Section II: **Participatory Knowledge**

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Participatory Knowledge: Conceptual Thoughts

Knowledge, Culture, and Participation

Thinking about modes of participation is closely connected to conceptualizing the complex workings and interpretations of democracy as well as ideas of equality and the public sphere. Accordingly, participatory models and structures have predominantly been discussed, demanded, or decried with regard to political discourse and/or cultural creation.[1] Knowledge is an integral part of both and yet in the history of knowledge participation so far has received relatively little attention as an analytical framework.[2] The notion of knowledge as "participatory" invites us to explore the ways knowledge is rooted in cultural practices and social configurations.

1 Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, eds., *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012); Martin Butler, Albrecht Hausmann, and Anton Kirchhofer, *Precarious Alliances: Cultures of Participation in Print and Other Media* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016); Hubert Heinelt, ed., *Handbook on Participatory Governance* (Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2018).

2 Most studies on participation and knowledge production are concerned with present issues in the sociology of learning or with science governance; see e. g. Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa, "Knowledge and Power," in *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practic*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (London: SAGE, 2012); Matthijs Hisschemöller, "Participation as Knowledge Production and the Limits of Democracy," in *Democratization of Expertise? Sociology of the Sciences Yearbook* 24, ed. Sabine Maasen and Peter Weingart (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2005), 189–208; Thomas Saretzki, "Participatory Governance of Science," in Heinelt, *Handbook*, 157–184. A related strand of research making use of concepts of participation in knowledge production is linked to the history of activism and community engagement; see e. g. John Trimbur, *Grassroots Literacy and the Written Record: A Textual History of Asbestos Activism in South Africa* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2020); Nicolas D. Brunet, Gordon M. Hickey, and Murray M. Humphries, "The Evolution of Local Participation and the Mode of Knowledge Production in Arctic Research," *Ecology and Society* 19, no. 2 (2014). Based on this research, more recently works have emerged in museum studies; see e. g. Lozej Š. Ledinek, "Collaborative Inventory/A Participatory Approach to Cultural Heritage Collections," in *Participatory Research and Planning in Practice*, ed. Janez Nared and David Bole (Cham: Springer, 2020), 121–131; Per Hetland, Palmyre Pierroux, and Line Esborg, eds., *A History of Participation in Museums and Archives Traversing Citizen Science and Citizen Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2020).

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The title of this thematic section, "Participatory Knowledge," borrows from ideas about processes of cultural production. In the tradition of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, media scholar Henry Jenkins coined the term "participatory culture" in his 1992 study of (pop) cultural markets of the late twentieth century.[3] Some of his early work may have been overly optimistic regarding the democratising effect of "participatory culture" but his central diagnosis that consuming culture always constitutes an act of shaping culture at large holds great potential for the study of the creation and circulation of knowledge through the lens of participation. Moreover, this approach underscores the close connections of knowledge and culture, both in practice and in theory. Hence, we can or even must conceptualize knowledge and culture together.

Linking knowledge to culture and the concept of participation for the thematic focus of the first volume highlights key aims *HIC* prioritizes in the approach to the field of the history of knowledge. We see knowledge as rooted in social and political structures, determined by modes of transfer and produced in collaborative processes. Our aim in this section is to draw attention to the potential of looking at these elements through the lens of participation and to open a dialogue about how and what this perspective can contribute to the history of knowledge.

Key Questions

Power structures and agency are written into the very fabric of participatory systems.[4] Modes of participation can enter into the examination of knowledge on various levels. We may ask who gets to participate in defining what counts as knowledge and in deciding whose knowledge and what kind of knowledge counts? As modes of participation in knowledge are predicated on social, cultural, and political power structures, not surprisingly, they reflect such hierarchies.

3 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992). For comparable work with regard to the medieval period see e. g. Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Jenkins' more recent work focuses on the participatory patterns of cultural production predicated on digital communication, e. g. Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito, and danah boyd, *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

4 Actors of knowledge are part of and themselves create and reinforce power relations. In discussing knowledge and power, scholars frequently point to Michel Foucault who has emphasized its controlling and punishing functions; see e. g. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977); *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Harvester, 1980).

Issues of classification tied to value judgement often determine what is considered "important" or "relevant" knowledge, or even what is considered knowledge at all. Colonial contexts for example illustrate this challenge, particularly in the encounter with indigenous knowledge systems.[5] As hybridized cultures emerge, they fuel the continuous process of negotiation and re-negotiation with regard to determining knowledge and understanding.[6] Closely tied to these questions are issues of agency. Who gets to participate in producing knowledge and in what way? Which mechanisms govern patterns of inclusion or exclusion and what kind of hierarchies do they create? Moreover, as cultural and social practices also depend on infrastructures and modes of communication, a final set of questions relates to who gets to participate in the circulation of knowledge and who has access.

Considering broad participation in knowledge creation also requires reflection on the role of the "expert."[7] Arguably, for the political realm this question has been pondered over and over since Plato's *Republic*. However, when it comes to epistemology, experts seem to have a different station than in the theory of democracy, which also shows ramifications when applying notions of participation from the realm of political theory to the history of knowledge. The position of Plato's philosopher kings is defined by the knowledge they have (or claim to have) while the process of how they acquired this understanding is mostly neglected or assumed to be intrinsic. This does not hold for experts within systems of knowledge, whose position is generally defined by their genesis, e. g. training or qualification, which in turn is determined by social structures and cultural parameters. Plato's republic leaves little room for more participation without changing the very nature of the political construct he proposes. In systems of knowledge, however, participation can be expanded without questioning the role, function, and necessity of experts as such, by focusing on the structural preconditions of their formation. This of course does not come without its own challenges and political implications as the Lippman-Dewey debate over the

5 For an overview of studying indigenous knowledge systems see e. g. Margaret Bruchac, "Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Knowledge," in *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, ed. Claire Smith (New York: Springer, 2014), 3814–3824. For a take on some of the methodological challenges see Anne Martin, "Indigenous Histories and Place Ethics," in *Big and Little Histories: Sizing Up Ethics in Historiography*, ed. Marnie Hughes-Warrington and Anne Martin (London: Routledge, 2021), 174–183.

6 Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridety* (Cambridge: Politiy Press, 2009).

7 For a recent reflection on the role of the expert see e. g. Marian Füssel, Frank Rexroth, and Inga Schürmann, eds., *Praktiken und Räume des Wissens: Expertenkulturen in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).

role of education, media, and expertise in democracies illustrates. Their contest also links to the question at hand. Both emphasize the role of communication, education, and modes of circulation in the generation and dissemination of (political) understanding and thus as a basis for democratic participation.[8] Participatory knowledge therefore can also be read in relation to political participation.

Participation in the modern world – whether in political processes, social interaction, or culture production – needs a system of mediated communication. Accordingly, media history adds a meaningful perspective.[9] Historical examples of direct ("unmediated") democracy in the western world, like Aristotle's Athens or Thomas Jefferson's rural town halls, are primarily idealized political spaces imagined for the sake of political theory. The emergence of Web 2.0 technology around 2005 that has brought on the recent boom in discussions about participatory structures is only the latest incarnation of a debate that has been replayed in one way or another with almost every major technological innovation from the printing press to television.[10] The similarities are particularly striking when we compare radio history with the debates about social media. In both cases an early phase of self-taught tinkerers evolved into a hobbyist culture that envisioned a future of a connected more democratic world. This laymen culture then, however, gave way to a professionalized high-stakes commercial space that was also prone to be co-opted for political and propaganda goals.[11] Indeed, media systems hardly ever exist for the purpose of participation alone but tend to follow economic and market-related parameters and interests.[12] Thus, we also need to consider who is involved in shaping infrastructures and institutions. Content is inseparably determined by modes of dissemination and transmission

8 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: McMillan, 1916); Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, 1922).

9 See e. g. the collection of essays in Anders Ekström et al., eds., *History of Participatory Media: Politics and Publics, 1700 – 2000* (London: Routledge, 2011).

10 Gabriele Balbi et al., eds., *Digital Roots: Historicizing Media and Communication Concepts of the Digital Age* (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

11 Bertolt Brecht contemplated the ambivalence of the "new medium" radio in various texts towards the end of the 1920s, collectively called his "radio theory." See e. g. Bertolt Brecht, "Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat (1932)," in *Bertolt Brecht Gesammelte Werke* 18 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1975), 552–557. For examples of the underlying narrative of participation in twentieth century radio history, see e. g. Susan Merrill Squier, ed., *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003); Jesse Walker, *Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America* (New York: New York UP, 2001).

12 Arguably, the digital age has brought new urgency and complexity as media tools are no longer exclusively controlled by humans. Machine learning, thus, adds yet another layer to grappling with the issues of knowledge production. On artificial intelligence and some of the cultural implications see e. g. Margaret A. Boden, *AI: Its Nature and Future* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016).

and looking at knowledge through the lens of participation in this context once again highlights these blurred lines between production and circulation.

It is worth acknowledging that participatory forms of circulation and corroboration can also play a key role in spreading "uncertain knowledge" that historically has often been the only way for subaltern groups to exchange information and even organise.[13] This has been shown for example by research on the importance of rumours in slave rebellions in the Atlantic world, or by examining the way gossip and hear-say became a political driving force in pre-revolutionary France.[14] Both examples highlight how participatory knowledge can have an empowering effect while at the same destabilizing established structures and power relations. What may prove democratizing and even liberating in one context might be quite problematic in another. Arguably, as the flipside to highly participatory networks of unofficial, uncertain knowledge systems we may point to the spread of conspiracy theories, not just in recent years, which also illustrates that knowledge and truth cannot be conflated.[15]

Besides critically analyzing structural elements that determine who participates in defining, shaping, and circulating knowledge with regard to access, ability, and authority, the nature of participation, i.e. how participation occurs, also needs to be considered. This may relate to the formation of methods or the collection of material as well as to the way the output is shared. It can also mean being included in the process of knowledge creation rather than being conceived of as a mere object of study or a passive receptor.

Academic disciplines that depend on community involvement for their research like certain areas within the social sciences or anthropology provide instructive examples of studying modes of participation – and also the limits

13 Gary Alan Fine and Nicholas Difonzo, "Uncertain Knowledge," *Contexts* 10, no. 3 (2011): 16–21; Sebastian Jobs, "Uncertain Knowledge," *Rethinking History* 18, no. 1 (2014): 2–9.

14 On slave rebellions see e.g. Wim Klooster, "Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and a Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolutions," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2014): 401–424; Sebastian Jobs, "The Other 'Faithful Servant': Uncertainty and Trust during Gabriel's Conspiracy in Virginia, 1800," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 66, no. 2 (2021): 355–376; on early modern France see e.g. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard UP, 1982); Elizabeth Andrews Bond, *The Writing Public: Participatory Knowledge Production in Enlightenment and Revolutionary France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

15 E.g. Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Michael Butter and Peter Knight, "Conspiracy Theory in Historical, Cultural and Literary Studies," in *The Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, ed. Michael Butter and Peter Knight (London: Routledge, 2020), 28–42.

thereof.[16] A particularly promising concept to build on for the history of knowledge are "communities of practice." As a model that originated at the intersection of cognitive science and the sociology of learning, where the term was originally coined by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger, communities of practice are concerned with the circulation of information within groups that are not necessarily homogenous.[17] This framework also widens our perspective to integrate contributions by different practitioners as more directly part of knowledge production and shifts the focus to what could be called "doing knowledge" or the social practice of knowledge.[18] This may refer to volunteers but also to those "for whom making knowledge was part of making a living."[19] Shedding light on the practical or even pragmatic processes behind the production of knowledge can also reveal implicit hierarchies and mechanisms of exclusion. Nevertheless, "communities of practice" highlight the act of knowledge generation, including collection, circulation, and documentation. Thus, compared to an approach that focuses primarily or exclusively on content and results, a broader community can be conceived of as participating.

Theories of "citizen science" have grappled with this issue for some time striving to identify key elements of such collaborative settings.[20] An established field in the natural sciences where an interested public has been encouraged to participate in collection drives and quantitative research designs as early as in the nineteenth century, citizen sciences, the approach in the humanities and social sciences, began flourishing in the late twentieth century. There were, however, precursors, for instance in the history workshops or linguistic field work. A more general theoretical grounding for citizen science practices that brings together experiences from different fields is even more recent, as digital and public

16 Guy Bessette, *Involving the Community: A Guide to Participatory Development Communication* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2004); Shauna MacKinnon, ed., *Practising Community-Based Participatory Research: Stories of Engagement, Empowerment, and Mobilization* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

17 Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

18 Andreas Reckwitz, *Kreativität und Soziale Praxis: Studien zur Sozial- und Gesellschaftstheorie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016).

19 Patrick Anthony, "Introduction to 'Working at the Margins: Labor and the Politics of Participation in Natural History, 1700 – 1830,'" *History of Science and Humanities* 44, no. 2 (2021): 109.

20 Loreta Tauginienė et al., "Citizen Science in the Social Sciences and Humanities: The Power of Interdisciplinarity," *Palgrave Communications* 6 (2020), accessed November 27, 2021; Gowan Dawson, Chris Lintott, and Sally Shuttleworth, "Constructing Scientific Communities: Citizen Science in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20, no. 2 (2015): 246–254.

humanities have offered fresh input.[21] While academic training and a methodological as well as a theoretical frame of reference endow experts with more interpretive authority, they do not exclusively determine the collection processes. Members of the participating public contribute their own framing, for example by choosing how to interpret and fulfil certain tasks or how to implement relevant directions. Consequently, citizen science has evolved into an established subfield in the history of science.

Approaches to Participatory Knowledge

With concepts of participation discussed in multiple disciplines from media studies to anthropology, from political sciences to sociology, a rich interdisciplinary exchange informs our understanding of "Participatory Knowledge". It reminds us that in order to analyze the complexity of knowledge formation and circulation, we need more than one disciplinary perspective. *HIC* is keen to promote this fruitful dialogue and to engage scholars from a broad range of fields. The contributions to the thematic sections attest to and highlight the great variety of approaches, contexts, and interpretation of "Participatory Knowledge."

Emily Steinhauer focusses on the ideological currents and methodological practices of knowledge production and participation. Her essay interrogates the sociological projects of the Frankfurt School with regard to the tension that arises between the particular brand of democratic ideals of mid-twentieth-century empirical social research versus the firmly hierarchical set-up of the relevant field work and the general environment of the studies. Moreover, Steinhauer distinguishes between knowledge-collection as a bottom-up and knowledge-production as a top-down approach. In fact, there is a distinct difference between participation in the creation and collection of data and (raw) material on the one hand, and sharing in processes of organization and interpretation on the other. As Steinhauer shows, the highly standardized nature of the questionnaire-based methodology used by the Frankfurt-School studies ultimately seems to have impeded the kind of participation in knowledge production that could be considered participatory, i. e. meaningful to the subjects.

Måns Ahlstedt Åberg shifts the focus to the motivations of participants and presents a compelling example of broad public mobilization for collective

21 Barbara Heinisch, "A Path through the Conceptual Jungle of the Public Humanities," in *Public Humanities*, ed. Liza Kolodzie et al., posted June 26, 2021, accessed March 31, 2022, https://publicdh.hypotheses.org/148.

knowledge production. He examines how in the 1930s the Swedish population responded to calls by the Uppsala-based Institute for Race Biology to submit material in order to establish genealogical lines and a racially coded imaginary of desirable Swedish ancestry. Lacking an explicit description of what kind of documentation would constitute such a lineage, many citizens sent birth certificates or family trees while others opted for photographs. Their choices influenced the nature and the makeup of the collection that would later also go on display in a national exhibition. Genealogical research may simply seek a sense of identity or belonging, but it is often coupled with the desire to access a kind of hereditary social capital, for example by discovering famous relatives. With a focus on the lineage of the so called Great-Mother in Dalecarlia, this was a central driving force. Moreover, in line with the racist knowledge regimes that at the time also manifested themselves in eugenicist efforts in other countries, this particular genealogical research had a distinctly racialized impetus. Overall, Åberg investigates what led everyday people to contribute to the project, showing that participation in knowledge production not necessarily happens as a goal in and of itself and how at times it is steeped in ideology.

The close ties between participatory practices of knowledge production and national ideology also lie at the heart of the contribution by **Ana Carolina Arias.** In the 1920s, Argentinian teachers were called upon to participate in the National Folklore Survey to help with identifying and collecting material of national cultural relevance. Almost simultaneously to the survey in Argentina, John and Alan Lomax travelled the United States collecting and recording U.S.-American folk songs as part of the New Deal programmes.[22] However while the U.S. example has experts actively seeking out contributions form participants, what is intriguing about the Argentinian case is that by using the school system as an organizational framework, a network of "collection nodes" emerged creating a more decentralized participatory infrastructure while also bridging the sometimes considerable spatial distance, not by travel but by communication. The teachers and school officials became highly influential in interpreting and implementing the guidelines from the Argentine Education Council that had initiated the survey. Moreover, in the process some of these actors grew into specific kinds of experts themselves. Arias' contribution, thus, also reminds us that participatory knowledge can create its own structures

22 Todd Harvey, Andrew Peart, and Nathan Salsburg, "Alan Lomax and the 'Grass Roots' Idea," *Chicago Review* 60/61, no. 4/1 (2017): 37–45; Robert Baron, "'All Power to the Periphery': The Public Folklore Thought of Alan Lomax," *Journal of Folklore Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 275–317.

and hierarchies that tend to be a lot more complex than an expert/amateur binary.

Sakina Gröppmaier shows how power structures and content can be closely intertwined in academic knowledge regimes, arguing that modes of participation play a role on both levels. She highlights how a very recent participatory strategy, namely hashtag activism, has created new, often transnational dialogues about power structures within mostly national academic systems while at the same time re-negotiating canons and traditional narratives in highly institutionalized (Western) knowledge settings. A raised degree of participation suggests a more equal and consequently more democratic process. Broader participation can mean the inclusion of more diverse voices, interests, and perspectives into the discourse. Elite and elitist structures and norms are rightfully challenged. Accordingly, Gröppmaier discusses the way these developments have caused "rapture," especially in this media-driven "academic public sphere" that cannot fully be separated from a highly politicized and often polarized more general (digital) public sphere. The proverbial ivory tower of old, itself part of an imaginary shaped by exclusionary structures,[23] was never really closed off entirely. We can identify a (mass)media driven expansion of the discourse on and in academic spaces beginning decades before the digital age, though it gained considerable momentum with the advent of the digital public sphere.

More recent occasions to spotlight the challenges and opportunities of participatory practices of knowledge have come in the form of rapid response archives that emerged for example in the wake of major events like 9/11 or collective activism like the Black Lives Matter Movement or the fight against climate change.[24] Building on these forerunners, the Corona pandemic gave rise to similar compilation efforts in different countries. In an open conversation, published in Section III of this volume, we invited representatives of three **Covid-19-archive-projects** to reflect on how their work ties in with the notion of participatory knowledge. These newer – often digital – formats draw fresh attention to the various questions of participatory knowledge. They are rooted in citizen sciences practices and depend on a low threshold with regard to (media) access and initial expertise. Nevertheless, balancing open and participatory collection with curation and the development of durable structures re-

23 Steven Shapin, "The Ivory Tower. The History of a Figure of Speech and its Cultural Uses," *British Journal for the History of Science* 45, no. 1 (2012): 1–27.

24 For a broader evaluation of participatory models in archiving see Edward Benoit III and Alexandra Eveleigh, eds., *Participatory Archives* (London: Facet Publishing, 2019).

mains an ongoing challenge. Motivations and the diversity of representation among participants varies over time and space, while methodological questions abound. Hence, these examples highlight how closely knowledge is connected to the ever-changing processes of social interaction and cultural practices. Modes of participation offer a most stimulating perspective to analyze these interdependencies in the history of knowledge.

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