

International colloquium
" Participation in a world of communication "
September 12 & 13, 2019 – UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles

Call for papers

“Participate in citizen consultations”, “Participate in fundraising projects”, “Participate in idea tournaments”, “Participate!”,... The issues of participation overwhelm discourses and practices, while questioning at the same time the visions of communication that they involve. In this respect, they echo Dewey’s reflections, who sees in the concept of participation a criterion able to offer a hierarchy of the degree of communication (Quéré, 2014). Participation and communication encompass the idea of a universal link, of a “communitarian fusion” ideal (Mattelart, 1999) or of a “planetary communication” (Breton, 1992). The imaginaries of communication as a universal link or as a way of living together are intertwined with those of participation as an ideal of exchanging, sharing, debate and concertation. “Participative management or participative communication (...) are perhaps the illustration of a migrating concept which manifests itself whenever a need of ‘reliance’ (Bolle De Bal, 1996), in a functionalist perspective, is revealing itself between the sender and the receiver” (Monseigne, 2009: 32). To understand this transition, this conference will attempt to consider the active, multiple and ambivalent participation of the “public” as placed in the center of the continuously growing “mediatisation” of social relations.

Participation remains nevertheless a polysemic concept, reinterpreted by different disciplines, as it can be employed by multiple and diverse lines of activities: politic, social, economic, cultural, etc. As a scientific concept, it is used in different fields of research such as political sciences and management sciences, but also in sociology, cultural studies... and information and communication sciences. During this conference, we wish to revisit and question the concept of participation, while making these different approaches interact with each other. Exploring the concept of participation with a communicative approach, beyond disciplinary differences, is making us question peripheral concepts such as collaboration, debate, mobilization and even engagement. During this conference, we acknowledge participation as a “boundary object” (Star, 2010). It can be defined as a “rhizome” in which different points of views encounter each other and cooperate. Participation can indeed emerge in a spontaneous way. At the opposite, participation can be “calculated” and planned. However, this doesn’t mean that its social scope would be reduced to the creation of an simulacrum, whose purpose is to legitimize or reinforce the domination of an organization or collective for example. Furthermore, we want to explore this underlying tension between process of participation and rhetorical instrumentalization of participation, but also discuss about the implications that this dynamic and flexible object can entail.

The proposals for communication will be articulated around four axis:

Axis 1 – Participation and organization

This axis explores participation with a constitutive communicative approach. This approach, known under the name of “Communicative Constitution of Organization”, considers organization as emerging “from a communication layout, from a coordination of sense production allowing to identify, to describe and to make it evolve” (Hachour, 2011, p.196). In other words, organization results from “a significant layout which frames collective activities and qualifies their degree of

accomplishment” (Hachour, 2011, p.201). Through this communicative approach, the objective is to better understand the contemporary organizational phenomenon which relates itself to the concept of participation. How can the tensions between the roles and discourses which emerge from participation be analyzed, may it be spontaneous or calculated? How does a participative project get built and what does the coordination of the project on organizational dynamic teach us? Which performative value do the discourses on participation have in the organizations? How can we decode and understand the practices of participation with a communicative approach?

Axis 2 – A communicative and participative apparatus

First, we will question the apparatus, as an “assemblage” of elements – may them be discourses, procedures or a combination of technical objects. How are the mechanisms of participation built? How do they organize participation? How have they evolved in recent years with the deployment of social media, platforms, etc.? What place is reserved to the participants by the mechanism and by the implemented procedures? How can the place given to the participants in the discourses around the participative mechanism be analyzed? Second, questioning the mechanism in the context of participation entails questioning its purpose, from the point of view of both developers and promoters. The implementation and the usage of the mechanism can lead to an undesired result, even contrary to the initial aim. What happens then? How do developers and promoters of the participative mechanism react?

Axis 3 – Professions of communication and participation

This axis questions the construction of careers and professional profiles related to the creation, management and “capture” of participation (Bonaccorsi & Nonjon 2012, Gourgues 2016). It is about understanding how and in what manner communication professionals are sometimes called to “manage” and intercept the forms and movements of participation. Communicators and “relationists” can thus become specialists of participation. The profession of community manager is only one example among others. How and to what extent do communicators integrate the skills of creating and managing participation within their already existing ones? How can this phenomenon be analyzed? What are the impacts on their skills and on the ethical dimension of their activity? Finally, what tensions arise?

Axis 4 – Reception and appropriation of communication and participation

This axis focuses on the appropriation of the mechanisms and the process of participation, which may involve diversions and crafts, from the point of view of the public. This brings us to explore the representation that the public has of participative mechanisms and processes, the way they perceive them and the motivations that animate them. What objectives do they have? What kind of interactions are included in this context? Is there a certain ideal of participation included in the configuration of relations? Thus, this axis interrogates how the participants perceive and appropriate a mechanism, more specifically a participative process. What “directory of actions” do they use? How is participation received, appropriated, and even diverted, reinvented, transformed or exported? How do they give themselves room for maneuver to improvise other forms of participation, to imagine other types of engagement?

Submission procedures

The proposal can convey theoretical reflections and/or empirical studies. Selection will be made from the intentions of proposals. First, we invite you to submit an abstract (between 1000 and 3000 words) in a Word format, for April 30, 2019 at the latest. After the selection made by the

scientific committee, the abstract will be able to be proposed for publication in a collective publication in English and as a thematic number of a scientific journal.

Calendar forecast:

- Proposals will be evaluated by a scientific comity.
- The authors will be informed of the decisions made by the scientific committee.
- The authors that have been chosen will be invited to submit an article of 5 000 to 7 000 words, to be published in English in a publication to the Routledge editions (Taylor & Francis group) or in French in a scientific journal.

The proposals should be submitted on the website: <https://participation19.sciencesconf.org>

Important dates to remember:

April 15, 2019	Deadline for the submission of proposals
May 15, 2019	Notification of acceptations
September 12 – 13, 2019	Conference at University Saint-Louis, in Brussels, Belgium

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