

The desire for equality: the function of the participation and partnership discourses in development

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Introduction

- Development cooperation – participatory approach, partnership approach
- Consensus: The *idea* of participation or partnership is accepted also by the critics.
- But there is more than just an idea to it...

Outline

- Methodology
- Origins of the participatory and partnership approaches
- Functions of the participatory and partnership discourses
 - Legitimizing function
 - Depoliticizing function
 - Hierarchizing function?
- The desire for equality in the participatory approach

Methodology

- Archaeology of Knowledge (Foucault)
- Rules of formation (strategies)
- Function „that the discourse under study must carry out in a field of non-discursive practices“
- Question of desire
- Analysis of secondary sources

- Origins of the participatory and partnership approaches
- Participatory approach: colonial era: „success of any rural reconstruction scheme would ultimately rest on the education and participation of the whole community“ (Oldham, secretary of the International Missionary Council)

- Origins of the participatory and partnership approaches
- 1960s, 1970s – Participation part of quite radical liberation theology, Freirian pedagogy
- Development concept → practice → failure → new development concept (participation)
 - Already in the 1950s the failures of development projects have been attributed “to the fact that the populations concerned were kept out of all the processes related to their design, formulation and implementation” (Rahnema)

- Origins of the participatory and partnership approaches
- Partnership – response to the failure of SAPs and their conditionality
- Possibility to transfer the guilt for failures to the partners
- Hierarchy in representation (stereotypes, Ethiopian famine) → creation of partners

Legitimizing function

- Participation is assumed to be inherently good (democratic) → legitimizes anything done in its name (like development, good governance, sustainability...)
- Participation and partnership are ambiguous concepts (quasi-empty signifiers) – useful for legitimization of anything that fits them
- Orientation on practice excludes theoretical critique

Depoliticizing function

- Focus on technical solutions (eg, quota on women – do they have a real say? Selfcensorship)
- Disregards issues beyond a project (eg, relations with a forest police)
- Excludes structural issues beyond a project related to, eg, the reasons for poverty
- Just words: First \longleftrightarrow Last (personal change? Ego, ambition, family-first, illusion of impotence)

Depoliticizing function

- Partnership between countries is based on inequality (ignored)
- NGOs or GONGOS/QUANGOS?

Hierarchizing function?

- Idea: equality
- Discourse: hierarchy, eg, Britain is represented as the dominant partner in British development cooperation strategy
- Representation of the Self by aid workers (awareness of the critique of Orientalism)
 - You might think that this sounds racist, but...

Desire of equality

- Fantasy of a „facilitator“ (neutrality, enables one to disregard the power in managing participation) → self-glorification
- Democratic deficit in the global North (ie, a lack) → desire for fullness → transfer to the global South
- Desire for a consensus (delusion-fantasy) → disregard for the micro-power processes
- Desire for control – everybody plays a predefined role in the process of participation

Conclusion

- Critical analysis of the functions of the participation and partnership discourse (legitimizing, depoliticizing and hierarchizing functions)
- → should lead to a change of practice...
- → we should also reflect upon our desires