CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION:
A CASE STUDY OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS IN ANTOFAGASTA, CHILE

A thesis presented to
the faculty of the Center of International Studies of
Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

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June 2009
This thesis entitled

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION:
A CASE STUDY OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS IN ANTOFAGASTA, CHILE

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Civil Society Participation: A case Study of Neighborhood Councils in Antofagasta, Chile (63 pp.)

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Abstract:

Civil society is a main attribute of democracy, however democracy as well as participation holds a normative value, which in real life is created and reproduced in a process of socialization. Thus, people’s participation is influenced by a set of social forces that shape and control people’s interaction in the social realm. This raises important questions about the quality and effect of peoples’ participation within democratic current societies. I argue that participation is a phenomenon in a continuing process of construction, where cultural as well as material resources influence its development and shape its outcomes at different levels and at different periods of time.

This study proposes to empirically study the character and effects of current forms of participation taking place within neighborhood councils in Antofagasta, Chile in order to better understand their role in reaching democratic principles as well as economic and social development.

Approved: ______________________________________________________________

Thomas Walker

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Elena and Roberto who have been my unconditional life friends and have supported me in all of my projects. I also want to thank the professors who guided this work: Diane Ciekawy, Thomas Walker and Steve Rubenstein for all their academic guidance, and support, and to all of my friends in Chile and in Athens, for their friendship, help and advice.

Finally, I would like to thank all neighborhood council’s presidents, members of the government and the private sector of Antofagasta, who provided me with valuable information for my research.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the past decade the concept citizen participation as a principal value of a democratic model of governance has regained significance within the socio-political context of many Latin American countries. This has occurred under the sponsorship of the international assistance community who consider citizen participation as crucial to achieving democratic sustainability as well as social and economic development in the region (UNDP). As a consequence many Latin American governments have begun to formulate policies to promote participation of citizens at national and local levels.

However, citizen participation might give different results from what a democratic proposal suggests. There is no question of the value of participation within democracy; however, democracy as well as participation holds a normative value, which in real life is created and reproduced in a process of socialization (Giannini 16). Thus, people’s participation is influenced by a set of social forces that shape and control people’s interaction in the social realm. Participation of individuals and groups can be influenced by different economic, social and political factors. This raises important questions about the quality and effect of peoples’ participation within democratic societies. I argue that participation is a phenomenon in a continuing process of construction, where cultural as well as material resources influence its development and shape its outcomes at different levels and at different periods of time.

For this reason it is crucial to empirically study the character and effects of current forms of participation taking place within civil society in order to better
understand its role in reaching democratic principles as well as economic and social development.

1.1 Statement of Problem

This study proposes to explore and analyze people’s perceptions and actions about participation inside Neighborhood Councils (NC’s) in Antofagasta, Chile. We want to be able to identify current forms of participation in order to explain the nature of public participation taking place in these organizations. The findings might help to understand how the current forms of participation reinforce or do not reinforce democracy building as well as its role in reaching social and economic development. Finally, this study intends to contribute information for further research.

The principal objectives are described as follows:

1. To identify actions considered by NC’s members as participation practices.
2. To identify factors that individuals perceive as contributing to or limiting participation.
3. To identify motivations and expectations that comes from participating.
4. To identify who participates, at what level of intensity and when, e.g. voting, city meetings, etc.
5. To identify the means individuals have to participate, e.g. information availability, opportunities to express opinion, to debate, etc.
2.1 Definition of civil society

Understanding civil society is essential to understand the notion of people participating within democratic governance. Civil society involves individuals acting collectively over a common goal. It implies the idea of people acting together in interaction with the state. On the contrary, citizen participation emphasizes the individual. It implies a specific territory as well as rights and responsibilities in relation to the government. Although the difference has been established this study will use the terms “civil society” and “citizens” participation interchangeably but will draw attention to its collective attribute.

The notion of civil society can be traced back many centuries in Western thinking. The modern idea of civil society emerged in the 18th century as a domain parallel to but separate from the state. Over time the notion of civil society became rooted to the concept of democracy as a model of governance. Currently most democratic models acknowledge civil society and civil society participation as main features of democracy. Thus, civil society is one of the primary mechanisms by which society influences as well as provides stability to the political system of a democratic nation.

Civil society then can be defined as the realm of organized social life that is autonomous from the state, voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules (Diamond 5, Oxhorn, Organizing 3). It locates itself among the private sphere (e.g., individual and family life), the state, and the market. Civil
society main features include citizens acting collectively in the public sphere to express their collective interest, achieve their collective goals, and making demands on the state (Diamond, 5, Oxhorn, Democracy 3).

2.2 The function of civil society

In theory, the principal role of civil society is to ensure a balance between the state and society. Attaining this balance requires that citizens exert their rights and responsibilities along with the timely provision and protection of these rights by the state. Functions of civil society include controlling and checking state performance, monitoring abuses such as corruption or voting fraud, mobilizing societies against such abuses, and holding state officials accountable (Diamond 5).

However, the key function of civil society is to limit the state’s power by dispersing this power. As a result, individuals are able to organize themselves autonomously around collective interests and therefore minimize the tendency of dominant groups to prioritize their interest over other less powerful social actors (Oxhorn, Democracy 2). This organizational capacity is the principal feature of civil society as it provides multiple actors with the ability to “alter patterns of integration on the overall exercise of political power” (Oxhorn, Democracy 2). An effective role of civil society should afford individuals with the potential to define or redefine their interest and needs over time contributing to the stability between state and society (Oxhorn, Democracy 3). Consequently, civil society in interaction with the state should maintain and ensure a permanent harmony of the diverse and changing necessities of the
whole range of social realities. Most important, civil society’s role in contemporary social organization is one of preventing the atomization of modern life in order to develop what Putnam called social capital which are features of social life, networks, norms and trust, which enable participants to act together more efficiently to pursue share objectives. Thus, participation facilitates ties of social confidence, builds predisposition for cooperation and mutual recognition and helps to nourish a sense of community reciprocity and solidarity. However, the sole existence of organized groups within civil society under democracy does not mean they function as effective democratizing agents (Fitzsimmons 6). Several conditions need to occur in order for civil society organizations to have a valuable impact on a democratic system.

First, government needs to be willing to release and redistribute political power as well as to place suitable conditions for the distribution of that power. Second, civil society organizations should be a meeting place for marginalized and disenfranchised groups to create channels other than political parties for the articulation of underrepresented demands. Third, civil society organizations should generate meaningful changes in state policies, institutions, and social practices influencing larger socio-economic and political processes. Fourth, there should be a maximum amount of direct participation of individuals within civil society (Oxhorn, Democracy 44).

2.3 Civil society and state

Civil society maintains a direct relation to the state. The modern idea of state is conceive as an organized political community occupying a definite territory, having an
organized government, and possessing internal and external sovereignty. Opello and Rosow indicate the following characteristic as the features of nation-states in the current global order:

First, a state has a distinct geographical defined territory over which it exercises jurisdiction; second, it has sovereignty over its territory; third, it as a government made up of public offices and its role is to control and administers the territory and population subject to the state’s jurisdiction; fourth, it has fix boundaries marked on the ground by entry and exit points; fifth, its government claims monopoly on the legitimate use of physical coercion over its population; sixth, its population manifest to a greater or lesser degree, a sense of national identity; and seventh, it can rely to a greater or lessen degree on the obedience ad loyalty of its inhabitants (3).

The current global order in which sovereign, territorial statehood became the only legitimate and acceptable form of political and military rule on the planet began during the late eighteen century in Europe with the French revolution. This transformation began when the idea that the sovereign authority flowed from god and was invested in a king was replaced for sovereign authority emerging from people and represented in the leaders chosen by them. Thus, hereditary monarchy was replaced by European state-systems and over time they largely embraced some type of liberalism as their only legitimate form. Thus, it can be said that what is distinctive about modern states is the fact most states have taken a broadly representative democratic form, which does not mean homogenous forms of government, but suggest an increasing world internalization of western models.
2.4 Political Philosophies of the state

Although the principal form of government in current modern states is a democratic one, there have been different political philosophies that have postulated and analyzed the ideal and actual roles of the state. These ideas emerged with the rise of capitalism, which coincided, with the reemergence of state as a separate and centralized sector of society. There have been important schools of thought that has intended to define the role of the state and further criticize state-society relationships in the modern era. Pierson identifies five major positions that have been adopted on the state-society relationships: The first two, Pluralism and Marxism, which argue that society dominates over the state-society relationship, shaping and determining the nature of the state (70). On the contrary, the other three, neo-liberalism, elitism and institutional statists argue that the state acts in pursuit of its own interest and may well have an independent role in shaping the nature of society. Next, pluralism, Marxism and neo-liberalism will be generally discussed as its features are in closer relationship to civil society and state relationship discussed in this work.

2.4.1 Pluralism

As its name indicates, the main idea behind pluralism is plurality. Its core proposition is that power and resources within society are dispersed. It mainly focuses on government not upon state meaning on the activities of particular groups of individuals involved in the performance of public functions. Citizens are free to express themselves,
mobilize, and organize to reach their aims favoring interest group activity as the principal mechanism shaping policy outcomes. Pluralism has been criticized for focusing too narrowly upon observable actions to the exclusion of underlying irregularities of power to the exclusion of less privileged ones (Pierson 73).

2.4.2 Marxism

Marxist theory begins with Marx’s position about the state. Marx’s insisted that the very existence of the state was the consequence of a society, which was divided by social class and as a consequence determined the form and nature of the state (75). For Marx the state was the instrument of the capitalist bourgeoisie. Within this theory, capitalism is seen as the social and economic system in which the wealth of the ruling class is obtained by exploiting the working class of proletarians. The state's function is to control working class rebellion by means of violence and ensure the interest of the capitalist class. Marxist theory was followed by Gramsci, who stated that the form of capitalist rule could not only be seen as repressive state apparatus acting under control of the ruling society. Gramsci argued that under the advanced form of capitalism developed in the west, the normal form of rule was arbitrated by both the state and civil society (77). The preeminence of capitalism was implemented through the ideological and cultural domination of the subordinate classes within the institutions of civil society. Thus, newspapers, church or schooling were elements of cultural and ideological control that mobilized people into consent.
2.4.3 Neo-liberal

In contrast with pluralist and Marxist, neo-liberals thinkers see the modern state as an increasingly dominant and harmful influence, imposing itself over society (80). The more general neo-liberal position states that freedom and justice can only be ensure in a society where freely contracting individuals organize their actions through market-like transactions (81). This demands a very limited role of the state having as its only aim to provide the framework for market oriented society to develop.

2.5 The importance of civil society for democracy

The organizational feature of civil society constitutes a fundamental part of society where changes, modifications and organization of people take place. Changes in larger systems (such as political or economic) will reflect upon the organizational capacity of civil society. Thus, in civil society, organization can be seen as a reflection of the social system in which they are embedded. Consequently, the role of civil society within democracy will tend to vary in different contexts and at different periods of time reflecting upon the quality and type of political regime (Fitzsimmons 5).

If civil society is unable to exert its influence onto the political system, this lack of impact will reflect back to the political system, which in turn would demonstrate a low correspondence to democratic principles (Oxhorn, Democracy 3). Questioning civil society and examining the economic, social and political realm in which they coexist, is essential to understand its impact in maintaining a democratic model of governance.
Chapter 3

Introduction to the Concept of Participation

3.1 Overview of citizen participation

Providing a functional definition of citizen participation does not afford a complete understanding of its nature. Understanding the way participation comes about is a much more complex issue. Citizen participation has different dimensions. It can be practiced at different levels of intensity and can be influenced by numerous factors (Seligson 96).

In order to fully understand its quality, participation needs to be examined as a multidimensional phenomenon. This chapter intends to explore the concept of participation from multiple perspectives. The first part will provide a definition that clearly identifies its main features making clear what it is and what it is not to avoid confusion with other terms. The second section will describe participation from a democratic theory perspective. Finally, there will be a discussion of the effects of participation, or the lack of participation under democratic governance.

3.2 Defining citizen participation

The term citizen participation has emerged into popular use in the past several decades. This emergence of the concept of citizen participation has been associated in the United States to the civil right movement, a public interest movement with emphasis on
openness, access, and accountability in the government (Langton 14). Currently, the interest on the concept of citizen participation is growing in its functional analysis and application. Government agencies have been establishing citizen participation policies, regulation and procedures. Thus, its transition from a symbolic to a functional concept has motivated a deeper study of it. The term “citizen participation” is preferably used in the western and American context because of the values associated with the term “citizen”. Citizen involves an individual in relation to a space and a political unit. This relationship affords a citizen with rights as well responsibilities as stated within that unit. Rights and obligations have developed as two of the essential values of citizenship in western civilization. Giving these characteristics, citizen participation refers to purposeful activities in which citizens take part in relation to the government. This analytical view of participation can consider actions such as voting in election or paying taxes as part of citizen interacting with the government.

3.3 Main elements of citizen participation

According to Rimmerman, three elements have to be present in order to achieve meaningful and effective participation: community identity, citizen education and development and individuals’ self determination. Citizen participation in community decision-making is essential for the people to recognize their roles and responsibilities as citizens within a larger community (19). The author considers community meetings an example to promote community identity as it encourages citizens’ awareness regarding other citizens’ needs “face to face meetings on the whole encourage members to identify
with one another and with the group as a whole” (19, 25). Rimmerman states that individuals who participate in the local decision making process are afforded a sense of participation and commitment which does not take place in a system where the elite rule the policy making and the implementation process (22). For participatory situations to be genuine citizens do not only have to pursue individual interests but instead they have to relate their concerns with the needs of the community. Rimmerman stresses that in order to pursue collective interest people have to go through a process of debate, decision and compromise.

Supporters of participatory democracy believe that citizen participation in the decision making have a “favorable psychological effect” on those who participate (19). Individuals who participate and deliberate in community decision making go through a beneficial learning process “from this perspective, political education rather than socialization, of the individual will be benefited wherever increased citizen participation is encourage” (22). Participation allows the individual to be more informed about political processes, acquiring valuable skills associated to the political system. (22-23).

Participation intends to instill in the individual a sense of awareness about its own capacity, not only to solve problems but to define and, if needed, redefined problems before moving to solutions. The focus is on creating new forms of power at all levels of the community in instead of using existing ones for “participatory democracy stresses the importance of citizens claiming their own responsibility and becoming solutions themselves” (23). This process assumes a great deal of citizen consciousness, that ultimately should work to activate and change people’s behavior is capable of giving
common directions to government instead of being just consumers of government and market services.

3.4 Features of participation

One main attribute of participation within democracy is the exercise of the right of citizenship. Democratic governance should effectively provide mechanisms for individuals to exercise their fundamental rights such as freedom of expression or association (Dascal 38). Therefore, the provision of basic civil rights is a prerequisite for the accomplishment of meaningful and effective participation. They are described as follow:

3.4.1 The right to be informed

The right to be informed is a starting point for participation. According to Dascal the timely and equal availability of information allows an active intervention of individuals. Thus availability of information becomes the first step for an equal distribution of opportunities for participation. It is an essential variable to exert individual responsibility and freedom of action (38).
3.4.2 The right to express opinion

The opportunity to express personal opinions and concerns on diverse issues allows people to interact and identify with a particular group. When people have the chance to express ideas, scrutinize, question, and complain a higher level of participation takes place (38). Additionally, access to people’s opinions enriches communication in the public sphere and helps government make more impartial decisions.

3.4.3 The legal right to refute government decisions

The right of people to refute decisions is a pre-requisite to reach consensus (39). People need to have at their disposal legal channels to challenge government decisions without fearing the consequences.

3.4.4 The right to reach consensus

Reaching consensus is a fundamental step for participation to have a positive impact on democratic development (39). Expressing opinion over a decision or disagreeing about one does not imply a consensus among those affected by that decision. Consensus refers to a process of deliberation and concurrence between people and among people and government.
3.4.5 The right to decide

Participation reaches its full meaning and effectiveness when people have the possibility to decide the result of a decision or solution to a problem (e.g. housing, health, legal, etc.). The right to decide constitutes an action that fully acknowledges what it means to be a citizen (Dascal 39). Having access to basic civic rights are essential pre-requisites to reach genuine participation within democratic government. However citizens’ rights are more generally socially constructed, thus the access of individuals to civic rights reflects the level of interaction between civil society and the state (Oxhorn Democracy 4). Lack of access to formal rights might lead to the exclusion of large segments of the population from active participation in the public sphere. Thus, suitable provision by the state of basic rights as well as regular exercise of these rights by the individuals is a critical variable to be considered in the process of civil society participation.

3.5 Participation and democratic theory

This section focuses on models of political theory over the issue of participation and its variants. These models are essential to understand the importance of the notion of participation in contemporary democracy. Within political theory the idea of citizen participation has continuously evolved reaching its more significant position in association to the concept of democracy. Democracy appears as a decision-making method and as a set of political institutions that embody, to varying degrees, certain
democratic principles; ultimately democracy appears as an ethical ideal and a way of life. Originally, democracy considered the open and direct participation of its citizens in the decision-making the foundation of their system of governance. However, with the development of western democratic theory the role of citizen participation in democracy has acquired diverse connotations.

3.5.1 The role of participation within democratic theory

Although democratic theory and its variants hold opposed propositions about the nature and levels of participation, participation as a whole has gained the recognition of theorist of an essential element that needs to be present for the establishment of democracy. Classical and contemporary democratic theories both agree that political equality and popular sovereignty are two central values that stand at the core of democratic practice. This refers to citizens having equal opportunity to exert influence through political activity if they chose and government being considered a creation of the citizenry rather than a separated institution standing above its citizens (Langton 44).

There are two major variants of contemporary democratic theory disputing the role of citizen participation in democracy: Protective and Participatory theories. Protective /pluralists see low levels of citizen participation and participation restricted to roles as signs of stable democratic systems (Hudson, 119). Within this theoretical model and its variants “the people” tend to be left aside, emphasizing in instead voting and elites. This model emphasizes the participation of people through set institutional channels such voting in elections or participating in political parties. Its main resources
are associated to legislative and financial instruments, and its focus is on procedure and form and not in outcomes. The set of principles advocated by this model does not include “participation in politics” or “community” as components needed for the proper functioning of democracy. However participation of the citizenry in a limited and controlled form is consider suitable for a stable democracy. Therefore, participation should be channeled through political parties or suppress until effective channels are created. Thus, “limited participation helps to stabilize democracy by cushioning the shock of disagreement, adjustment and change” (Fitzsimmons 7).

On the contrary, developmental/participatory democratic theorists assert that a healthy democracy needs an active citizenry, to be fully participant in all aspects of government (Hudson 119). This model emphasizes the role of the masses over the liberal notion of democracy, which emphasizes elections and elites (Gianinni, 407). Democratic theorist that advocate the need for high rates of participation believe that participation promotes stable democratic government in two ways: Participation ensures that public policy will reflect the public good of all, producing government policies that will reflect the interests, concerns and preferences of everyone and not just the interest of a few.

Second, through participation people will learn to be goods citizens capable of understanding what is in the public good, having the possibility to learn democracy by practicing it (Hudson 119). The main idea of participatory democratic models is based on the principle that the individual and their institutions cannot be considered isolated from each other. The solely existence of democratic institutions is not enough for there to be democracy, “every individual living in a democratic society should have the opportunity to participate directly in all spheres of political life” (Fitzsimmons 2).
There are two additional principles that work as foundations for supporters of participatory democracy. First, the conviction that individual should participate in community as well as workplace decisions that will affect their quality and direction of their life. Second, the conviction that individuals’ high rate of participation will contribute to the development of the individual along with individuals’ recognition of citizenship.

Participatory democracy literature provides different insights to define what is meant by meaningful and effective participation. For Pateman, one of the precursory scholars of this model, participation “refers to (equal) participation in the making of the decisions, and equality of power in determining the outcomes of these decisions” (see figure 3.1) (Pateman 43).

Fig. 3.1 Three types of participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full participation:</td>
<td>Each member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of a decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Participation:</td>
<td>Each individual does not have equal power to decide the outcome of a decision but can only influence them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo Participation:</td>
<td>No real participation in decision-making takes place (e.g. the individual is only allowed to question and discuss an already taken decision).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participatory democrats identify three forces that drive individuals to participate more actively in the decision making process. First, individuals need to have a desire to have better control over vulnerabilities of life. Second, the desire to improve policy decision making and make their communities a better place to live and third, the recognition of the importance to addressing deteriorating civic relations and the wish to create the means and abilities to work together more effectively (Hudson 124).

Theorist such Pateman believe that participation can be stabilizing as well as bolstering forces for democracy “once a participatory democratic system is established, it becomes self-sustaining because the process of self-government develops participative qualities in citizens” (25). Through participation, citizens learn to value the skills they gain and the bonds they forge; ultimately individuals become protectors of the political system if they feel they have a stake in it. The general aim of participatory the democratic model is to favor human development, increase the political efficiency, lower the alienation in relations to the central powers, encourage the interest for the collective problems and contribute to develop an informed, experienced, and active citizenship concerned with the public issues.

3.6 The question of participation in contemporary democracy

Most democratic models agree in that citizen participation in civil society is essential for democracy maintenance. However, the question from a democratic perspective is how much participation should there be for a government to be democratic? This question ultimately takes us back to questions democracy as a model of
governance. For Lagos the answers is culture. Democracy is not about institutions but about the culture in which they are embedded. It is people’s behavior within culture that shapes institutions and end up defining what democracy and is attributes will correspond to (Lagos 16). From this perspective we can see democracy as a cultural construct in which all individuals have come to believe. For Hellinger and Judd, voting can be seen as having people itself decide issues through elections of their representatives or just as a mere ritualized opportunity for people to reaffirm their belief in their political system (10). For these authors democracy the United States has been a successfully cultural construct. This success has based on government individuals closely attending to the processes that nurture and build a sense of democracy legitimacy among people (5). School, media and elections themselves have been a crucial socializing mechanism organized to politically socialize individuals into the idea of embracing democracy as necessary and just ideal (9). Democratic symbols are crucial in accomplishing this purpose. Therefore, elections, citizenship and citizen participation can be also as questionable concepts as democracy itself.

3.7 Participation and the economic factor

Individual’s economic inequalities can work as a hindering factor that weakens individual’s potential participation. According to Rodriguez, the development of an individual’s capability to participate is in direct relation to the fulfillment of his or her basics needs (149, 150). When individuals are not able to meet their basic needs such as housing or food, their abilities to participate would tend to decrease (see figure 3.2).
Thus, as individuals’ needs increase, their motivation to engage in any kind of participatory situation lowers. This situation creates a vicious circle, as there is no change in economic inequalities if there is no participation. At the same time, there is no participation without a change in social and economic inequalities. This is an especially critical aspect in areas where high rates of inequality, poverty or political turmoil are constant. Thus, the economic factor also becomes a critical variable to consider when examining participation. Individuals’ economic equality and security is then required for them to have independence an (equal) access to participation (Pateman 43).

Figure 3.2 – Participation and the Maslow scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation Level</th>
<th>Maslow scale of needs</th>
<th>Type of Participation resulting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest level</td>
<td>Auto-realization</td>
<td>Determinative Participation: Individuals participate in the decision-making exercising their creativity and their self-expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem and Self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consultative Participation: Individuals have an open space to give their opinions and those opinions want to be heard by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to a group</td>
<td></td>
<td>Informative Participation: Individuals feel part of a group by being informed of public issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Level</td>
<td>Physiologic and safeness</td>
<td>Non-participation: No participation occurs at this level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4

Historical development of Participation in Chile

4.1 Factors influencing the development of civil society in Chile

As suggested by Fitzsimmons, organizations and their constituency might react, reorganized or adapt when facing changes produced by larger social structures (15). The following chapter is an overview of political and economic processes that had influenced the development of civil society in Chile, where the research took place. It intends to provide a foundation for understanding and further analyzing the nature of participation at the local level in Chile at the present time.

4.1.1 The Political factor

Politics in Chile between 1973 and 1989 increasingly influenced the organizational capacity of civil society. The military dictatorship established on September 11, 1973 influenced civil society in four important ways: it disarticulated long established civil society networks, it reduced the role of the state, it implemented neoliberal policies, and it limited democratic restitution by setting a rigid and contradictory legal framework. All of these measures discredited the state in regard to civil society exacerbating peoples’ lack of confidence in state institutions and affecting their potential willingness to work together in the future.

After the coup d'état led by former chief of the army Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the links that held together state and civil society were severely deteriorated.
Organizations were shut down and decrees were subsequently spelled out to prevent and limit the reappearance of any kind of group activity. Demobilization and exclusion became the political dynamic. Such harsh procedures intended to create the right setting to change the basic socio-economic and political structures of the country (Oxhorn, Popular 740). The strategy consisted in building doubt in the population about the ability of politics and hence of democracy to solve the problems of the country (Silva 385). The aim of the military regime was to convince the population that obtaining equal opportunities for all citizens was only possible by introducing a free market model (Silva 400).

The end of the dictatorship did not bring significant changes. Most of the structural reforms introduced by the military regime were to remain unaltered under the upcoming administration (Oxhorn 738). In 1990, that administration began to function amid the severe restrictions it had inherited from the military regime. For instance, a number of laws (leyes de amarre) were passed by the authoritarian regime before ending its period in an effort to restrict the freedom of action of the upcoming administration (Ensalaco 410). As a result, the new democratic government was forced to function within legal frameworks that retained an economic and political status quo. As a result the scope of the new democratic government was limited and its inability to influence and change policy ended up jeopardizing the confidence and support the population had placed in the process of redemocratization.

The impact of such conflicting transition began to notice later on. In 1996 opinion polls revealed that individuals had become increasingly disenchanted and dissatisfied with Chile’s political system (Posner 59). Despite Chile’s top economic ranking among
Latin American nations, Chile had the lowest level of citizen’s satisfaction with democracy (Latinobarometro). The policies implemented by the military regime took its toll on civil society. For instance, the long period of repression along with economic liberalization limited the emergence of traditional collective actors, such as unions, impeding the growth of alternative voluntary associations (Posner, 60). As a consequence the political scenario was transformed into one that did not stimulate participation and it was increasingly elitist (Oxhorn 13).

The contradictory political scenario left behind by the military regime, the impact of the structural reforms and the incapacity of the new government to represent popular sectors worked as factors that increased peoples’ dissatisfaction with the democratic process (Posner, 60). Studies such as the UNDP 1998 report showed that many people in Chile were disappointed of the social, economical and political transformation affecting the country. Long after the return to democracy, Chileans’ general perception was that the current government had not produced its own political project but merely administrated the plan developed by the military regime (Posner 72).

One of the most representative aspects that guaranteed the reproduction of Pinochet’s neoliberal project was the constitutional reform of 1980. These changes of the constitution were intended to create a protected democracy. It resulted in an authoritarian version of representative government that guarantees "national security" by severely circumscribing the will of the people. This aim was to be accomplished in three ways: through the establishment of a permanent role for the armed forces as "guarantors" of the nation's institutions; through the imposition of restrictions on political activity, including the banning of movements or ideologies hostile to democracy; and through the creation
of institutional mechanisms that would limit popular sovereignty. The current government appears to be an instrumental institution or a tool for the reproduction of the socioeconomic system pre-established by the military government.

4.1.2 The economic factor

One fundamental event that has had an increasing impact on the development of civil society in Chile has been the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. This model emphasized free trade, privatization of state institutions, open markets, and a minimal role of the state in both the economy and society. Most form of economic growth and distribution of economic resources were to be regulated by the market forces. This model emphasized personal economic benefit. The economic position of people in Chile was assumed to derive from ones’ competitive effort in the market stressing the individualism and competence. With this logic governing society, peoples’ efforts were center in participating in the market having less time and perceived need to become politically active (Oxhorn, Democracy 9).

Economic liberalization leads to an increased sense of competition among individuals and a change in personal incomes as well as organizational funding. As a result people tend to favor individual benefit instead of collective ones (Fitzsimmons 28). Such increasing individualism accounts for civil society’s fragmentation and atomization which results in the perception of collective actions as being a less and less of a valuable act.
The implementation of such policies in Chile brought significant changes. The state was no longer the social welfare provider and peoples’ alternative was to turn to the market to find solutions to their basic needs such as housing, health or education. Thus, individuals' well being became largely determined by one’s own personal economic resources (Tironi 90).

Market principles and market-based incentives have permeated Chilean society and caused a negative impact on the nature of collective actions. For example, neoliberal reforms have favored economic concentration that strengthens specific sectors of capital. This has undermined the economic base and the organizational power of lower classes, particularly labor groups. This decline in the organizational strength of lower classes has removed a crucial foundation for mobilization into political participation (Huber 338).

For instance, many neoliberal policies brought a change in labor regulations in favor of corporations; labor unions weakened and individuals became extremely concerned about maintaining their economic stability and welfare protection. People’s ability to participate at their work place reduced because channels to participate in unions were more restricted and involve and implicit risk of their job stability (Oxhorn Democracy 6). These aspects undermined people’s ability to engage in any kind of participatory action due to the increasing perception of one’s own economic security. The feeling of loosing one’s own security or having to make greater sacrifices in order to survive overwhelms anybody’s interest or will to participate in the public sphere (Oxhorn, Democracy 7). Experiencing economic insecurity, Chileans have begun to perceived public participation as an ideal that is increasingly out of reach. Participation has become a luxury individuals can no longer afford and a waste of efforts that could be
otherwise devoted to participation in the market for individual economic benefit (Oxhorn, Democracy 7).

The implementation of neoliberal economic policies that brought about rapid economic growth also set up barriers for Chile’s future economic development. Initial effects of neoliberalization included increasing income inequalities and high levels of poverty. Despite the country’s economic growth many individuals located in low-income brackets did not reap the benefits of economic reform (Fitzsimmons 106). However from 1990 to 1998 economic growth reached its highest level at an impressive 9% GDP (gross domestic product), with and average of 7.5% (Tironi 86). But such an economic miracle had a double impact on Chilean society.

Rapid economic growth allowed a large fraction of the population to reach certain economic stability while another part rose from under the poverty levels. However, when benefit from such dependency on the market came to and end in 1998 due to a world economic decline, people were left with the uncertainty of not being able to turn to the market or to the state to fulfill their basic needs (Tironi 90). The consequences of such economic fluctuations have eroded people’s ability to become active agents in pursue of collective solutions to their problems. Even more worrying is that individuals have become highly dependent and vulnerable to the variation of the economic system.
Chapter 5

Research Methods

5.1 Methodology

The aim of this study was to determine the nature of citizen participation taking place at the local neighborhood councils in the city of Antofagasta, Chile in the post-Pinochet period. The selected method was qualitative research. This method was chosen because it contributes to a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of social reality (Gaviria 64). That is, it allows for an explication and detailed description of the world of people who live out the phenomenon being investigated. A total of twenty-one semi-structure interviews were conducted. There was a list of questions that guided the interview. The purpose was to motivate the interviewee to talk about topics under research. However, the interviewee had complete freedom to stress and expand on topics that he or she considered significant. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Texts were read over selecting segments of the text that seemed relevant to the basic concerns of the study. This selection process consisted of recording key words, phrases, and passages that the participants themselves had repeated or otherwise indicated as important ideas. The material extracted was analyzed and main themes were identified and discussed.

The interviewees were twelve presidents of neighborhood councils (see table 5.1) two members of the government (see table 5.2), two members of locals NGOs (see table 5.3) and two members of local universities (see table 5.4). All participants resided and performed their activities in the city of Antofagasta, Chile. The research focuses on the interviews conducted with the NC’s presidents. However, the other five interviews were
used in order to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of civil society participation at the local level in Antofagasta, Chile. Presidents of neighborhood councils were chosen randomly out of an official list provided by the city hall. This list included 126 neighborhood councils legally registered as non-profit organizations with the municipal government. The subjects interviewed were previously contacted by phone. A brief description of the research study was given to them before they agreed to an interview. Interviews lasted one hour approximately and conducted in the city of Antofagasta, Chile from July through August 2002.

5.2 Research participants

The study focused on a sampling of the possible range of organizational activity within civil society. According to Fitzsimmons there are four main categories in which organizations can be grouped. These are territorial, functional, identity, and ideological (26). Neighborhood Councils correspond to territorial organizations. NC’s are semi-autonomous, grassroots organizations created in 1968 out of law 16.880. A new law passed in 1989 at the end of the military regime (law 19.418) defined these organizations as those whose goal is to develop the district and its inhabitant’s interest and to cooperate with the authorities of the state through the city hall (see figure 5.1). NC’s can be formed at the mayoral’s, neighbors or the municipal council’s representatives’ request. Each NC’s is bound to a particular territory, which becomes the NC’s unit. In order to compose a NC’s a NC unit needs to be composed by at least fifty neighbors in a district with up to 10,000 residents. Neighborhood Councils have as their main objective to
promote the integration participation and development of the residents of the NC unit.

NC’s are directed by an executive board composed by at least five official members. They are elected in a regular assembly through an informed, direct and confidential vote for a two-year period. The president need to obtain the majority of the votes to become elected. Neighbors can be registered in only one NC and are allow one vote per person.

NC’s president’s duties are to legally represent its NC, call for general assemblies, oversee decisions taken by the executive board, and be accountable for the physical and financial patrimony of its NC.

Table 5.1 – Neighborhood council presidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ema Cruz</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebeca Bustos</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel Villalobos</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelly Zepeda</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladys Araya</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugo Esgrish</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladys Arias</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raul Fabrega</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalina Romero</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernestina Cortes</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Troncoso</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Council #18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2 - Government representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cristian Pizarro</td>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Antofagasta/Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcos Simunovic</td>
<td>City Hall Council Representative</td>
<td>Antofagasta/ City Hall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 - Development Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manuel Escalante</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Escondida Mining Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Sepulveda</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>(Coproba) Local Human Society association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Troncoso</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Neighborhood Council Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 - Local scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cesar Trabuco</td>
<td>Sociology Professor</td>
<td>Antofagasta University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis Valenzuela</td>
<td>University Dean</td>
<td>Jose Santos Ossa University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Area of study

Antofagasta is the capital of the Second Region (Segunda Región) and is composed of three provinces and nine communes\(^1\). It is located in the north end of Chile representing 16.7% of the total Chilean territory. Antofagasta has approximately 472,000 inhabitants, 96% urban and accounts for 3.1% of the total Chilean population (INE, 2001). Mining is the most important economic activity of the region. It produces close to 59% of the gross regional product. Copper is the region's principal product, representing between 52% and 55% national copper production.

Antofagasta has been one of the country's fastest growing regions during the last decade. Between 1988 and 1997 while the country grew at an average rate of 8% per year, Antofagasta grew at a rate of 9.6% (World Bank). Poverty rate in the region is 13.9% and the rate of people living under the poverty is 3.3% of the total local population (INE, 2001).

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\(^1\) The republic of Chile is politically organized in 12 regions, and a Metropolitan Region, Santiago. Each region is divided in provinces and these in communes, which are officiate by a Mayor.
Chapter 6

Results

6.1 Introduction

One main objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of neighborhood council members about participation in the public sphere. The aim was to draw conclusions about social values and beliefs governing people’s actions regarding participation inside NC’s. The study focused on three main themes previously mentioned as part of the specific objectives. These were:

- Actions or activities considered by NC’s members as participation practices.
- Factors perceived by NC’s members as contributing to or limiting participation.
- Motivations and expectations in participating.

6.2 Actions considered by NC’s members as participation practices

Most activities carried out by the organizations were related to recreational activities (see table 6.1). Ranked second were activities related to public infrastructure improvements and below that level activities related to providing financial support for emergency situations.
Table 6.1 Activities carried out by the NC (% of times mentioned)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Court rental</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnish, maintain the court and NC building</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football, basketball games</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses such as embroidery, manual activities and others</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate the NC anniversary, Christmas</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bingo, raffle</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public infrastructure improvements</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine, housing provisions (e.g. medicine, roofing)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial services</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby to have a football court built</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid for housing lost due to fire or bad weather</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform about health policies</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or low-cost child care</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect used books to build library</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Classes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Classes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk dance classes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the recreational activities carried out were Christmas parties, bingos, soccer contests, knitting, cooking, fitness, and hairdresser courses. Most leisure activities were mainly targeted to women and in a lesser degree to children, men, and young people. The training they received was mostly focused on developing technical skills. Activities were free of charge or low cost. Another significant activity carried out by NC’s presidents and members was related to administrating NC’s buildings and football courts. Most NC’s representatives put a lot of time into maintaining NC’s buildings and football courts. Their goal was to rent out these facilities to collect money to pay for utilities and maintenance of the same buildings.
Lack of funding and their inability to come up with more effective strategies to fund their activities have forced these organizations to sell themselves under various categories. Much of the money collected in raffles and bingos goes into refurbishing and maintaining these facilities. However, because these facilities are rented they are kept locked from public access. Although NC’s presidents stated that they do open the courts to children they also indicated that most time they do not keep these facilities open to the community because the locals destroy, mess up, or steal items from inside.

Other activities carried out by the NC in a lesser degree focused on lobbying for public infrastructure improvements. Most efforts were aimed at requesting that City Hall repair or build roads, sidewalks, and parks, as well as to install traffic lights, pedestrian crosswalks and trashcans. Such requests were never done in writing. Neighbors’ requests were directed to the NC’s president, who would go in person to the municipality office where they would ask for an interview with the Mayor. In most cases, NC’s presidents would only talk to community representatives and not to the mayor. The regular procedure was to wait for the visit of a municipal employee to the community. However, many presidents stated that they were still waiting for many of their request to be heard and addressed.

NC Presidents felt that the government was making a great contribution by giving citizens the possibility, for instance, to have their roads paved or football courts built. There clearly was a paternalistic relationship between the government and NC’s. Most presidents expected the visit of a government official as a way to validate their work. They felt rewarded and gratified when government’s official would visit them. In this regard presidents of NC’s stated:
• “They [government officials] have come to see our building and saw in person how well kept it is”

• Since the mayor gave us this football court we have changed all the nets. I want them [government officials] to come and see the new nets and compare them with the old ones we had.

• “I want them [government officials] to come and see the new fence we put and the new wall we build [for the football court]”

At the same time many of the presidents felt they were in a lower position in relation to the government. Government assistance is perceived by NC's as an act of consideration more than as the state’s duty. At the same time lack of technical knowledge and lack of outcomes reinforced the idea of NC’s dependence on the government. All of these facts made NC’s members feel in a position where they would not be able to argue or contradict government decision or actions. Furthermore, NC’s need to constantly turn to local government to request public services reinforced paternalistic practices and favored momentary solutions for problems that need special consideration. In regard to this presidents stated:

• “I am very bad, I’m always going to the city hall to bother them, and to ask them for things [when going to request for public infrastructure]”
• The mayor told us that we can only invest the money coming from the football courts into the same courts”
• The mayor told us that the football court was built so that our children would have a place to play. It has to be open for them, so they do not pay, only adults pay to use it”.
• “We can not ask private business for money, that is the role of the city hall and if we do it would mean overlapping the mayor’s work”

In Chile, after the end of the oligarchic society the state took the role of the “hacendado” or the paternalistic figure (Sabatini 109). However, the military government did not try to establish a dependency relation with the people. On the contrary, during dictatorship the discourse was based on the importance of individual’s own ability to reach economic stability and personal safety. Many privatizations policies of the military regime increasingly affected people that were already positioned in a low-income scale. Consequently, the dependency nature of the impoverish population had persisted hurting the capacity of self-help and diminishing the autonomy of collective groups. Thus, economic insecurity of many of the NC members only reinforces is dependency relationship with the state.

A much smaller percentage of the activities carried out by the NC’s were focused on community assistance. This translated into fulfilling essential basic needs such as health or housing services. The assistance provided by NC’s was mostly economic. The procedure established to request this help was neither formal nor permanent. When an individual belonging to a certain district needed assistance he or she had to go in person
to the corresponding NC representative’s house. Once there, he or she would explain the situation and then wait for a couple of weeks to receive some economic assistance. Money was collected among the residents of the corresponding NC district by the NC members and then brought to the person in need. This type of assistance was only given in emergency situations. Such cases would usually be related to burial services, the treatments of illnesses, prescriptions, housing, or food.

6.3 Contributing or limiting factors

Lack of cooperation, help, and solidarity were mentioned as significant constraints limiting people’s participation. Most NC’s presidents commented that they did not receive any help from the elected board. They stated that once they were elected, cooperation from the NC members would gradually reduce until the presidents would end up working mostly by themselves. Some of the statements made by the interviewees were:

- “I have to be president, treasurer, secretary etc”
- “As a president, I always work by myself, there is hardly any help from the elected board”
- “The executive board is not working. We had our last meeting five months ago”

Most presidents expressed their disappointment with the elected board due to their poor or lack of cooperation. However, they also perceived a lack of interest and cooperation in the community. In regard to this they stated:
“Nobody collaborates”

“I need people to get involved as I do, I need support”

“90% of the people here do not get involved with the NC”

“People don’t like to get together, they are very apathetic”

Since presidents ended up working by themselves in the representation of their neighborhood, they would usually carry the entire burden of administering the organizations. Presidents felt that people would tend to demand a lot from them even if they knew the organization was not properly functioning or did not count on others members support. One NC member recalled having neighbors calling at her door late at night asking her for assistance or complaining about issues involving their neighborhoods. Such pressure along with lack of cooperation from the organizations’ peers and community resulted in the presidents’ dissatisfaction with their positions.

Many of the NC presidents stated that, after working for a short period, they become disappointed and frustrated with the NC. The apathy coming from their communities was the main reason that caused them to think NC did not work properly. Regarding these issue NC presidents stated:

“People do not want to do anything, they are too aggressive”

“I don’t think people care about this NC”

“It is nice to talk and listen [when coming to meetings] but when it
comes to doing things nobody cooperates”.

- “The NC role is weak”
- “Our NC is not working as it should be”

Feelings of frustration and disenchantment permeated not only the presidents and NC members but also the entire community. Most presidents felt extremely criticized by their neighbors and found it hard to establish dialog with and among them. NC presidents commented on this issue:

- “Criticism is the main barrier to participation”
- “There is too much criticism of others”
- “You need a lot of patience and cold blood in order to receive so many criticisms”
- “Criticism is fine, but not behind one’s back”.

NC’s presidents were well aware of the importance of expressing opinion, but felt that people were not interested in making themselves heard by giving and exchanging opinions in order to reach agreement. Concerning these situation NC presidents stated:

- “People are not capable of telling you, look you did three wrong things but one good”
- “They [the community] always wait until you make a mistake to step on you. They cannot say Hey, she made a mistake, let’s help her”
• “People are not willing to receive any kind of suggestions. The other day I told my neighbor that her trash was all over the sidewalk, and the next day she did not talk to me anymore”

• The government addresses people so they can give an opinion, but people do not go to meetings, they do not even care to give an opinion”

Most presidents agreed that when people came to meetings and discussed issues involving the community there was a tendency of people criticizing the NC representative’s work or talking behind their back. The feeling of lack of confidence among members is widespread. On this matter NC presidents commented:

- “People don’t say what they think or feel”.
- “When they come to the meetings they only come to attack”
- “There are many people that talk behind my back”

It is possible to find a relationship between the situation of ‘talking behind one’s back’ and the spreading rumors. Rumors work as a mechanism to get informed or to distribute information. Community members at these organizations are able to express what they think without fearing reprisal or loosing the benefits obtained at a NC. At the same time, rumors work as an indirect mechanism to express people’s frustration or disappointment. On the other hand, rumors can also be seen as a form of control from the community towards NC’s. Most comments received by NC’s presidents from the community come in the form of rumors. Most rumors are negative in nature and end up
limiting NC’s extend of the activities and actions. Lacks of formal channels to get inform, express opinion and reach agreement makes rumor and gossip part of the culture in which the community is embedded. However it also represents a highly ineffective and harmful factor to reach genuine participation.

Another aspect perceived by NC’s members’ representatives as limiting participation was the increased interest in obtaining personal benefit in exchange for cooperation. Most presidents stated that people did not participate in the NC activities if they would not see any immediate personal benefit. In regard to this NC presidents said things such as:

- “Nobody works for free anymore, people get involve only if there is some sort of benefit involved, especially money”

Likewise, many NC presidents felt their role did not offer them any kind of benefits. This idea was reinforced by the burden they put on by working by themselves in representation of the entire organization. On this matter they stated the following:

- “This activity is very unrewarding; it takes too much time, time that I could be devoting to something else”.
- “Working here is like giving a lot to something that is not giving me back any economic benefits”.
- “There is not benefit in doing this. It is the opposite, it takes too much time”.
In addition, most presidents stated that people in their community tended to care more about things if they were required to pay for them. For instance, the government required people within NC districts to pay a small amount of money in order to have their streets paved. This was part of a government-sponsored program called “participative pavements” which looked for people’s involvement in community improvement. Many NC’s presidents perceived this issue as reinforcing the idea that all benefit entails an economic cost and that it is acceptable to pay to the government in order to have access to this kind of public service. Regarding this they stated:

- “Before people were able to be get the entire funding for public improvement, now it is not that way. Unfortunately, when you give people something free of cost they don’t appreciate it. But, if you make them pay a bit, then they really care”
- People think the government needs to provide everything, I do not think that is true, you need to improve your life yourself, personal advancement is up to you”.

NC presidents were well aware of the problems affecting their community (see table 6.2) however, most NC president agreed that there was a tendency of people to be more isolated and consequently show little or no interest for finding solutions to these problems within their community. There was a general feeling that people needed to solve their problems individually. Regarding this one stated:
• “After the coup [in 1973] people learned to live their own life and be concerned only about their own personal well being and not that of others”

The dominant culture favors the private over the public. Individuals’ home and private realm constitute the most significant part of people’s life. At the same time, it is within this space where individuals can exert complete control and find personal safety. The priority given to the private sphere makes community perceive the public sphere as risky, insecure and demoralizing. Consequently, the negative connotation of the public sphere reinforces peoples’ withdrawal from it in opposition to life inside ones’ own home. Unfortunately, many of the NC’s activities project as part of the public realm. Activities such as talking to neighbors, visiting the city hall or holding public meeting might be perceive as activities taking place in a space that does not represent the safety and control individuals find at the private sphere.

Table 6.2 - Main problems in the community (% of times mentioned)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism of public areas</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism (drinking on the street)</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty in general</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single mothers</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people’s unemployment</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another factor perceived by the presidents as affecting participation levels was related to an individual’s cultural or educational background. Many presidents referred to people not willing to participate as having a “lack of consciousness”, “lack of education”, or being “ignorant”. However, while some NC presidents referred strictly to the lack of formal education others referred more to the capacity of individuals to get involved in critical thinking. Concerning this NC's presidents stated:

- “When people have some cultural or political knowledge they do not let themselves be told what to do”
- “There are neighbors that do not know how to read and write, so how are they going to get informed at all”
- People do not participate because they do not have formal education”
- People are unconscious, they lack consciousness, they are ignorant”

6.4 Motivations and expectations in participating

Most presidents stated that people were motivated to cooperate only in emergency situations. For instance, most presidents stated that the community was willing to cooperate when someone was at a severe health risk, needed shelter, or food. Regarding this presidents stated:

- “People cooperate when someone dies or get sick”
- “There is a lot of solitary among us when someone gets sick”
In all other cases most neighbors cooperated with the NC’s only if they knew they would receive some sort of benefit. Regarding this presidents stated:

- “They [neighbors] think we are obliged to give things to them”
- “When they [neighbors] need something they come and get it, if there is nothing to get, they just don’t come”
- “When you request their help [of neighbors] they walk away, but if they need anything or if we are giving something away, then they come”

The capacity of self-help of NC’s in times of crisis is remarkable. In such situations, people are able to recognize themselves as part of the same group and therefore, are able to think collectively and cooperate. However, the critical thinking that emerges in time of crisis is soon neutralized by other dominating values deeply rooted in Chilean society. Individualism and competition reinforce the idea of personal success and values economic and social advance in opposition to collective activity. Requesting or receiving assistance might also be perceived as a negative aspect, one that denotes failure and powerlessness. Many individuals in the community, especially young people would rather not to participate in NC’s in any way so as to keep their independence and restate their individual capacity. However, when individuals cannot find opportunities to fulfill its basic needs within its social realm their relationship with others become difficult. Lack of autonomy and self-esteem generate high levels of hostility and relationships become utilitarian. Such was the case at NC’s.
Regarding NC presidents’ motivation to become involved in the community, most of them stated that their main motivation was associated to a non-material reason (see table 6.3).

Table 6.3 - Reasons for becoming NC’s presidents (% of times mentioned)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal, intellectual advancement</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve ourselves and our environment</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal prestige</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet more people</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn cooking, tailoring</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get invited to the events the city hall organizes</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They perceived this activity as an opportunity for improving their community as well as themselves. Most presidents stated that despite all the work that it implied, it still was a form of personal and intellectual development (see table 6.4).

Table 6.4 - NC’s role according to its presidents (% of times these activities are mentioned)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To help with people’s needs</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work for the community</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have government representatives visiting us, hear us, and ask them for things</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To fight for my community ideals</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are not very many, have the sidewalks repaired, have the streets paved</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This non-material reason is the principal factor motivating NC’s leaders to remain in their positions. There is a widespread belief that people participate because they have more time. Even though all the NC’s president interviewed did not had a full time job or a regular salary they were all engaged in some sort of activity, especially women. Most women performed domestic tasks such as cooking, washing, taking care of children or cleaning. Consequently, most NC’s presidents were in those positions in order to fulfill a social or physical need to be an integral part of society. Being NC presidents was their way to be part of the public sphere, space to which they would not be part of otherwise. In this sense their motivation to work is one that it is in contrast with other individuals in the community who get involve mainly to fulfill basic needs such as health or food.
Chapter 7
Discussion

Public participation at the community appears to have been affected by the economic model and by the political developments of the past thirty-five years in Chile. Market oriented economic policies introduced at the beginning of the 80s brought about social transformations that modified life styles, values, customs and ways in which Chilean society interrelated. The current economic model fosters individual solutions rather than collective action. It encourages individuals to withdraw from the public space and enter the market in search for personal benefits. On the other hand, political circumstances have forced individuals to adapt to particular ways to participate in the public sphere. Seventeen years of severe repression and forced withdrawal from the public sphere have neutralized organizations’ capacity to effectively occupy the public realm.

Political and economic events have affected public participation at the grassroots level in particular ways conditioning and limiting their involvement in the public sphere. First, NC’s lacks organizational capacity to effectively influence government decision-making at the local level. Second, most NC’s constituents have difficulties fulfilling basic needs such as health or housing. Therefore, they are more concern about meeting personal needs than aiming for collective achievements. Although most community members preferred to get involved in paid labor rather than work for free, those individuals that do participate feel quickly discourage due to NC’s lack outcomes.

The situation described above results in the malfunction of most of these organizations. Several circumstances affect NC’s performance. Lack of concrete
proposals is probably the greatest shortcoming of NC’s at present. Their inability to define their needs and organize over a common goal have transformed these organizations into ineffective mechanisms for formulating policy and improving community life standards. Most activities performed at NC end up having little or not direct impact as far as improving social or economic conditions of the community. Lack of a sense of community leads to a disconnection among individuals in the NC’s districts affecting their interaction within the NC. In addition, conflicting relations inside NC’s affects people’s confidence among themselves as well as their own self-esteem. Eventually, community members find it hard to perceive themselves as part of the solution for the community problems. Their overall interest diminishes to the point where any involvement is seen as a waste of time, time that can be devoted to participate in the market for real, although personal benefits.

These circumstances altogether account for the high level of criticism and apathy towards NC activity, which brings community discontent, distrust and frustration among their members. This situation has made individuals turn to NC’s only in case of emergency establishing a utilitarian relationship with their NC’s, fostering individualism and community fragmentation. Therefore, people forced involvement into the public sphere have made community members establish utilitarian relationships with the NC’s. Individual’s participation in the public sphere is limited to one that only seeks psychological and personal safety. Most NCs provided services to people that would not be able to have access to them individually. The economization of participation reveals not only high levels of economic inequality among these groups but also the transformation of a citizen status into a market regulated one.
The influence of the market over individuals is not the only factor affecting civil society participation at the grass-root level. On the other side is the Chilean state, which lays vulnerable to the forces of the economic model and its unable to provide for citizens needs. Chilean government has disassociated from its citizens by demanding from its citizens a type of participation that requires citizens to improve their conditions of life on their own. The type of participation the state offers is a limited one as it has been co-opted by the dominant economic model.

The state has giving the population a legal framework for creating organizations, but does not provide political support for these organizations to have a more influential role in the decision-making. Having NC’s participating in requesting roads to be paved or asking for trashcans to be installed suggests a different kind of participation far from a democratic proposal. Current NC’s activity prompted by the state is one that derails community organizations from getting involved in genuine and effective actions that would actually have an impact in their social and economic development.

Citizen participation has been extensively proposed as an essential value for democracy maintenance and social economic development. However many of these propositions have been done with little empirical evidence and little research on participation and democracy amid the dominant economic model. Economic forces have caused organizations and their members to adapt in ways that have left them far from the political realm, leading organizations to exercise less and less checks and balances on the state power. Although the state might provide a legal framework for citizens’ rights, the principle of citizenship is separated from the social context (Giannini 415). Therefore, in the public sphere individuals can easily become constrained by economic or political
factors hindering their citizen status even within a democratic system. As it was shown in
the study, inequality is the main obstacle to the complete development of citizenship and
therefore of genuine public participation. On the other hand, the economization of
participation might lead society to perceive the principles of democracy as less of a
valuable model for governance.

Although participation in NC’s takes place on a regular basis, its nature
emphasizes economic and particularistic pursuits. While citizen might be active in their
communities, current participation suggest the production of subjects that devote their
time and effort in the name of democracy but are not challenging the state or its policies.
Current practices of civil society participation might give birth to new forms of power
amid contemporary free market democracies. Although participation is considered to be a
fundamental component of democracy and one of its most rewarding attributes,
contemporary democracy might end up being less participatory than we ever thought.
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