

REFLEXIVE FREEDOM AND THE POLITICS OF PARTICIPATION

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Abstract: The article presents a theoretical-methodological analysis of the concept of reflexive freedom in relation to the political sphere of its application, with the aim of revealing and clarifying the main political consequences and normative claims that its recognition implies for political theory. The analysis is based on the assumption that particular conceptions of individual freedom as moral autonomy of the individual lead to particular models of politics. In the article, the main thesis is formulated and argued that the philosophical conception of reflexive freedom, in its applicability, programmatically leads to a model of participatory politics. As part of the analysis, the concept of reflexive freedom is compared with the competing concept of negative freedom and its corresponding model of politics, the politics of *modus vivendi*. The comparison makes it possible to highlight several specificities and particularities of reflexive freedom and politics of participation and, thus, reveal a diametrically different perspective on the phenomenon of individual freedom and the political conditions for its assurance.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, moral autonomy, normative political theory, politics of participation, reflexive freedom

Introduction

The starting point of this study is the statement that in modern moral and political philosophy, the dominant position is held by the ideal of individual freedom, freedom of the individual as his capacity for autonomy or self-determination. The value of freedom gained this dominant position in modern political thought mainly thanks to two moments. The generally accepted essential moment in the development of the understanding of freedom, which has also become decisive for its modern form, is the universalisation of freedom in the sense of its egalitarian and undifferentiated extension to all people. In the modern understanding of freedom, as opposed to the ancient or medieval one, it ceases to be understood as a social privilege or prerogative and becomes a universal characteristic of man. When Hegel formulates his famous thesis that “the History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom”, precisely this generalization in the cognition of freedom is its primary meaning, “the Eastern nations knew only that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world only that *some* are free; while *we* know that all men absolutely (man *as man*) are free” (2001, 33).

The second defining moment in the development of freedom lies in its immediate connection with the understanding of human dignity. The supreme position of the idea of freedom significantly strengthened and confirmed the modern conviction that the moral essence and value of man as a being lies precisely in his autonomous capacity for self-determination, that this is his defining quality which ontologically distinguishes him from other forms of life. Freedom is thus not, as it would seem, an absolute value in itself, whose content and bindingness refer to itself, which, in its justification, suffices of itself. Although it is sometimes neglected in the discourse on freedom, especially at the level of normative disputes about its interpretation, superior value to individual freedom is the value of human dignity, only from it does this freedom draw its normative force and persuasiveness, dignity as a Kantian conviction that “the value of human subjects lies in their capacity for self-determination” (Honneth 2014, 16). From this conviction, then, arise categorical demands for its normative commitment to the functioning of society, to the legitimacy of political power; “autonomy and self-realization are the key concepts for a practice with an immanent purpose, namely, the production and reproduction of a life worthy of human beings” (Habermas 1996, 469). To disrespect or disregard the autonomous capacity for self-determination at the social and political level is to deny this fundamental determination of man, his ontologically anchored dignity. To this also refers Kant’s well-known idea that “a government that would be established on the basis of the principle of benevolence toward the people, as a father vis-à-vis his children, that is, a *paternalistic government (imperium paternale)* would be the greatest imaginable *despotism*” (Kant 2006, 45). And this regardless of the sincerity of its good intentions, usefulness or nobility of the goals that such a government would like to promote. In the words of Mill, “neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it” (Mill 2001, 70).

From this perspective, the following question emerges as a key one: what political consequences result from the normative recognition of the ideal of individual freedom? Any search for an answer to the question posed in this way should first of all come to terms with the fact that philosophical development has brought several fundamentally different concepts of freedom as autonomy, and thus that political consequences cannot be derived directly from a general and therefore also indefinite idea of freedom, but only from its concrete and specific concepts. Unfortunately, contemporary political philosophy shows a widespread tendency, on the one hand, to generalize freedom (often motivated by an attempt at a kind of ideological privatization of this fundamental value in political disputes), on the other hand, to overlook the political differences between competing concepts of freedom (as if only some concepts of freedom were capable of and worthy of political expression).

The most famous conceptual distinction of individual freedom in political philosophy is in the form of negative and positive freedom, which is primarily associated with Berlin (2002), but in this study we draw on Honneth’s more recent reconstruction of the philosophical development of the idea of freedom, which reveals three distinct concepts of freedom: negative, reflexive, and social freedom (Honneth 2014). We analysed the concept of negative freedom elsewhere and showed that this idea of freedom in its social applicability programmatically leads to the model of politics of *modus vivendi* (Turčan 2023). In this study, we will attempt a similar theoretical-methodological analysis of the concept of reflexive freedom in order to show that a different concept of freedom also leads to a fundamentally different normative understanding of politics. We present and argue for the thesis that the philosophical concept of reflexive freedom, in its

social applicability, programmatically leads to a model of participatory politics through its normative demands. Since the concept of reflexive freedom has developed philosophically and historically in an attempt to overcome the inherent limitations of the concept of negative freedom, we also proceed in this article by critically comparing the concept under study with the previous one. It is precisely critical confrontation that allows us to reveal and articulate not only fundamental differences, but also our own determination of the concept of reflexive freedom and its political consequences. Since we have devoted separate attention to the examination of negative freedom elsewhere, here we will only synthesize the findings on this concept, which we will then use for comparison. From this perspective, it may be helpful for the reader to be familiar with the previous study.

Reflexive freedom – Freedom as autonomy of the subject

From a formal point of view, every concept of individual freedom as self-determination contains, in a certain way, two moments: the question of setting goals and the question of their realization. The first aspect takes into account whether the goals of the practice are an expression of the individual's *own will*, or whether they are only determined, given or imposed on him in some way. The second aspect relates to immediate practice and takes into account the individual's *possibilities* to successfully *realise* these goals in practical action. The concept of negative freedom rejected the first question, mostly as too speculative, and elegantly solved it with a tacit assumption or a stated thesis that ultimately everything an individual wants is a manifestation of his individual will. He focused his theoretical attention exclusively on the second moment and defines the concept of individual freedom as the absence of external obstacles that would prevent the implementation of goals in practice (Turčan 2023, 4–8).

The idea of reflexive freedom, on the other hand, critically returns to what its negative form takes to be unproblematic, the question of the determination of individual goals. The essential question of freedom as autonomy here becomes very manner and conditions of determining individual goals, starting from the critical pointing out of the fact that not everything that an individual *wants* or empirically pursues in his actions must at the same time be the result of his free and unconstrained decision. This idea critically reflects the fact that individuals face a variety of influences and pressures in their decision-making, and for a variety of reasons, including existential ones, they may be forced by circumstances to choose and pursue something with which they themselves do not internally identify. The concept of reflexive freedom, therefore, introduces as an important normative criterion the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous will, between autonomous and heteronomous action. In other words, for a reflexive understanding of freedom, *wanting* is not yet a sufficient condition for the autonomy of will and goals. It calls for the individual's reflexive relationship to himself as a necessary condition of freedom, "the idea of reflexive freedom focuses solely on the subject's relationship-to-self; according to this notion, individuals are free if their actions are solely guided by their own intentions" (Honneth 2014, 29). In its own way, "reflexive freedom, is the art in which the subjects reflect on and assess their motives and influence the willing," it is a "freedom through the inclusion of the self-relational subjectivity" (Okochi 2012, 13–14). Reflexive freedom represents the same aspect of the concept of positive freedom that Berlin associates with the expression of "the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will" (Berlin 2002, 178).

Negative understanding of freedom ideologically corresponded to the historical conditions of the early modern age and the modernization of society; in this sense, “negative freedom is an original and indispensable element of modernity’s moral self-understanding” (Honneth 2014, 29). In its later development, however, it gradually corresponds less and less to social and political reality, encounters a different experience and therefore increasingly becomes a subject of diverse criticism. The question of reflexive freedom becomes especially relevant in the structural context of contemporary, late modern or postmodern society, i.e. a highly individualized society that leads people to understand and shape their own lives as open projects and take full responsibility for their success or failure. As Honneth shows elsewhere, modern society has come to terms with the romantic demands for authentic individual self-realization in a peculiar way, “the claim to self-realization was increasingly made into an institutional demand in the course of the last third of the twentieth century: at first hesitantly and subsequently on a massive scale, individuals were confronted with the expectation that they present themselves as being ‘flexible’ (to cite the contemporary jargon) and willing to develop themselves if they wished to achieve success in their profession or in society” (Honneth 2004, 472). The original individual request turns into a social expectation and pressure, thus the concept of reflexive freedom regains its relevance and appeal for normative political theories.

In these social conditions, the justification and urgency of the normative requirement of reflexive freedom is fully revealed, so that individuals can *really* autonomously determine their lives, so that under social pressure it does not happen that “his liberty (of individual) is confined to the selection of the most adequate means for reaching a goal which he did not set”, but which have only been socially imposed on him, where “from a unit of resistance and autonomy, he has passed to one of ductility and adjustment” (Marcuse 2004, 45, 55). An isolated unit subtly dissolving into a mass consumer society in which the economic imperatives of maximising production and consumption seek to colonize the entire living space in a subtle way, effectively subjugating the very ideal of self-realization. In such conditions, instead of the autonomous individuality of man, “pseudoindividuality reigns” and “the individual trait is reduced to the ability of the universal so completely to mold the accidental that it can be recognized as accidental” (Adorno – Horkheimer 2002, 125).

Critique of reflexive freedom – Rousseau and Kant

The conceptual distinction between autonomous and heteronomous action, will and goals, raises many questions and even legitimate concerns at the political level: on the basis of which we can practically distinguish autonomous goals, and how can we socially sanction and legitimize them? As critics point out, the political pursuit of such a normative requirement can paradoxically open a wide space for social domination and manipulation of the individual himself in the name of his own autonomy, “once I take this view, I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their ‘real’ selves” (Berlin 2002, 180). Not only according to Berlin, such an understanding of human freedom is the deeper origin of modern totalitarianism. According to Arendt, “politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will” (Arendt 1961, 164).

Philosophical pioneers of the reflexive understanding of freedom are Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant (see Honneth 2014, 30–37). Both thinkers contributed significantly to the theoretical development of the idea of reflexive freedom, clarification of its moral and political

value, and justification of its normative priority. In particular, Kant's connection of autonomy with the idea of human dignity appears as an irreversible shift in philosophical discourse. However, with their theories and normative conclusions, they both also contributed to the mentioned concerns; there is probably no easier way to criticize reflexive freedom than to unreservedly identify it with some selected aspects of Rousseau's or Kant's teachings.

Rousseau connected the idea of freedom as autonomy with a sovereign legislation of the general will, in which the individual as a citizen not only participates but must also submit to it unconditionally. It is Rousseau's radical demand for the absolute subordination of the individual to the social whole, while referring to his freedom, to which he is even supposed to be "forced", that raises serious doubts. If necessary, this subordination can even take an extreme form, "when the ruler has said: 'It is in the state's interest that you should die', he must die, because it is only on this condition that he has hitherto lived in safety, his life being no longer only a benefit due to nature, but a conditional gift of the state" (Rousseau 1994, 71).

By submitting to the general will, the individual is supposed to be willing to deny and negate his individuality, thus clearly revealing the value superiority of society over the individual. Inspired by Rousseau's idea of autonomy as self-legislation, and in an effort to avoid the unsustainable consequence of society's domination over the individual, Kant transfers the realization of this idea directly into the individual himself. Since others are not needed to determine the will of self-legislation, but each man is sufficient on his own with his own reason, there can be no contradiction between autonomous and individual will. Kant thus achieves a reflexive understanding of freedom by speculatively splitting man into an empirical and transcendent Self and exclusively identifying the principle of autonomy with its transcendent side. The individual acts autonomously only if he subordinates his practical decision-making to the categorical imperative of universalizing his own will. The ideal here is "the selfperfection of a dispassionate sage" (Berlin 2002, 201). However, the idea of reflexive freedom as such does not stand on the assumption of "total selfidentification with a specific principle or ideal", with the general will or with the transcendent Self, and does not necessarily lead to any "splitting of personality into two: the transcendent, dominant controller, and the empirical bundle of desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel" (Berlin 2002, 181). It can only take this form in the above and similar conceptions, but the concept of reflexive freedom is also open to different philosophical interpretations. Post-Kantian political thought itself formally agrees that the fulfillment of positive freedom in some form (including reflexive) can only be "political, not metaphysical", "as the realization of rightful political relations" (Shoikhedbrod 2023). Moreover, in contemporary political philosophy, no one „defends *autonomy* in the strict Kantian sense of self-legislation *guided by universal principles* /.../ moral and political philosophers such as Habermas, Rawls, Dworkin, Ackerman, Nagel or Scanlon speak of a process of self-determination guided by a *situated* understanding of the *good*" (Ferrara 2002, 50–51). It is this understanding of autonomy as a constructive and relational process that opens up space for different normative interpretations of reflexive freedom.

The defense of reflexive freedom – The issue of the interpretation of the subject of freedom

Dealing with the criticism of reflexive freedom in Rousseau and Kant reveals that the essence of the problem with this concept of freedom lies, on a fundamental level, primarily in how we interpret the subject of freedom itself, that is, the individual as a being. If we understand it rationalistically and speculatively, as is also the case with Kant, and we sublimate the

individual with a certain abstraction of man, then we slide straight into the search for some universal principle that would express his autonomy, objectively valid for a given abstraction. However, if we look at the individual realistically as a concrete empirical individual and the real subject of his own existence, then, as a general given, we see that his life and decision-making always and inevitably take place in a social context, which is not only a simple medium but also has a constitutive relationship to his life and decision-making. Despite the widespread tendency of psychology, and partly also of philosophy, to treat the individual as an isolated, self-autonomous and self-sufficient entity, in fact it is unreservedly true that “the process out of which the self arises is a social process which implies interaction of individuals in the group, implies the preexistence of the group” (Mead 1972, 164). As a starting point, we then recognize the fact that “the general feature of human life /.../ is its fundamentally *dialogical* character” (Taylor 2003, 32–33). In such a case it is then sufficiently obvious that “individuals gain autonomy by being socialized into a communicative community in which they learn to regard themselves as addressees of the universal norms they bring about in cooperation with others” (Honneth 2014, 35).

The realistic understanding of reflexive freedom as an intersubjective practice of individuals contradicts not only metaphysically loaded ideas (Kant), but also romantic ideas of the authentic Self (Rousseau), which the individual must introspectively discover within himself, in such an understanding “self-realization cannot be understood as a process of self-discovery, but only as an essentially constructive process” (Honneth 2014, 36). Autonomy in the sense of reflexive freedom is very close in meaning to the ideal of authenticity, which requires the development of a unique and irreplaceable identity of an individual. So close that the distinctions between autonomy and authenticity sometimes blur, and these notions are often understood as identical. Even here, however, the fact that individual identity is not formed in a monologic relationship with oneself, but in dialogic relationships with others, is also shown to be a determining fact and only “to the extent that we become aware of the intersubjective constitution of freedom, the possessive-individualist illusion of autonomy as self-ownership disintegrates” (Habermas 1997, 62).

In his investigation of the ethics of authenticity, Taylor shows that authenticity itself understood as a self-centred and monological orientation of the individual to his own Self “flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society” and “is something self-defeating in a mode of fulfilment that denies our ties to others”, because with its claims it undermines and weakens the very conditions for the realization of authenticity (Taylor 2003, 4, 41). In a social context, this leads to what Lasch (1991) called a culture of narcissism. Destructive for authenticity is primarily its connection with a negative idea of the private sphere of an individual, closed in itself and separated from others.

From a realistic perspective on man, it is also clear that total or perfect freedom is only a fiction of contractualist theories and the construction of the state of nature; in fact, the individual is always and to a large extent limited and guided by social institutions of various kinds in his freedom. These institutions have a far-reaching influence on his life and the conditions of his own freedom, not only in negative limitation, but also in positive determination of forms and goals of practice. The actual question of reflexive freedom must therefore lie within the reach of the individual on these institutions; the individual is free to the extent to which he can fully participate together with others in their joint formation, to the extent to which he can unforced

identify with their limitations and goals. It is precisely this active participation of the individual in the political formation of social institutions that can be generally called the politics of participation, the normative basis of which is a reflexive idea of individual freedom as autonomy. Freedom, the subject of which is a social individual.

Politics of participation or the public sphere as a realm of freedom

The differences between negative and reflexive freedom, as well as between their political implications, are fundamental. The essential and determining difference is primarily in the very way of understanding the relationship between the private sphere and public authority. While the negative understanding demands a strict delimitation of these spheres and sees in it the satisfaction of individual freedom, the reflexive understanding of freedom demands their connection in a certain sense. In the negative definition of freedom, the individual is understood as a full-fledged subject of freedom only or primarily in his private sphere, in which his subjectivity is manifested, while in the public sphere, he is more or less satisfied with a passive position of an object on which political laws act. From this, then, arise the philosophical effort of the theories of negative freedom to give these laws a natural, objective or even metaphysical status, as well as the political demand for guarantees of the rule of law in the undisturbed disposal of individual rights. Reflexive understanding of autonomy, on the other hand, is characterized by its demand for a full-fledged subjectivity of the individual not only in his private, but equally also in the public sphere, finally, here it is true that subjectivity in the public sphere is a means and a prerequisite for his subjectivity in individual self-determination as well.

Thus, while negative freedom is characterized by the category of *privacy* and its legal protection, for reflexive freedom, a similar position is held by the opposite category of the *public sphere* as a dialogical space of mutual formation of collective will. This is a philosophical category of the public sphere that was analytically formulated and normatively developed primarily by J. Habermas (1991) in his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, which undoubtedly contributed to its expansion in the current political discourse. It is this category that makes it possible to fully avoid the aforementioned deficiencies of Rousseau's and Kant's understanding of reflexive freedom, as well as to express the meaning and basic form of the politics of participation.

Habermas's understanding of the public sphere in this work has been subjected to a certain criticism, which points to his idealization of the bourgeois form of the public sphere and his identification of the political category with this historical form, ignoring its extensive class and gender inequalities, on the basis of which broad layers of society were excluded from it, that in its political application it is ultimately "the shift from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one, from rule based primarily on acquiescence to superior force to rule based primarily on consent supplemented with some measure of repression" (Fraser 1990, 62). In his later works, however, Habermas coped with this criticism in some way and seems to have incorporated its objections into his discursive theory of liberal democracy. But what is important here is that taking this criticism into account does not in any way question the very importance of the public sphere as a normative political principle, not even from the point of view of the critics who also invoke it.

However, the mentioned criticism is valuable above all because it draws attention to one important condition of the politics of participation, namely, if the political public is to effectively

overcome its form of hegemonic dominion, it must be based on its consistent disconnection from social and gender inequalities. It is precisely the extensive structural inequalities in society that are a fundamental obstacle to the development of the politics of participation. The basic normative condition that determines the success of any politics of participation is the mutual understanding and recognition of equality; participants must see each other as equals. Structural inequalities have exactly the opposite effect. It is naive and idealistic to believe or assume that individuals or social groups that have fundamentally different living conditions and possibilities of action will really recognize each other and enter political deliberation processes as equal partners. Along with Iris Young, we understand the phenomenon of structural inequality here as “a set of reproduced social processes that reinforce one another to enable or constrain individual actions in many ways” (Young 2001, 2). Thus, structural inequalities are something that directly and significantly affects the decision-making and actions of individuals, while remaining essentially beyond their individual reach. There is considerable asymmetry between structural inequalities and individuals. The problem is that, by their nature, these inequalities have a preferential and discriminatory effect in relation to the possibilities of participation, putting certain groups at a disadvantage simply because they lack the necessary spiritual and material means to participate in public discourses. A particularly necessary resource that is not given due attention in theories of participation is *free time* itself. Active participation in political processes of deliberation requires a considerable amount of time from individuals. Not only direct participation, but also the necessary informing and familiarization with the issues under discussion, with political debates, require and presuppose sufficient free time. However, there is considerable structural inequality in society in access to free time as a formal means of political participation. For a significant part of the population, most of whose time is consumed by involvement in the economic processes of production, as a way of ensuring the means of their own existence, the category of free time is a rare and chronically scarce commodity. In such social conditions, it is not surprising that civil society degenerates in its own way and, in practice, remains only at the level of a passive spectator of the political process. A spectator such as the one described and normatively thematised by Green in his theory of ocular democracy (Green 2011). However, it is questionable whether it is meaningful to make a certain norm out of this pathology of contemporary liberal democracy. We are concerned that in such a model, politics is confirmed as a form of hegemonic dominion, and the manipulated demos basically only serves its ideological legitimation. Interest in consistent democratic politics must, on the contrary, turn its attention to the overall way of functioning and reproduction of social life and look for effective ways of neutralizing power relations in it so that it is possible to replace political dominion with rational authority. An authority whose rationality and authority are based on and derive immanently and directly from the dialogical processes of political participation. The correctness and justification of its decisions do not need to be additionally and transcendently legitimized by speculative appeals to higher values or common interests. The legitimacy of decisions made in this way is sufficiently and completely exhausted by the value of individual autonomy expressed in the concept of reflexive freedom. However, adequate and meaningful expression of this autonomy requires a number of formal requirements, which are ultimately critical conditions for its quality.

For the category of the public sphere, the most consistent social participation possible is essential, the participation of all interested citizens, regardless of their social differences. Incomplete or weak participation not only weakens and undermines the legitimacy of the results but also creates space for all-round manipulation and ultimately for hegemony. The fulfillment of this condition,

however, requires much more than just a change of theoretical outlook: “the relationship between publicity and status is more complex than Habermas intimates, that declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status distinctions are bracketed and neutralized is not sufficient to make it so” (Fraser 1990, 60). It is necessary to practically create a corresponding political environment, which also implies social commitment of the politics of participation and its extensive character, which stands in sharp contrast to the minimalism of the politics of *modus vivendi*.

The social engagement of the politics of participation

From the beginning, the politics of participation is characterized and distinguished by its increased demands on society and its institutions; it is no longer sufficient with the legal formalism of *modus vivendi* politics, with institutional guarantees of the rule of law. The conditions and demands that the politics of participation assumes and at the same time requires, also determine its social roles. In contrast to *modus vivendi* politics, politics in this sense is not limited to the field of positive law, and its role is far from exhausted by this. The politics of participation is programmatically focused on the creation, development and institutional support of public discussion forums, in which citizens can participate as equal and autonomous persons in joint decision-making on public matters. It is oriented towards promoting an egalitarian political culture that does not tolerate political privileges and prerogatives, and its success depends on this condition. Here, the equality of citizens is not understood only as an equal right to the private sphere, but as equal access to participation in determining the collective will manifested in social institutions of public authority. For the full fulfillment of the meaning of politics of participation, the principle formulated by Nancy Fraser as “parity of participation” is important, which rejects the formal understanding of equality as insufficient and demands the removal of structural obstacles that prevent equal and full participation, it “means assuring that all have access to the institutional prerequisites of participatory parity - above all, to the economic resources and the social standing needed to participate on a par with others” (Fraser – Honneth 2003, 229). It is a radical democratic understanding, which moves from the political to the social and economic sphere, thereby raising serious doubts about the possibilities of participatory politics within the existing liberal democracy.

In order to fulfil individual freedom, it is no longer necessary to limit and suppress the area of public sphere in favour of the private one, “it is no longer a question of preventing a public space from encroaching upon that of private individuals, given that the public spaces have to be constituted in order to achieve individual aims” (Laclau 2007, 120). On the contrary, the phenomenon of the public sphere needs to be expanded to all essential areas of public life and pluralized at the same time. In a reflexive understanding of freedom is fully revealed the fact that “without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance” (Arendt 1961, 149).

The sense of expanding the public is justified by the need for reflexive freedom to include in itself, in principle, all social institutions and spheres of public power that determine or influence the goals of individual practice through their action. At the same time, pluralization of the public should prevent monopolization and concentration of social power; individual spheres of the public must remain independent and autonomous from each other in the sense that decisions and normative criteria used in one area must not be automatically transferred to others. In this way, it is also possible to effectively avoid Rousseau’s negative consequence of combining individual

autonomy with political sovereignty. Reflexive freedom as individual autonomy must reject Rousseau's notion that society has a normative priority over the individual. The expansion and pluralization of public spaces is an essential requirement for politics of participation also because "public discourses find a good response only in proportion to their diffusion, and thus only under conditions of a broad and active participation that simultaneously has a *dispersing effect*" (Habermas 1997, 62).

If citizens are to be actively involved and enter into the processes of participation and public decision-making, the connection between the processes of participation, the adoption of decisions and their practical impact on a specific area of their lives must first of all be obvious. Otherwise, political participation becomes only a form of legitimization of hegemonic power. Normative emphasis placed on the public sphere does not abolish or weaken liberal political institutions, which often derive their legitimacy by appealing to a negative understanding of individual freedom. On the contrary, the discursive nature of civic participation can only strengthen their social legitimacy.

The promotion of participatory politics leads to what Habermas calls also the constitutional democracy, whose "sole substantial aim is the gradual improvement of institutionalized procedures of rational collective will-formation, procedures that cannot prejudge the participants' concrete goals" (Habermas 1997, 61). Openness in the results is an essential moment for reflexive freedom. As long as we take the principle of autonomy of the individual seriously, we cannot say anything about the concrete content of autonomous will, that is, not even about the results of politics of participation; we can only insist on a formal requirement. The goals of practice cannot be sanctioned by hypothetical consent or rational assumption, but only by actually expressed consent in conditions of equal participation. The lack of interest in a consistent politics of participation inherent in the negative concept of freedom, but only its caricaturing, for example, in the form of a social contract as a kind of constitutional assembly of free individuals, largely results from the naively rationalistic principle of generalisation of the will, which is present in some form in political philosophy from Hobbes to Rawls. However, as Rousseau correctly pointed out, the will by its own nature is non-transferable, "power can be delegated, but the will cannot" (Rousseau 1994, 63). This is a fundamental limitation for any form of representative democracy that claims to contain the principle of participation. Participation in the selection of representation is not in itself a full-fledged form of participatory politics, and certainly not an expression of reflexive freedom. On the contrary, in a certain sense, such a policy can even be understood as its negation, since it transfers decision-making about goals, the exercise of autonomy, to the representative.

In a certain sense, however, the politics of participation is an expression and fulfillment of the political ideal of democracy. In this respect, too, it differs fundamentally from the politics of negative freedom. Although it may seem surprising, a negative understanding of freedom does not lead to democratic politics: "freedom in this sense is not, at any rate logically, connected with democracy or self-government" and "there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule" (Berlin 2002, 177). In relation to democracy as a political regime, the negative conception of freedom maintains a considerable distance, which can also be explained, as we have shown, by its primary orientation to the private sphere of the individual, the way of its definition. From this perspective, it does not make much sense for an individual to be actively involved in the public processes of democratic politics, which involves spending considerable

effort and own free time from the individual's tent, while the very result of these processes is considerably uncertain and the probability of asserting one's own position or one's own interests in them is weak. On the other hand, democratic politics can be understood as the way in which other people can intervene in an individual's life that creates space for such intervention. Defending individual freedom against the external interference of others, a sceptical attitude towards democracy and participatory politics seems logical. For this reason, several political theories that defend a negative concept of individual freedom are not only sceptical of democratic politics, but even directly weaken or limit the possibilities of such politics. Finally, a negative understanding of freedom is even compatible with authoritarian, autocratic and undemocratic forms of politics, as evidenced by Hobbes's political theory. This is the main reason why liberalism, "its name notwithstanding, has done its share to banish the notion of liberty from the political realm" (Arendt 1961, 155).

Conclusion

In contemporary political philosophy, the politics of participation is thematised primarily in theories of democracy, especially in the normative model of deliberative democracy, which is obviously closest to this kind of politics, "deliberative democracy refers to the ideal of increasing citizen participation in public deliberation and making collective decision making responsive to public deliberation rather than to economic and social power" (Rostbøll 2008, 2). The question arises, why do we actually use the term politics of participation and not democratic politics to express the political demands of reflexive freedom? Above all, the concept of participatory politics is broader than democracy; in principle, every form of participatory politics is democratic, but not every form of democracy is participatory. Various normative models of democracy are being formulated and defended in contemporary debates; in addition to the deliberative one, there is an elitist, pluralist, protective, liberal, republican, etc. (Held 2008). It is obvious that the degree and form of participation are different in individual models, and some, such as elitist or ocular democracy (Green 2011), are even a denial of the normative principle of political participation, or this principle serves only for the ideological legitimation of hegemonic domination. Moreover, if we turn our attention from normative theory to political practice, we find that even historically there are various forms of implementation of participation politics, which far exceed the standard models of liberal democracy (see Qvortup 2007, Lomb 2018, Pateman 1976).

The second reason lies in the fact that the concept of democracy in political philosophy is too loaded and closely associated with the political institution of the state. Democracy is primarily thought of as the optimal political regime for the governance of the state; this may limit the theoretical perspective and naturalize the institution of the state. However, the politics of participation does not suffer from such an ideological connection; it is rather critical of the state as a political form. The critical attitude is commensurate with the finding that the modern centralized and bureaucratized state, with its extensive professional, technocratic apparatus, can represent a strong structural obstacle to politics of participation, significantly restricting and limiting the sphere of collective decision-making. In relation to society, the state often represents the decisive institutional-power support of the current forms of domination, and it is questionable whether it is possible to successfully overcome them in a given political form. The politics of participation is therefore primarily focused on decentralized and local governance; its authentic form must seek, support and invent non-state political forms of self-government based on the

ability of engaged individuals to act freely and decide on their own affairs. But its ideological imagination must be open even to the prospect of overcoming the state as a historical form of governing society.

But none of this means that the democratic tradition is irrelevant for the politics of participation; on the contrary. The rich historical experience with forms of political participation and democracy is an extremely valuable source of normative inspiration. After all, the original Athenian democracy still remains an unsurpassed ideal. Its institutional arrangements provide a valuable model of participatory politics, „Athenian democracy was direct, not representative /.../ attendance in the sovereign Assembly was open to every citizen, and there was no bureaucracy or civil service /.../ government was thus ‘by the people’ in the most literal sense” and thanks to that governmental system, “Athens managed for nearly two hundred years to be the most prosperous, most powerful, most stable, most peaceful internally, and culturally by far the richest state in the all Greek world” (Finley 1985, 18, 23). Two centuries (!) of experience is the best historical proof that the ideas of political participation and direct democracy are not some utopian ideals. However, we do not naively claim that the Athenian model can be simply copied and reproduced in current social conditions, but we are convinced that rather than proposing various dubious models of elitist democracy, “new forms of popular participation, in the Athenian spirit though not in the Athenian substance need to be invented” (Finley 1985, 36).

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