and civic participation, Virtue has developed a curriculum consisted of 11 courses, as well introduction and cultural activities, which will be delivered through an existing MOOC platform of one of the partners.” (from the VirtuEU project proposal).

4.3. LEARNING OUTCOMES

The youths involved in the VirtuEU project are to become leaders and role models for their peers – at the national and international levels.

“In particular, the VirtuEu project aims to:

- Increase the participation levels of young people in the partners’ countries.
 - Provide young people with opportunities and means to express themselves and their opinions, become active and contribute to the community
 - Provide new teaching and learning approaches, within the framework of virtual education and training,
-

Activities:

The objectives of VirtuEU will be achieved through:

WP2: Dissemination & Exploitation Activities

WP3: Development of the Active Citizenship Curriculum and establishment of a Train the Facilitators Scheme

WP4: Implementation of Virtual Exchanges

Beneficiaries:

- 2.500 students from Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, and EU States (Portugal, Greece, Germany and others) will participate in the Virtual Exchanges.
- 250 experienced facilitators will be trained on the developed and validated curriculum.
- Approximately 10.000 other students will be receivers of the key messages of the project.
- Development of a network of 50 stakeholders”

(from the VirtuEU project proposal).

5. REFLECTION AND FUTURE STEPS

The actual virtual exchanges / online sessions are projected to start in the Autumn semester / 1st semester of 2024-2025. A number of steps have to be completed first. This and other similar studies / publications, regarding the 11 online courses which were developed, are seen to be an initial step towards the greater goal of international online virtual exchanges between the partner entities and their youth students. A main objective of this and other similar publications, presented at the ICIEMC 2024, is dissemination and to practice the communication of the essential concepts involved in the VirtuEU debate (and an idea-exchange forum).

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