

# Self-Reflexivity as a form of Client Participation: Clients as Citizens, Consumers, Partners or Self-Entrepreneurs

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## Abstract

The article suggests that self-reflexive participation should be considered a distinct form of client participation. Self-reflexive participation is an individualized form of participation that occurs through a development-oriented dialogue between the client and a practitioner. In this dialogue, clients reflect on themselves, set goals for the future and devise strategies, thereby improving their self-regulatory potentials. The article discusses important differences between self-reflexive participation and democratic, consumerist and co-productive participation in terms of the form participation takes, the aim of participation, the client role, the resources required from clients to participate, the assumed relationship between the agency and the client and organizational responsiveness. Self-reflexive participation is based on a view of the client as capable and reflexive and it may foster a tailoring of social services to the wishes and life-projects of clients. However, self-reflexive participation is based on the assumption that clients can be empowered through improved skills of self-observation and life-planning. When focus is on these skills, it may gloss over important conflicts between clients and agency and detach questions of client participation from organizational responsiveness and struggles over user control.

**Keywords:** participation; democracy; consumerism; self-reflexivity; co-production; client participation

## Introduction

Self-reflexivity has been described as part of a new type of rationality in the front-line of the welfare state: related to the use of individual action plans across sectors such as health, education and social services. The use of individual action plans entail a dialogical negotiation between client and practitioner, which casts the relationship between state and citizens in novel ways (Born and Jensen, 2010). In this paper, I suggest that self-reflexivity can be considered a distinct form of client participation. This form of participation is different from both democratic, consumerist and co-productive participation in terms of the form participation takes, the aim of participation, the client role, the resources required from clients to

participate, the relationship between the agency and the client and the organizational responsiveness to client needs and preferences. Self-reflexivity as a form of participation may both entail possibilities for clients to influence the design and provision of services, but it is also a form of participation that is limited in distinct ways and which places particular demands on clients compared to other forms of participation (Kampmann, 2004). It is the aim of this article, to discuss what kind of influence self-reflexive participation allows clients to have.

Lipsky (1980: 42–43) maintains that client participation has a dual function, both as a means for securing individual and fair treatment and as a way of legitimising an agency's intervention in its clients' lives. Thus, participation can be involuntary for clients, and street-level organizations may seek to persuade clients to participate actively in the system. White (2011: 64) calls for a detailed examination of the concept of participation and the interests it serves and underscores that

'participation is not always in the interests of the poor. Everything depends on the type of participation, and the terms on which it is offered. [...] exit may be the most empowering option'.

Therefore, it should not be taken for granted that client participation is empowering or liberating to clients.

Based on this dual nature of client participation it is important to discuss what self-reflexivity as a form of participation entails. While several forms of participation have been identified and discussed extensively in the literature on client participation (e.g. by Aberbach and Christensen, 2005; Askheim *et al.*, 2017; Christensen and Pilling, 2018; Dent and Pahor, 2015; Fotaki, 2011; Mizrahi *et al.*, 2009; Nabatchi *et al.*, 2017; Wistow and Barnes, 1993), self-reflexivity has not been discussed as a distinct form of client participation before. Therefore, I find it important to discuss the implications of self-reflexive participation for clients' possibility to influence the services they receive. The article examines self-reflexive participation by contrasting it to democratic, consumerist and co-productive participation. Hence, the article will describe these three commonly discussed forms of client participation with the aim of discussing the distinctive features of self-reflexive participation and its implications for client empowerment.

The discussion is based on the rich literature on client participation. I have sought to identify key texts that conceptualize and discuss client, user or citizen participation (not treatment participation) through a combination of database search and chain search. Important research has focused on the causes or outcomes of participation, how to further participation, client experiences of services, clients' participation preferences, interventions to increase participation, and how to evaluate, assess or measure participation. However, systematically reviewing this extensive literature has not been the aim of this article.

Instead, I have focused on texts that outline or discuss what participation is and the different forms participation may take. In this article, I focus on client participation in public services. Therefore, I have primarily selected literature that focuses on the participation of people who are direct beneficiaries of public services and income transfers (clients), in contrast to the engagement of the general public (see Andreassen, 2018, for a discussion on models of citizen involvement). Throughout the article, I primarily use the concept of ‘client’, rather than ‘user’ or ‘consumer’ – since users and consumers typically have more service options available to them than social service clients do (Järvinen, 2002).

In the following, I begin by briefly describing three forms of participation that have been discussed extensively in the literature (democratic, consumerist and co-productive) with the aim of contrasting them to self-reflexive participation.

### **Democratic participation**

The democratic form of participation is based on the view that participation is ‘an essential part of a vibrant democracy’ (Mizrahi *et al.*, 2009: 39). The participant is a citizen with decision power, asserting lay control and holding government agencies accountable. Thus, democratic participation relates to the expression of voice (Hirschman, 1970). Arnstein (1969) describes citizen participation as a matter of citizen power and community control. Participation, therefore, entails redistribution of power from the powerful to powerless citizens. Arnstein graduates citizen participation using the metaphor of a ladder, whereby each succeeding rung corresponds to increasing degrees of citizen participation and, consequently, power redistribution. Participation for Arnstein is fundamentally related to decision-making and the power to force institutions to be responsive to the needs and preferences of citizens.

Democratic client participation entails the client having influence over problem definition and the selection of measures (cf. Kelty *et al.*, 2015; Rønning and Solheim, 1998). As described by Djuve and Kavli (2015), this influence involves the client’s expression of agency, with the caseworker allowing the needs and preferences of clients to influence service provision, even when the caseworker disagrees with the client’s suggestions. Therefore, democratic participation also evokes notions of client empowerment – though the relation between democratic participation and empowerment involves significant tensions and contradictions (see Holland *et al.*, 2005), and the notion of empowerment is also used to legitimize consumerist participation (see Newman and Vidler, 2006). Democratic participation finds justification in the individual’s and community’s right to self-determination as well as the self-efficacy, trust, cohesiveness and cooperation that should follow from democratic deliberation and lay control (Mizrahi *et al.*, 2009).

Democratic participation often assumes an adversarial relationship between welfare agencies and clients, based, in part, on conflicting interests and frames of

reference of clients and practitioners as well as different positions in relation to organizational pressures (e.g. performance measures). In Lipsky's (1980) analysis of street-level bureaucracies, clients only have marginal impact on the functioning of welfare agencies. According to Lipsky, 'Street-level bureaucracies usually have nothing to lose by failing to satisfy clients' (p. 55; see also Brodtkin, 2013a, 2013b). However, practitioners may be evaluated in terms of client performance, and practitioners may need client compliance in order to achieve organizational goals (Lipsky, 1980: 58–9). Thus, practitioners will orient themselves towards obtaining client cooperation or consent and may develop routines that help them control clients (pp. 86, 117; Dubois, 2009: 4). However, practitioners are also constrained by specific ways of securing client consent (Lipsky, 1980: 58–9). According to Lipsky (1980: 60–70), practitioners control clients by structuring the context of the interaction in such a way that the responses open to clients are directed, e.g. by teaching clients appropriate client behaviour and by distributing both psychological and material benefits and sanctions. In this context, the definition of the problems facing the client and the choice of intervention are not merely a technical matter to be resolved by skilled practitioners, but also a moral concern that justifies client participation rather than expert authority (cf. Short, 1996).

This form of participation can be termed democratic because democracy fundamentally entails two core principles that both relate to this form of participation: *non-domination* and *proportional inclusion*. While non-domination entails the right of self-determination, proportional inclusion entails the inclusion of people in decision-making regarding matters that potentially affect them (Warren, 2011). Democratic participation is about enhancing self-determination through a transfer of decision power to the client who is affected by the decisions. However, the use of the term democratic to describe this form of participation is not meant to imply that other forms of participation are undemocratic or that democracy only entails self-determination through inclusion in decision-making.

### **Consumerist participation**

The consumerist form of participation seeks to optimize services through user choice (see Borghi and van Berkel, 2007). The participant is a user, a consumer or even a customer choosing between different services or service providers. Consumerist participation entails clients making informed choices by positively selecting services or service providers that fit their needs and preferences and exiting services or providers with which they are dissatisfied. For this form of participation to take place, several conditions must be met: 1) clients need information about alternatives and the possible consequences of these alternatives; 2) clients must be able to choose between relevant services or service providers, e.g.

different training programmes or different schools; and 3) client choice must have consequences for service providers so that the latter have an incentive to be responsive to clients' needs and preferences (Tritter and McCallum, 2006: 161).

User choice is often identified with neo-liberalism and the marketization of public services. However, while 'user choice has been absorbed by neoliberalism' (Roiseland, 2016: 40), we should exercise caution in distinguishing between participation through choice and the marketization and privatization of public services (see, e.g. Askheim *et al.*, 2017). User choice may be related to contracting out and marketization when users are asked to choose between public and private providers. However, users may also be enabled to choose between different services from a given provider (e.g. home care or residential care) or to make choices about service decisions that decouple user choice from outsourcing and marketization (see Newman and Vidler, 2006: 203).

In the neo-liberal variant, user choice comprises a mechanism in the optimization of services through marketization. In several public service areas (e.g. elderly care, primary schools), quasi-markets have been created to allow both private and public providers to compete and consumers to choose (Roiseland, 2016; Torfing *et al.*, 2019). Participation here occurs through individual choice in a marketplace, with individual choice then becoming the mechanism through which to ensure that services are responsive to individual preferences and needs, ideally working as a feedback mechanism that leads to adjustments in service provision (Askheim *et al.*, 2017; Tritter and McCallum, 2006: 161). The neo-liberal variant of consumerist participation thus finds its justification in individual choice and the effectiveness and quality that should follow from market competition – not community involvement or empowerment.

An important dimension of consumerist participation is that clients should be able to exit services if they are dissatisfied. Warren (2011) has argued that the capacity and right to exit should be considered an important dimension of democracy and empowerment, since exit may 'mean breaking a relationship of domination' (Warren, 2011: 690). Not all forms of exit are democratic, however, as some forms simply reflect neglect, lack of engagement or evasion of responsibility. Nevertheless, the individual capacity to replace an organizational membership with another – e.g. replace a poor child-care provider with a better, change political affiliation, leave an unsafe job – is an important exit-based empowerment that may be institutionally enabled through rights, protections, welfare entitlements, multiple service providers, etc. (Warren, 2011). As such, the capacity to exit and select an alternative service or provider is important in challenging asymmetrical power relationships between system and client, particularly if the client is highly dependent on the service offering (e.g. health care). Moreover, user choice can serve as a mechanism to realize individual service preferences and avoid dependency on oppressive social relations rather than

a mechanism for optimization through the market (Warren, 2011: 691; see Røiseland, 2016). The ability to exit without sanctions then becomes a crucial dimension of participation in general, not just in relation to the neo-liberal variant (Kelty *et al.*, 2015).

Consumerist participation relies on the ability to make an informed choice, which requires a high level of information about the alternatives as well as their costs and consequences. Clients often do not have prior knowledge about the skills and competences of service providers so as to make quality comparisons. Even when relevant and adequate information is provided to the client in a comprehensive manner, the effects of different interventions are often unpredictable, impeding the possibility of making informed choices (Barnes and Prior, 1995). Thus, while the ability to exit may empower clients, it has been argued that participation through choice may actually disempower clients (Small and Rhodes, 2000). In particular, clients with uncommon needs and preferences may be unable to find relevant services to choose from, a concern that increases when the geographical dispersion of services is taken into account (Small and Rhodes, 2000). Furthermore, clients may be burdened rather than empowered by participation through choice, especially if they have to choose in situations where the necessary information to make a choice is unavailable, where the options to choose from are constrained by availability rather than by client need and preference and when clients can choose different providers but not control the content of services. Under these circumstances, choice is a poor mechanism for clients to assert influence over the services they receive (Barnes and Prior, 1995; Fotaki, 2011).

### **Co-productive participation**

The co-productive form of participation rests on a pragmatic recognition that programmes improve when they are based on the knowledge and experience of clients, when clients invest themselves in the programmes and take ownership and when they participate in service delivery to themselves and others (Mizrahi *et al.*, 2009: 39–40). Co-productive participation entails collaboration between clients and professionals in the process of service delivery (Whitaker, 1980). Thus, it entails participation in the process of planning and delivering services, not necessarily decision-making regarding services (some scholars use broader definitions of co-production, e.g. Bovaird *et al.*, 2015; Nabatchi *et al.*, 2017). The participant is a partner, contributing to service delivery with his or her own resources (time, engagement, knowledge, experience and skills), at the same time, utilizing the resources of public agencies. The co-producing participant may contribute to his or her personal service delivery or to the services of others, e.g. through peer-support, as a para-professional staff member (Alford, 2009: 15). The co-productive form of participation finds justification in the

improved use of the resources of both the clients and agencies and the increased relevance of services to clients, which is supposed to lead to improved service quality and increased effectiveness (Askheim *et al.*, 2017; Voorberg *et al.*, 2015; Whitaker, 1980).

A range of public services requires co-production in the sense of active contributions from clients, particularly when the objective of services is some form of personal transformation, e.g. education, health or family counselling (Whitaker, 1980). For instance, employment services rely on clients performing job searches, writing CVs, participating in job interviews, undertaking job training or adult continuing education and providing the agency with information regarding health conditions and family obligations that may hinder specific forms of work, odd work hours, long commutes, etc. Without such collaboration, it is extremely difficult for employment services to move people into employment. Other service areas such as dental care also rely on co-production; preventative dental care depends on daily participation by clients (e.g. brushing teeth), in contrast to treatments that can be delivered with a minimum of participation by the client (e.g. dental surgery). Not all activities that clients perform can be regarded as co-production. Co-production entails clients making an active contribution towards reaching organizational goals, thereby entailing more than a minimal compliance with formal requirements. Scholars have emphasized the voluntary nature of co-production: asserting that, as a form of collaboration, it requires at least partly voluntary commitment from clients (Whitaker, 1980; Alford, 2009). Thus, co-production is not simply a fundamental condition for the functioning of the public sector; it is also a distinct form of client participation, whereby the client becomes a crucial collaborator in the planning and delivery of services and where management is preoccupied with how to increase the engagement and efforts of clients. In this form of participation, the professional may, in some cases, become an enabler or facilitator instead of a provider of services (Bovaird, 2007; Whitaker, 1980).

For co-production to occur, it is crucial that the knowledge, skills and engagement of the client are brought into play in service delivery. This requires that clients are both willing and able to participate (Alford, 2009: 183). In this context, an important critique of co-productive participation is that it may hinder equitable distribution since the active participation may be burdensome for disadvantaged clients (Nabatchi *et al.*, 2017). The co-productive form of participation emphasizes a high level of collaboration and mutual trust between professionals and clients (in contrast to the mistrust and control that have been characteristic of NPM) (Osborne, 2006; Runya *et al.*, 2015). Lack of user influence or even non-voluntary programmes do not, in themselves, preclude co-production, since clients can participate voluntarily in service delivery without participating in decision-making. However, co-production relies on the engagement of the client, and lack of influence or even coercion may lower

the client's commitment. As suggested by Alford (2009: 185–7), the use of sanctions to ensure the active participation of clients may undermine trust and lead to demoralization, resentment and gaming behaviour.

The co-productive form of client participation is linked to New Public Governance, whereby citizens are increasingly expected to actively participate in service delivery. New Public Governance signals a shift from control, performance management, benchmarking and competition between service providers towards an emphasis on collaboration among a wide range of public, private and non-profit stakeholders (Morgan and Shinn, 2014; Torfing *et al.*, 2019; Runya *et al.*, 2015). Trust and social relations are seen as important governance mechanisms (Osborne, 2006). Co-productive participation thus relies on the organizational responsiveness to client knowledge and skills, professionals' competencies in collaborating with clients, mutual trust between professionals and clients and clients' ability and willingness to perform relevant tasks (Voorberg *et al.*, 2015).

### **Self-reflexive participation**

Self-reflexive participation occurs through a development-oriented dialogue between the client and the practitioner, e.g. a social worker, teacher or nurse. This dialogue is the context for reflexivity, whereby the client observes and presents him- or herself as well as plans for the future and devises strategies (Born and Jensen, 2005). Reflexivity involves life-planning and self-development, i.e. it entails observing and contemplating about the self in the immediate situation and possible future courses of life (D'Cruz *et al.*, 2007). The self-reflexive form of participation entails dialogical self-presentation and self-creation, which form the basis of the distribution of obligations between the agency and the client (Born and Jensen, 2005). The client becomes a self-entrepreneur who engages in self-observation, self-expression and self-constitution in relation to future-oriented planning and negotiation with the agency.

Self-reflexivity is related to the use of individual action plans as a policy instrument (Born and Jensen, 2005). Though some scholars describe self-reflexivity as a condition of late modernity that allows welfare subjects to interact with social services in new ways (e.g. Ferguson, 2003), I consider self-reflexivity as a particular form of participation that is carved out by administrative practices. Hence, self-reflexive participation is not advanced by users or user advocates; rather, it is furthered by administrative techniques. Ferguson (2003) describes reflexivity as a resource used by the socially excluded to cope with the stressors in their lives; however, as a form of participation furthered by the use of individual action plans, self-reflexivity is also a demand placed on clients. In dialogue with a practitioner, the system urges the client to be self-reflexive (Born and Jensen, 2005). As such reflexivity is not only a resource, it is also a requirement.



For example, in kindergartens and schools self-reflexive participation involves an extension of the children's scope for agency as well as a new set of criteria for assessment and evaluation. In this form of participation, children are expected to be able to express their interests, wants and preferences and motivate them, formulate expectations to themselves, plan their own learning processes, keep a personal log or portfolio, evaluate their own efforts and suggest improvements for their future learning processes. As such, children are not only expected to learn (e.g. numbers and letters), but also to create themselves as active learners through the process, developing their own individual way of managing their wants and preferences and resolving conflicts (Kampmann, 2004).

Self-reflexive participation is connected to the social tendency to emphasize reflexivity and flexibility: 'Active citizens are expected to be able to create their biography individually and adapt it continuously to changing external conditions' (Jensen and Pfau-Effinger, 2005: 7; see also Ferguson, 2003). In addition, self-reflexive participation is related to tendencies towards *personalized services* (e.g. patient-centred goal-setting), *goal-oriented services* (rather than process- or activity-oriented services) and *contractualisation* (written agreements between agency and client). As such, self-reflexivity is part of a move away from standardized services towards services tailored to individual needs and preferences (Borghi and van Berkel, 2007; Born and Jensen, 2010; see Scourfield, 2007). An important part of this participation is to negotiate the goals of intervention through dialogue (Born and Jensen, 2010). Such negotiated goal-setting takes place in, for instance, primary school education, rehabilitation and employment services. Hence, while self-reflexivity as a form of participation draws on therapeutic elements (e.g. personal development, self-observation, self-creation), it does so in non-therapeutic contexts and the self-reflexivity is called for by the system rather than client-initiated therapy. As such, self-reflexivity as a form of participation can be interpreted as part of the tendency of 'psy' knowledges and practices affecting the relationship between state and citizen (see Rose, 1999).

Self-reflexive participation seems to rely on establishing consensus between the client and the agency through dialogue (Born and Jensen, 2010). In welfare contexts where conflicts of interest hinder consensus, e.g. child protection services in cases where clients are faced with the threat of having their children taken into an out-of-home placement, self-reflexive participation may be overthrown by social control (Scourfield and Welsh, 2003). Hence, self-reflexive participation implies a collaborative approach to participation similar to participation as co-production, where the relationship between the agency and client is seen as collaborative, with different forms of knowledge and activities complementing each other (see Tritter and McCallum, 2006: 164). In addition, self-reflexive participation entails a negotiation of the goals of the intervention and the distribution of obligations between agency and client that resonates well with

co-productive participation – with its emphasis on basing the service provision on the knowledge, competencies and skills of clients.

In contrast to the collaborative approach of self-reflexive participation, democratic participation is usually considered based on an adversarial relationship between the agency and clients, a relationship conceived as a contest for power between powerholders and the powerless (Arnstein, 1969; Tritter and McCallum, 2006: 164). The highly individualized self-reflexive participation has no collective counterpart, which also contrasts with democratic participation. Self-reflexivity fundamentally relates to self-regulation, as clients are required to engage with the questions: what are your goals, and how do you expect to achieve them? Here, participation takes the shape of negotiating the formation of personal development goals and ways to reach them. Born and Jensen (2010) argue that this form of participation is similar to human resource management-interviews:

In these performance interviews the individual's strong and weak sides are addressed in order to stimulate reflection with respect to relevant ambitions, skills, competencies, and opportunities. In such performance assessments, the language created by the industrialisation and collectivisation ("we would like", "we demand", etc.) has ceased to be useful. Instead, a new idiom is used – the self-strategising language. By using this idiom, the employees can articulate that they, as individuals, have defined as objective to get from A to B in X number of days; and it is in this very plan that they establish the contours of themselves (Born and Jensen, 2010: 330)

Hence, self-reflexive participation is a participation in planning and self-creation, not participation in decision-making or problem definition in a broader sense that might not relate to personal development or personal goal-setting. When important conflicts of interest or conflicts of values exist between the client and the agency, the system-induced dialogical self-reflexivity may become problematic, because it relies on trust, collaboration and the possibility of reaching consensus. In the context of fundamental conflicts of interests or values, there is a risk that the system-induced reflexivity and attempt at reaching consensus through dialogue becomes a form of manipulation of the goals and preferences of clients, as they are urged by the system to reflect on their life situation in a particular light. Here, self-reflexive participation may obscure important conflicts between agency and clients.

Self-reflexivity bears some affinities with consumerist participation concerning the emphasis on personalized services and individual responsibility. However, in consumerist participation it is usually assumed that the client holds preformed and stable individual preferences as the basis of choice, while self-reflexive participation entails reconstructing or redefining the client through dialogue. Self-reflexive participation is not primarily about making choices, but about observing yourself and setting goals for your personal development.

Self-reflexive participation is a form of participation that constitutes the self and goals for the future. While the goal-orientation might seem to resonate with consumerist participation, the process of goal-formation that is crucial for self-reflexive participation sets the two forms of participation apart. Consumerist participation relies on an understanding of the client as informed and rational with preformed preferences, while self-reflexive participation is based on a recognition of the client as a capable and reflexive citizen who is able to reflect, engage in dialogical goal-setting and self-regulate (plan and act) in a goal-oriented manner (Born and Jensen, 2005; Ferguson, 2003). This bears some affinities with co-productive participation that relies on an understanding of the client as a knowledgeable and capable partner.

The four forms of participation are summarized in [Table 1](#).

### Potentials of self-reflexive participation

Since the self-reflexive form of participation relates to personal goal-setting and self-creation, the content of self-reflexivity is not limited to the specific target area addressed by the agency (e.g. employment, health or education), but combines reflexivity in relation to personal, social and professional developments. This element of the self-reflexive participation has been criticized for subjecting clients to a demand for personal development when faced with, e.g. unemployment or disabilities (see, e.g. Mik-Meyer, 2006), but it is also an element that carries potentials for problem-setting participation and life-first approaches, rather than, e.g. work-first (Borghini and van Berkel, 2007: 417). In what follows, I will briefly present these contrasting views on self-reflexive participation starting with the more critical approaches to self-reflexivity.

Self-reflexivity lends itself to a Foucauldian analysis of the manner in which power works through the creation of specific forms of subjectivity and, hence, how self-reflexivity creates a close relationship between government and self-government (Peters, 2001). As such, participation as self-reflexivity is related to a form of micro-governance and has been described as a self-technology in a Foucauldian sense (Born and Jensen, 2010). Critiques of demands of self-reflexivity have highlighted the resources required for self-reflexivity to take place and, thus, the risk of excluding specific groups of clients who do not possess the necessary resources (Born and Jensen, 2010; Mik-Meyer, 2006; Scourfield, 2007; see also Lash, 1994: 120), the responsabilization of the client through reflexivity (Born and Jensen, 2010; D'Cruz *et al.*, 2007; Scourfield, 2007; see also Borghini and van Berkel, 2007) and the individualization of problem definitions and solutions that self-reflexivity may entail, e.g. personal development as a solution to structural problems (Born and Jensen, 2010; Mik-Meyer, 2006). Self-reflexivity, therefore, can be part of neo-liberal governance, whereby social problems are pushed back on clients who are expected to act as self-managers, individually carrying the

TABLE 1. Forms of client participation

	Democratic	Consumerist	Co-productive	Self-reflective
Client role	Citizen	Consumer	Partner	Self-entrepreneur
Conception of client	Self-determining	Informed Rational	Knowledgeable Capable	Reflexive Responsible Capable
Mode of operation	Voice Problem definition Decision-making Transfer of power	Choice Exit	Service-delivery Task performance	Future-oriented self-reflexivity Goal-setting Planning
Purpose for client	Access to rights Decision-power Influence Control Holding agency accountable	Self-determination through choice Maximize self-interest	Increase relevance of services Increase control over process	Personal development Reimagine one's self and possible future Life-planning Devise strategies toward life projects
Purpose for agency	Legitimacy Sustainability Client commitment to decisions	Cost-efficiency User satisfaction	Improved use of resources Effectiveness Efficiency	Self-regulation of client
Assumed relation between agency and participant	Adversarial	Resolvable through market	Collaborative	Collaborative/Resolvable through dialogue

burden of personal investments and social risk, in effect, displacing public responsibility in addressing social problems (Peters, 2001; Scourfield, 2007).

In contrast to this dire view of self-reflexivity, Borghi and van Berkel (2007: 415) emphasize its democratic potentials:

Social policies and institutions should empower and promote policy users' reflexivity regarding their life projects, instead of offering them predefined and standardised problem definitions and problem solutions. This perspective strongly favours the participation of users in social interventions: as citizens, not merely as consumers or customers.

In this formulation, self-reflexivity is about participation in defining problems and solutions and placing social services in the context of the wishes and life projects of participants. Similarly, Ferguson (2003) illustrates how disadvantaged clients (women suffering domestic violence) used interventions not only for protection, but also for life-planning and re-constituting their selves and future biographies. As such, the self-reflexive form of participation can potentially empower clients to partake in shaping their own lives. In this view, self-reflexivity may be a way for participants to make sense of their world and to locate themselves in relation to others. In contrast to democratic participation, self-reflexivity is based on the assumption that participants can be empowered through improved skills of self-observation and life-planning (D'Cruz *et al.*, 2007: 77). However, we should be careful not to relate self-reflexivity to agency in a straightforward manner, since participants may be 'reflexive but powerless', unable to influence the structures that affect them (Hoggett, 2001: 45).

Importantly, system-induced reflexivity may be empowering, or it may have a disciplining effect, depending on: how the institutional interaction unfolds, the strategies and methods used by the practitioner, the resources of the client and, consequently, the subject-positions created for the client and practitioner (Olesen, 2003). When the intervention is the result of negotiation between the client and practitioner, potentials for transfer of power co-exist with the risk that universal rights and obligations are replaced by exclusion or inclusion, depending on the willingness and ability to be reflexive (Born and Jensen, 2010).

Self-reflexivity as a form of participation relies on individual agency (expression of wishes, needs and preferences) and the ability to transform wishes into a form that the practitioner will accept. This participation depends on the practitioner's trust in the client's expressions as genuine and realistic and in the client's ability to carry out the suggested plans for the future (Born and Jensen, 2010). In important ways, this form of participation also depends on the client's trust in the practitioner's ability to carry through the agency's part of the agreement and to back the client's efforts with sufficient resources. Therefore, there is a risk that participation will break down when such trust cannot be established, for instance, when social discipline overrules attempts at self-regulation or when caseworkers deem client participation to be 'irrelevant', e.g. when the client is seen as unable to

plan in a future-oriented manner or unable to self-regulate or make realistic suggestions (see Born and Jensen, 2010: 329). Hence, self-reflexivity requires the ability to observe and present oneself and to enter into negotiation and dialogue with practitioners (Born and Jensen, 2010). However, it should be noted that all four forms of participation require resources from clients, albeit very different resources. Democratic participation in service development, management and evaluation is time consuming; it requires regular attendance at meetings, engaging in deliberation and may require some training in the bureaucratic procedures of public organizations (May, 2006). Experience with participation may need to be built for successful democratic participation to occur. As Pateman (1970: 105) states: 'we do learn to participate by participating'. Democratic participation may be particularly taxing if the systems are fragmented, with a high number of settings where decisions can be made, e.g. with a provider/purchaser split (Barnes, 2011: 357). Consumerist participation requires that clients obtain extensive information about alternative services and about the implications of different services in order to be able to choose (Tritter and McCallum, 2006: 160–161). Co-production can also be demanding for clients since it taps directly into clients' active participation in service delivery, particularly their time, engagement and knowledge (White, 2011: 59). If clients are expected to perform complex and ill-defined tasks and the clients lack the skills to undertake them, co-production can be burdensome for the clients (Alford, 2009: 199–200).

### **Self-reflexive participation and organizational responsiveness**

It is important to note that there are typically quite different aims with different forms of client participation. Wistow and Barnes (1993) distinguish between two broad forms of purposes: 1) learning from clients in order to improve the quality of services, 2) empowering clients in order to promote user control over services. If we consider the forms of participation discussed in this article, the differences between the aims of participation are considerable. Democratic participation involves the client as a self-determining citizen (individually or as part of a community) who is empowered to place demands on the state. Participation here relates to voice and constitutes a means to client control, or at least influences problem-definition, decision-making and resource distribution. Hence, the aim is to create opportunities for clients to express their needs and preferences and foster organizational responsiveness to clients' expressions. Consumerist participation also involves a notion of organizational responsiveness, not through client voice as in democratic participation, but through client choice, however, often with the aim of increasing effectiveness or improving service provision through competition rather than increasing client control. Co-production is often used with the aim of improved use of resources, but it fundamentally involves a notion of organizational responsiveness. Co-productive participation namely relies on the organizational

responsiveness of service provision to client knowledge and skills (Voorberg *et al.*, 2015). In contrast to the three other forms of participation, self-reflexive participation is aimed mainly at improving the individual client's capacities, not organizational responsiveness. The client participates in individual goal-setting, planning and a negotiation of the obligations of the client and agency. While self-reflexivity may empower clients to set their own goals for their future, self-reflexivity as a form of participation promotes only this narrow form of client empowerment. It seems aimed at improving the clients' capacity for self-regulation rather than increasing user control over services or the organizational responsiveness to client needs and preferences. Self-reflexivity here involves a fundamental asymmetry, since it is the goals, plans and practices of the client that this participation revolves around, not the practices of the institution (see e.g. Karila and Alasuutari, 2012). In addition, since self-reflexivity is a highly individualized form of participation, it does not aim at any form of community mobilization or community control and it is likely to further a personalized problem-definition rather than a structural one. Self-reflexive participation thus entails a risk that participation becomes detached from concerns regarding organizational responsiveness and user control.

### Conclusion

Based on prior work on client participation, this article suggests that self-reflexive participation can be considered a distinct form of client participation. Self-reflexive participation is a highly individualized form of participation that occurs through a development-oriented dialogue between the client and a practitioner. In this dialogue, clients are expected to reflect on themselves, set goals for the future and devise strategies, thereby improving their self-regulatory potentials. As such, self-reflexive participation revolves around the individual client's personal development, not decision-making or problem definition in a broader sense that might not relate to personal development or personal goal-setting. With the use of negotiated goal-setting, self-reflexive participation represents a collaborative approach to participation. This makes trust an important precondition for self-reflexive participation, but it also entails the risk that important conflicts of interests or values between the client and the agency are disregarded.

Self-reflexive participation positions the client as capable and reflexive and it may foster a problem-setting participation, where social services are tailored to the wishes and life-projects of participants, since it may empower clients to reflect, set goals and ultimately act upon their individual life projects. However, self-reflexive participation allows only for a limited form of client empowerment through improved individual skills of self-observation and life-planning. When the focus is on these skills, it may detach questions of client

participation from organizational responsiveness and struggles over user-control. Thus, self-reflexive participation seems to promote a rather narrow form of client empowerment and it may entail a responsabilization of clients and an individualization of structural problems. However, it is important to be attentive to forms of participation that may occur outside of formal decision-making processes and with goals other than decision-making, e.g. building relationships, sharing experiences and re-imagining potential futures for oneself (Tritter and McCallum, 2006; Stage and Ingerslev, 2015). Hence, we should not deny the value of self-reflexivity as a form of participation that allows for a somewhat restricted, but in some contexts crucial form of client empowerment.

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