



HAL
open science

Participatory democracy at the regional scale in Europe: size vs. politics?

Guillaume Gourgues

► **To cite this version:**

Guillaume Gourgues. Participatory democracy at the regional scale in Europe: size vs. politics?. Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Science Politique, Jul 2009, Santiago, Chile. halshs-00515413

HAL Id: halshs-00515413

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00515413v1>

Submitted on 7 Sep 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Participatory democracy at the regional scale in Europe: size vs. politics?

Guillaume Gourgues, PHD candidate (PACTE - IEP Grenoble)

- Draft paper, do not quote -

1- Introduction

As Sartori (1987) wrote about democracy, the size of the political territory is conversely proportional with the strength of participation. Except from semi-direct devices, as referendums, the nation-state size imposes an adapted and realistic pattern of government, mainly based on representation and elections. However, the empirical observers of the evolution of European democracy quickly grasp another reality: some local political authorities (elected, most of the time) pretend that they must implement a stronger or “participatory” democracy on their own territory, which could be as big as a nation-state. European regions (sub-national level), and more precisely few of them, apparently deny the Sartori’s “scientific” rule about democracy. Here, we will try to understand how and why the “issue” of size is managed by these regional authorities: are they manipulators? Is their participatory democracy a demagogic myth? Do they take in account the issue of size and how?

As testimonies of this selective “participatory turn”, we can quote the first experience of a European citizens’ panel in 2006/2007 which involves seven voluntary Regions, the various projects of Catalonia on water or immigration policies as well as a specialized administration in charge of promoting participatory practices in the Catalonian policies (and at the infra-regional level), or the Toscana’s law about promotion of citizens’ participation, the first regional law on participatory democracy in Europe, effective since the 1st of January 2008. The unevenness between regions does not correspond to a national differentiation. In France, for example, only a small number of regional councils have clearly indicated their ambition to promote practices of participatory democracy (notably Poitou-Charente, Rhône-Alpes, and Nord-Pas-de-Calais). The few connections between regions on this topic are mainly structured at the European level (e.g. the European panel experience, or the common project on e-democracy between Catalonia, Toscana and Poitou-Charente). Secondly, the diversity of the modes, practices, and involvements make very difficult a clear demarcation of what we gather under the term of participatory democracy. The sustainability of modes, their costs, modalities, methodologies are largely heterogeneous.

Following the Archon Fung’s democratic cube (2006), we can find at the regional level in Europe the whole spectrum of participatory modes, that is to say quasi antagonistic view of selection of participants, nature of internal interaction between participants and impact on decision, from local referendum to citizens’ juries. First of all, we must precise what sorts of “participatory devices” draw our attention. Some European regions, like the *Lander* of Bavaria, have implemented semi-direct devices, as referendums. These referendums don’t interest us, they have got the same relationship with size than voting. As Sartori (1987: 111-

112) argues, the referendum democracy does not suppose an active participation of citizens. Even if the referendum suppresses the intermediaries between people and decision-making, it doesn't guarantee the involvement of people in this process, contrary to deliberative device. Instead of these classical semi-direct instruments, some European regions seek to create the conditions of a concrete and active participation to the "regional citizens" within the regional or local governments. It could be compared to what Fung and Wright (2003; 5) call *Empowered Participatory Governance* (EPG) that is to say democratic reforms that "rely upon the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and empowered because they attempt to tie action to discussion". Yet, the EPG family gathers a large panel of practices, and we will precise what sort of regional devices and reforms through the European regions could be considered as EPG, but also the relationship between these regional reforms and size.

To understand the relationship between "regional" EPG and size, we use two types of data. Firstly, macro empirical data: a European inventory of EPG devices, realized since three years (2006-2009). This inventory shows that the management of size through EPG could be divided in three categories: *micro focus*, *puzzling* and *non territorial* effects. Although, these types of management, instead of strictly denying the issue of size, seem to follow a common trend with social sciences. Indeed, the relationship between size and democracy has been progressively modified within social science, from optimum to management: the paradigms of participatory and deliberative democracy are considered as the final stage of this modification. These paradigms consider that size is less an exclusive criterion which determines the shape of the democratic regime than a technical challenge. Secondly, qualitative data: a selection of interviews with political and administrative managers of EPG devices at the regional scale. These data provide information about the motivations of the actors who decide to challenge the "technical" problem of size. These managers argue their management of size, in two ways: first, they use political definitions of regional space level (place for politics and policies); second, they argue that they can solve the "size" problem with a rigorous use of methodology.

The article is organized as follows. In a first part, we explore the evolution of the issue of "size" within the social sciences, from optimum to management. Based on this evolution, we will compare three main types of the management of size, within the regional EPG devices in Europe. In the second part, we will try to understand how (and if) the size is considered as a problem for EPG. Politics and faith in methodology are the two main arguments which are opposed to size. We conclude on a general topic about the relationship between democracy and "realism".

2- From optimum to management of size

Even if it seems hard to argue a clear correlation between the evolution within social science and the trends of the political regulation, we argue that the understanding of the first could give us some keys of understanding for the second. Indeed, whereas the size was considered by 19th century philosophers as a potential threat for the very nature of democracy, social sciences have progressively considered that democracy could be adapted to large size, before arguing that a "strong democracy" must be re-created at the nation-state level. Yet, even if the debates in social sciences are still alive, the observation of regional authorities in Europe confirms that size is no longer considered as a threat but instead as a technical problem which can be overcome.

2-1) the “issues” of democracy’ size in social sciences

Historically, the size was considered as a problem, or at least an issue, which baffle the settlement of the “good” government, especially in political philosophy. Montesquieu, in his *Esprit des Lois*, argues that the republic couldn’t survive in an extensive scale of government. The direct participation to the law-making and the control of government are threatened by the extension of the territory. The Republic, that is to say the gentle form of democracy, must be realized in a little scale:

“In an extensive republic the public good is sacrificed to a thousand private views; it is subordinate to exceptions, and depends on accidents. In a small one, the interest of the public is more obvious, better understood, and more within the reach of every citizen; abuses have less extent, and of course are less protected” (Book VIII, Chapter XVI)

In the description of Montesquieu, the “territory” is coalesced with the idea of “political community”. The best republican government is favoured by a dense community, that is to say a limited community, which strong interrelations which must reinforce the alertness of the governed, toward the government who always settle a restricted form of democracy. Beyond this recommendation, based on the speculative philosophy of Montesquieu, the incompatibility between large size and republic, or democracy, raise the issue of an optimal size of government. This is precisely this argument of the optimum size which is used by Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, to demonstrate the impossibility of democracy.

“Besides, how many conditions that are difficult to unite does such a government presuppose? First, a very small State, where the people can readily be got together and where each citizen can with ease know all the rest; secondly, great simplicity of manners, to prevent business from multiplying and raising thorny problems; next, a large measure of equality in rank and fortune, without which equality of rights and authority cannot long subsist; lastly, little or no luxury — for luxury either comes of riches or makes them necessary; it corrupts at once rich and poor, the rich by possession and the poor by covetousness; it sells the country to softness and vanity, and takes away from the State all its citizens, to make them slaves one to another, and one and all to public opinion” (Book III, chap. 4)

Rousseau also correlates the size of the state and the political community to the rise of private property, inequalities and selfishness. The fragile bases of the democracy are directly threatened by the extension of the community. Contrary to Rousseau, Madison (*The Federalist*, n°10) argues that the large size of the community should be a guarantee against the tyranny of the majority. Direct democracy in a small community threatens the liberty of minor interests. One can compare this argument to the Durkheim’s view of individual liberty: the division of work in large nation-states provides a major possibility for individuals to free from the community oppression¹. This approach not only concerns the political philosophy, but also sociology. The Madison’s Republic shares with the Durkheim’s state the idea of a specific political sphere which can weak the social control of the small community. According to the definition of the democratic issue (direct participation, liberty, justice), the size issue is considered differently. However, from Montesquieu to Durkheim, the question of the size is also considered trough the question of the “optimum”.

¹ This sociological argument was criticized by Pierre Clastres, in *The Society against the State*. For Clastres, the community is not synonymous of individual alienation. He observes that the primitive society was organized in order to prevent the power from becoming a separate sphere from society. Clastres argues that the rise of state analysed by Durkheim as a possibility for individuals to emancipate from holistic repressive and conservative society, is an occidental and ethno centrist definition of political modernity.

Although, the “contemporary” analyses of democracy also deal with the issue of “size optimum”. Max Weber provides the first “rational” analysis of the impossibility of a strong democracy in a large scale of government. For Weber, the issue of the size of “community”, and as a consequence, of territory, must be crucial for the settlement of direct democracy (Thomas 1984). Indeed, Weber tried to define the direct democracy as a rational form of administration which is linked to a set of political and historical system, which has risen under precise conditions, contrary to a Marxist definition of the “primitive communism”. Consequently, this rational form of the direct democracy administration is threatened by some factors of instability. The first of these factors is the scope of the organization. For Weber, this scope must be local, with a definite number of members². That’s the reason why the direct democracy is incompatible with the industrialised capitalism, because the accumulation of capital and the extension of the community’s size lead to alienation, that is to say the impossibility for every citizen to identify himself with the community’s interest. In the context of the industrialized nation-state, the “democracy” must be thought as a set of constitutional and juridical rules, which could limit the domination, rather than the transfer of an ideal from the local to the national level of government.

However, this Weber’s approach of the “size issue” in democracy was not really followed by the political scientists. Following the Schumpeter’s works, the political science of the post World War II has abounded a speculative approach of democracy, in order to give a sociological framed analysis of the “realities” of liberal democracy. The democracy was mainly thought in opposition to totalitarianism: as a consequence, the hierarchy of the democratic issues was revised. Indeed, the direct participation of the population to the self government is no longer a *sine qua non* condition for the democratic regime. The stability of democracy could be secured even in a situation of citizens’ apathy (for a critical review see Pateman 1970). Yet, the size becomes progressively a simple criterion of this democratic stability. In other words, the large or small size of community is not correlated with a theoretical “real” or “strong” form of democracy anymore. Dahl and Tuffte (1973) are no longer searching what type of democracy (strong, representative, direct, etc.) could be associated with big size. The problem of size for Dahl and Tuffte is correlated to the central dilemma of democracy, as Dahl (1994) will re-define it: the dilemma between system effectiveness versus citizen participation: “(...) all other things being equal, the smaller the polity, the more will citizens act responsibly and competently in controlling public decisions, but the less will be the system's capacity to respond to citizen preferences” (p. 25). According to this necessary democratic trade-off, they conclude that "no single type or size of unit is optimal for achieving the twin goals of citizen effectiveness and system capacity" (p. 138), because "democratic goals conflict, and no single unit or kind of unit can best serve these goals" (Idem). Their solution is not an optimum size, but a correct number of “levels” which interact in order to ensure participation (small size) and effectiveness (big size). The democratic “management” of size is focused on the interaction of the different levels, within a democratic system. Le Roy (1995), in the Swedish case, shows how the neo-corporatist organizations which provides a link between the participation of their members at the local level, and their lobbying at the national level, have progressively destroyed this function:

“The evidence suggests that many of the traditional bases of citizen participation in Sweden have radically altered their character since the 1960s. As organizations have pursued the amalgamation of their local constituencies, the avenues for democratic participation within these institutions have diminished substantially” (p. 314)

² The other factors are : the equality of status which prevail among the members ; the stability and simplicity of the administrative functions ; some minimal trainings in ways and means (Thomas 1984 p. 226)

In United States, the shift of civic organizations, since the mid-century, from large-member associations to lobbies, has also been analysed in term of democratic weakness (Scokpol 2003). Thanks to their complexity and plurality, the democratic regimes must combine the values of several “sizes”: large scope on policy problems (national size), strong participation and empowerment (local size). Thereby, each size could be associated with a democratic value-added. Even if some scholars have tried to show that the local level is not necessarily more participatory than the national level, notably concerning the electoral participation (Larsen 2002), the effect of size on democracy is still demonstrated, but is now analysed through its complexity (Ladner 2002). Based on a global comparison of democratic regimes, Dana Ott (2000) argues the group of the “small” countries (defined according to her criteria) are more likely to become and remain democratic than larger states. However, all of these approaches define democracy as a set of juridical, economic, and ideological data potentially affected by size.

Yet, this approach of the relationship between size and democracy was challenged by a specific stream of democratic theory : the participatory and deliberative theories. The theoretical pressure towards a more participatory or strong democracy (Mansbridge 1980; Barber 1984) argue that the democratic legitimacy should be based on a face-to-face democracy, rather than relying on elections. Among the scholars who promote this view of democracy, James Fishkin (1994) directly challenged the issue of the size effect on democracy. Even if he recognizes that the “face-to-face” democracy ideal has been lost in the nation state scale, he decides to consider it not as a fatality but as a challenge: “How can we adapt the ideal to the large scale nation state, to a population which cannot possibly gather together in the same room to take decisions?” (Fishkin 1994: 5). The gap between the ideal and the size is no longer conceived as a realistic definition of democracy but as a technical issue. Without pretending change the nation-state democracy in a permanent face-to-face democracy, Fishkin argues that the democratic reforms must be thought according to this tension between an ideal and reality.

“The logic is very simple. If we take a microcosm of the entire country and subject it to a certain experience, and if the microcosm (behaving in the way we would like ideal citizens to behave in seriously deliberating about the issues) then comes to different conclusions about those issues, our inference is simply that if, somehow, the entire country were subjected to the same experience as the microcosm, then hypothetically the entire country would also come to similar conclusions” (Fishkin 1994: 173)

The device of the deliberative poll is conceived as an attempt to challenge the apparent incompatibility between large scale and face-to-face democracy. John Dryzek (2001) followed this path, by proposing solutions to combine “deliberation and large scale” (Dryzek 2001 pp. 652-656): for instance, he studies three available solutions that propose firstly that “deliberative democracy can be restricted to a small number of occasions when popular deliberation can occur” (p. 653), secondly, “to restrict the number of people involved in deliberation, making sure that the individuals who do participate be in some way representative of those who do not” (idem) and thirdly, the solution of Robert Goodin who “wants those who do participate in proceedings to call to mind the interest of those who do not participate” (p. 655). Even if Dryzek debates these three approaches, he defines them as several solution to the “economy of deliberation” that can resolve the challenge of large scale. Similarly, Fung and Wright (2003) argue that the EPG experiments are concrete experiments which challenge the self-evident truth of the size effect:

“Perhaps this erosion of democratic vitality is an inevitable result of complexity and size. (...) But perhaps the problem has more to do with the specific design of our institutions than with the tasks they face as such. If so, then a fundamental challenge for the Left is to

develop transformative democratic strategies that can advance our traditional values – egalitarian social justice, individual liberty combined with popular control over collective decisions, community and solidarity, and the flourishing of individuals in ways which enable them to realize their potentials.” (Fung and Wright 2003: 4)

In other words, the consideration for the issue of size depends on the theoretical approach of democracy. Size, which was progressively thought in terms of management, rather than optimum, could be seen in two different ways. Either one consider that each size correspond to a precise democratic value which must be preserved, or one argue that size must not be an obstacle to the achievement of the strong democratic ideal.

2-b) Regional “participatory” democracy and size in Europe

The empirical practices of the political actors seem to follow a similar evolution. The rise of some experiences of regional “participatory” democracy or EPG, that is to say the settlement of devices and methods which intend to re-create the condition of a strong democracy and active participation at the regional level proves that, empirically, the issue is considered by decision-makers as a challenge which can be overcome. This phenomenon does not only concern Europe. In Canada, the government of British Columbia had decided to reform its electoral system by using a citizen’s jury and a referendum, in order to create the conditions of a national debate which involve as many citizens as possible (Lang 2007). In Europe, some regional authorities have also implemented some of these devices or methods of active participation. But what is exactly the issue of the regional “size”?

Statistically, the European Regions gather large communities of citizens in vast territories. Following the statistical units of the European Union³, the sub-national levels of authority in Europe are mainly classified as NUTS 2 (from 800 000 to 3 millions inhabitants), and sometimes NUTS 1 (from 3 to 7 millions inhabitants), like the German *Landers*, or the Belgian and the UK Regions. For example, among French regional councils (NUTS 2), the smallest region (Corsica) includes 300 000 citizens and the biggest (Ile-De-France) 11 672 millions of inhabitants, because of the presence of the capital city of France. Except these two extremes, the average of the French regions’ population is near from 3 millions of inhabitants. However, this number is still less important than the majority of the big cities around the world. Yet, the physical sizes of the regional territories are bigger than the cities areas, while they are very heterogeneous: the German Landers or some French regions (like Rhône-Alpes or Midi-Pyrénées) are bigger than some European countries, some regions, and some “little” regions like Alsace (France), Umbria (Italy) or Basque Region (Spain) are still bigger than the majority of the big cities. Furthermore, the European regions must share their territories with several infra-regional authorities, type of territory (urban, suburban, and rural). In other words, the issues of size in the European regions can be compared with the nation state problems: the size of the territory and, sometimes, the size if the community make very hard to implement an active and direct participation of citizens to the management of public affairs within their own territory. But the most crucial element of the size issue within European region could be compared with the Dahl and Tuffte’s focus. Indeed, the interrelations with other levels of government within their own territory are one of the major issues for European regions. Several cities, metropolis, urban areas are contained within the regional spaces. Citizenship is structured by several level of political belonging, which have been qualified since the beginning of the 90’s as a European multi-level polity (Falkner 1999; Scharpf 2009).

³ The European Commission has created a statistic unit called NUTS, which divided the European economic space in several areas, functions of the number of inhabitants. These units don’t necessarily correspond to existing political authority.

However, as we have previously said, some European regions try to combine their large space, the presence of other authorities within their own territory, and an active participation of their population. Most of the time, the interrelation between regional political authorities and civil society are analysed by scholars through the paradigm of *governance*, which can explain a re-configuration of networked regional governance, which include among other partnership, the participation of “active citizens” (Tomaney Pike 2006: 130). This networking governance could be considered as a socioeconomic approach that build “regional governance capacity” by reinforcing the institutional thickness of the less favoured regions (Amin Thrift 1995). While these analyses rely on concrete cases of “partnership”, the specificity of the “democratic” relationship, that is to say the power of people on political institutions is hard to understand with such approach. In order to focus on the “size” issue, we choose to limit our object to the EPG devices, without considering the institutional partnerships and neo-corporatism management.

But how identify and classify the regional EPG devices according to their relationship with size? In the various attempts to classify the EPG practices, the “size” criterion is rarely considered. The research agenda of Rowe and Frewer (2004), about the evaluation of effectiveness of public participation doesn’t consider the size as a relevant criterion. The three ideal steps of the evaluating process they conceive (define effectiveness; operationalize it with tools; interpret results), only talks about the “context” of implementation as “the environment in which an exercise takes place, including the political/cultural/economic climate (e.g., political background behind the commissioning of an exercise), as well as the nature of the issue being considered (e.g., level of controversy surrounding it)” (Rowe Frewer 2004: 549). The Fung’s democratic cube (2006), which aims to classify the institutional practices, and measure their progress compared to classical instruments, takes in account three dimensions: What is the scope of participation (large/selected public) ? What are the mode of communication and decision? What is the extent of authority? The “scope of participation” could be assimilated to “size”, but weakly. Indeed, this first “question” only considers the number of people who are gathered in the same place at the same time. Yet, within the institutional practices at the regional level in Europe, we can observe three main types of management of size, which define the relationship between “size” and “democracy”.

A first type of management could be considered as a *micro focus effect*. Confronted to the regional size, the regional authorities choose to support and help the sub-regional experiences of participatory democracy. In this case, the regional authorities act like a provider of resources (money, human skills) in a sponsoring view. Since 2004, the “Generalitat” of Catalonia (Spain) has implemented a supporting device composed of three elements: (1) aid grants for the municipal experiences, (2) training seminars for the elected representative and civil servants of the local authorities on the management of “participatory democracy”, (3) to favour the visibility and the promotion of the local experience. Since 1989, the Nord-Pas-De-Calais region (France) has implemented a device called the “inhabitants’ participation found”. This found finance the local projects which could involve an active participation of the inhabitants of the poor urban districts. These districts were previously classified as targets of social policy by the French state, and the Region gives a support thanks to its “participatory” projects founds. This type of management is close to the Dahl and Tuffte ideal of an optimum set of level which promotes the various values of democracy.

A second type of management to size within the regional “participatory” practices could be qualified as a *puzzling effect*. Contrary to the first management (by “sponsoring”), the regional authorities could consider that their “territory”, defined as the limited area of their administrative power, could be divided in several sub regional districts. The usual aim of this territorial “cutting” is to make the delivery of public service more effective. It often concerns

sectorial policies and address to the “users” or “stakeholders” of these precise policies. For example, since the mid-90’s all the French regional councils have adopted a common device called “Railroad Line Committees” (RLC). These committees including the users’ associations, the regional institution, the local officials and the national transport enterprise (SNCF) deal with the quality of the railroad service⁴. The regional territory is divided into several infra territories, following the railroads. In each region, the various RLC are gathered in a regional structure, once or twice a year. This structure aim to making-up of this participation: the mains expectations of users, the improvement of the public service, etc. In Italy, the Toscana law about participatory democracy is based on a similar management of size: each level of authority within the regional territory is concerned by this legislative impulse, from municipal to regional level. The difference with the Catalanian device is that the legislative tool creates a regional coherence between the different parts of the territory. The region territory becomes an assembling of participatory levels.

The last type of management is a *non territorial effect*. The regional authorities use some devices, frequently created by social sciences themselves, in order to produce the temporary condition of a face-to-face democracy at the regional scale. Two European projects have created this type of management. Both projects were supported by the European commission and/or European organizations as foundations. The first project was the European citizens’ panel (2006/2007) about “the roles for rural areas in tomorrow’s Europe”. Nine regional panels in Europe were selected: Bavaria (Germany), Rhône-Alpes (France), Cumbria and Durham (UK), Flevoland (Netherlands), Wallonia (Belgium), Saint Gallen (Switzerland) and a cross boarder agency (North South Rural Voice, Ireland and Northern Ireland), who were the executive boards of the regional panels. Each regional board manages his panel with its own partner, even though the foundations assured a methodological coordination. After the first step of regional workshops, the regional panels were joined in Brussels (2007) in a final session of the citizens’ panel⁵. The deliberation and the random selection were presented as legitimate tools which create the conditions of an active participation of some citizens to the regional level. It was also the aim of the second project, named IDEAL EU (2008). This project involves three other European regions: Catalonia (Spain), Toscana (Italy), Poitou-Charentes (France). The 15th of November 2008, a simultaneous debate in the three regions was organized, between randomly selected young people, about the sustainable development in Europe. The debates were connected through a virtual platform which gathered the results of each debates, in order to make a synthesis of the whole European deliberation. Common topics, timing, structures⁶ and Internet connection creates a temporary cross European debate. However, this non-territorial management of EPG often corresponds to “one-shot” projects. But these deliberative devices are more and more used by regional authorities: in France, seven regions (Limousin, Picardie, Poitou-Charentes, Rhône-Alpes, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Languedoc-Roussillon, Ile-de-France) had used it, once at least.

Obviously, this three type of management of size are ideal typical. Concretely, these types are often mixed. Firstly, they could be mixed in a common device, as in the Toscana’s law. Secondly, they could be mixed in the same region, which create a set of devices. Yet, two crucial elements must be recalled. First, these devices and modes of active participation are situated in different types of interrelations between local authorities and central state. These

⁴ The French regional councils have been the authorities in charge of the regional railroad transport since 2001, instead of State.

⁵ History, objectives and activities of the European panel are available on <http://www.citizenspanel.eu/>

⁶ Each regional panels were divided in several groups of ten persons. Each group was animated by a selected person.

interrelations are heterogeneous between European states: federal system (as Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium) and unitary system (as France, England, and Holland) don't give the same power to regions, despite the current processes of devolution in several unitary states. In other words, the EPG correspond to different definitions of the "regional power" issue across European Union. Second, the proliferation of devices in some regions can hardly be analysed as a radical change of the government style. Even if the uses of the EPG devices are growing, the general structure of government, that is to say the delegation of the decision and power to a restricted group of elected people is still dominant. That said, these limits don't really concern our issue. Indeed, the regional "choices" of EPG have to deal with the size of their territory. How do they manage this issue? Is it taken into consideration? Is size neglected?

3) The rise of the size management: the case of four French regions

The regional authorities in Europe don't seem to consider the issue of size as an insurmountable problem. Our global survey findings reveal that the regions adapt their management of territory in order to create the conditions of a stronger democracy within their own territory. But these macro observations don't resolve the question of the compatibility between political projects and size. In order to understand the way that size is managed within the regional EPG projects, we choose to focus on the case of French regions. As we quoted it earlier, the heterogeneity of state-models in Europe leads us to prefer a comparison within the same state, in order to control the juridical and political issues of the devolution and regionalization.

A general survey⁷, about French regions gives us a general vision of the French regions that use EPG devices (Table 1; for a map of French regions see Annex 2). Even if we don't detail the nature of these devices, we mention the presence of EPG devices when regions claim that some of their practices correspond to it. This "indigenous" inventory was analysed with the Fung's criterion (see above). According to the analysis, four regions were selected because of the specificity of their size, population and types of EPG devices: 1) The Rhône-Alpes region (43 698 km²; 6 172 Inhab.) which actively promotes EPG ; 2) The Bourgogne Region (31 582 km²; 1 681 Inhab.) which discreetly implements a sort of participatory budget in high schools ; 3) The Nord-Pas-de-Calais Region (12 414 km²; 4 089 Inhab.) which has practiced EPG since decades ; 4) The Ile-de-France region (12 012 km² ; 11 672 Inhab.) which implements a set of permanent consultative instances, divided in "publics" (youth, handicapped).

These four case studies were compared during our PhD thesis (currently in progress). Our methodology gives an important place to interviews. Eighty interviews were realized between March 2007 and January 2009. In the four regions, we selected the main "managers" of participatory devices: elected representative involved in the "decision" of promoting EPG, civil servants (high and low ranks) who manage concretely the organization of the devices, and political councillors who act between political and administrative spheres. For each of them, the "regional" EPG is a reality, composed of devices, political outputs, and concrete problems. The aims of these interviews were multiple: information, definition of participatory democracy, description of issues, etc. But the interviews didn't explicitly deal with the issue of size. However, without a specific item about this theme, the question of size has spontaneously appeared during 25 interviews. (Annex 1). All of these 25 persons are involved in the implementation or the settlement of "participatory" devices in our four French regions.

⁷ Gourgues G (2009) *Participatory democracy in French regions: A status report*, Association of French Regions.

Table 1 : size and EPG in French Regions

| Regions | Area | Population | Density | EPG devices |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| | (In km ²) | (In thousand) | (in hab./km ²) | - |
| Alsace | 8280 | 1 848 | 223 | - |
| Corse | 8680 | 300 | 35 | - |
| Île-de-France | 12012 | 11 672 | 972 | Yes |
| Haute-Normandie | 12317 | 1 851 | 150 | - |
| Nord-Pas-de-Calais | 12414 | 4 089 | 329 | Yes |
| Franche-Comté | 16202 | 1 188 | 73 | - |
| Limousin | 16942 | 754 | 44 | Yes |
| Basse-Normandie | 17589 | 1 500 | 85 | Yes |
| Picardie | 19399 | 1 942 | 100 | - |
| Lorraine | 23547 | 2 391 | 102 | Yes |
| Champagne-Ardenne | 25606 | 1 378 | 54 | - |
| Poitou-Charentes | 25810 | 1 779 | 69 | Yes |
| Auvergne | 26013 | 1 379 | 53 | Yes |
| Bretagne | 27208 | 3 194 | 117 | - |
| Languedoc-Roussillon | 27376 | 2 590 | 95 | Yes |
| PACA | 31400 | 4 897 | 156 | Yes |
| Bourgogne | 31582 | 1 681 | 53 | Yes |
| Pays de la Loire | 32082 | 3 553 | 111 | Yes |
| Centre | 39151 | 2 591 | 66 | Yes |
| Aquitaine | 41308 | 3 205 | 78 | - |
| Rhône-Alpes | 43698 | 6 172 | 141 | Yes |
| Midi-Pyrénées | 45348 | 2 856 | 63 | - |
| France | 543 965 | 62 810 | 115 | - |
| Average | 24 726 | 2 855 | 115 | - |

Source: Survey realized for the Association of French Region, January-October 2008⁸.

These 25 interviews provide us qualitative data which could be explored. Is the regional scale compatible with EPG? Is not size a problem at all? How and why EPG could be implemented at the regional scale? Some of the most involved regional managers of EPG in France answer (more or less directly) to these questions. In a first time (a), the EPG is considered as a political issue, that concern politics (a left wing definition of democracy) and policies (more effectiveness for regional public action). According to these views, the big size and huge population of the regional is not a problem anymore. In a second time (b), the issue of size is less denied than managed. The uses of available “methods” and “process” of participatory democracy are seen by all the actors as an efficient way for implementing EPG.

⁸ A common questionnaire had been send to every region. Ten regions responded: Auvergne, Centre, Ile-de-France, Lorraine, Limousin, Languedoc Roussillon, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Pays de la Loire, Poitou-Charentes, Rhône-Alpes. Nine of them claim EPG practices. Besides these questionnaires, some EPG practices were identified in Bourgogne, Basse-Normanide, Picardie, and PACA.

3-a) Politics (and policies) vs. Size

The disjuncture between size and democracy is linked of the actors' perception of the very nature of democracy. Indeed, as we will argue, democracy is not considered as a juridical system, which tends to ensure a stability which legitimates the exercise of power. On the contrary, democracy must be thought as a value correlated to politics and policies.

Regional elections in France of March 2004 saw the establishment of dominant left-wing coalition⁹ - mainly composed of socialists (PS), communists (PC), and ecologists (Les Verts) - in the majority of the 26 regions. As a matter of fact, all of the elected representatives of our panel belong to left-wing political parties (Socialist, communist and green parties), and most of them have been recently elected. Since 2004, several regional councils claim a practice of participatory democracy. For instance in Rhône-Alpes, the victory of the left wing coalition corresponds to an explicit promotion of "participatory democracy" as a political choice. In order to strengthen this involvement, the left-wing coalition decided to create a vice-presidency specifically in charge of participatory democracy. In order to explain this voluntarism, a cabinet's director argues that the consequence of the regional scale of democracy is a lack of citizen's "pressure". This lack is directly correlated to the necessity for using strong political voluntarism:

"(...) having a delegated representative is a necessity for the participatory democracy, firstly, to remind in the executive board and the administration that we implement a policy for the citizens. Because in the absence of seeing them spontaneously and being spontaneously interpolated by them, there is a kind of distance which is established. Thus, there is also this difficulty to take in account the whole territory." (Interview 19)

But this voluntarism is not only a consequence of the regional size. Many practitioners use political arguments to justify and defend the regional "participatory democracy". As they explain, their goal is not to substitute a whole system (representative democracy) to another (participatory democracy), but to deepen the democratic nature of their government. Thus, the *politics* of participatory democracy doesn't consider the size as a relevant issue. To illustrate this point, we can focus on several members of regional council, who particularly advocates for more participatory democracy in French regions. An elected representative gives a simple vision of the political involvement which creates the participatory democracy:

"The regional institution has got a geographic meaning, an administrative meaning. Well. But after all, we are not only managers we are also and fortunately, politicians, who manage an institution. And we have done a political program in which the participatory democracy has a rightful place. To me, it seems obvious that... with the regional citizens, we undertook to implement a policy, and in this policy, the participatory democracy is a priority, it's our duty to... I should say that's, for me, it is enthusiastic, because we have a lot of chance to implement this kind of policy." (Interview 13)

For its political advocates, participatory democracy is perceived and defined as a way of changing (opening) the decision-making process to the active participation of citizens, but foremost a political program. This political dimension leads some political advocates to reject the size issues, as another regional councillor argues:

"Is it important that the regional council implements participatory democracy?"

The regional council, as everyone! I guess that participatory democracy must be implemented at every level of government. Well, the town is... however, it is an authority... I guess that all the associations must work in this way. Thus, the region is

⁹ Proportional lists, along with a two-turn ballot with a majority bonus, have favoured the emergence of these compound political majorities.

also... how I can say... a space for intervention which must be taken by citizens. There are issues which are... regional issues, which cannot be discussed elsewhere than at the regional council.” (Interview 2)

“It is true (*the value of EPG*) for every local authorities, it is not... I don’t think that we must do more participatory democracy at the region than in other local authorities, or in a district, or at the nation state level. I don’t see it like that.” (Interview 15)

The regional institution, like the regional space, is seen by these actors as a political space, that is to say a place for government, and why not, for change. To implement EPG to the regional scale could be considered as a way to prove that every power, every authority must be affected by the active participation of citizen. For an “advocate” of participatory democracy within a regional council, participatory democracy must prove that it can be applied to every type of government:

“For many people, the participatory democracy, it is within the city, and a lot of people said me why the region? Yet, I believed in it, otherwise I didn’t do it. And I guess that the experience has proved that it was a totally relevant level of... impulse of the people participation. And I want to demonstrate that actually there is any irrelevant level. In other words, I think that the construction of democracy really must be done at every level, without any exception, and almost without prioritize any level. Some levels are not sufficiently, or not all, the place for participatory democracy. For example, at the national level, there are few... In France I mean... That’s why the Latin American experiences are so interesting, because they also try to develop it at the national level. So there are levels where it not exists very much. At the national level, at the global level, it is not hot stuff, at the European level, it is not really... it is not easy. And at the regional level, it belongs to this levels which are considered... Yet, I believe that it can be possible and it must be possible at every level, for every size. My biggest satisfaction, as a vice-president, it is to have demonstrated that it is possible to practice participatory democracy at the regional level. In any case, we have demonstrated that we can develop participatory spaces and sites in a regional territory and why not, global...” (Interview 4)

According to this political view, the size of the regional community and territory is not a physical limit which must impose a model of democratic regime. On the contrary, the political programme about the “good” form of democracy has to overcome the size “pretext”. To explain her involvement for democracy at the regional level, a vice-president argues that she has a “political” definition of the region:

“This is the history of the French regions, which were administration of projects, and which have a lot of difficulties to consider it-self as political authorities. I believe that I the only one in the regional council who says that the region is a political authority” (Interview 8).

Other regional vice-presidents explain why they choose to not implement participatory democracy at the local level (municipality, county, district), precisely because of the nature of their political project:

“It is true that here we have rather chosen the county for the adequate scale of participation. Well, it is a small county... (...) It is true that the biggest part of the participation process was more led at the county level than at the town level. We guessed that the town was not the good scale for a “developmental” participatory democracy.” (Interview 5)

“So, there, we use a participatory approach applied to a large scale. Which is rare, because most of the time, the participatory approaches are applied to the scale of neighbourhood, or to well identified objects. There, we are on a scale of one million two thousands inhabitants, and during approximately one year, we have got 1 200 peoples

who participate to workshops, meetings, whose aim is clearly to build a shared diagnosis about the mining basin” (Interview 9)

Some of the regional managers even go so far as to say that the regional size is the best place for EPG, better than other scale. They “believe” in the relevance of the regional scale for public action, and problem-solving, which lead us to argue that this scale is one of the best scale for participatory democracy:

“Nowadays, the region is the less bad scale for the management of the relationship between the citizens and the world. I explain myself. Every citizen is in the world, and the world is within each citizen. (...) We are both absolutely universal and absolutely alone. So, I guess that the region is the less bad of the institutional, geographic, physical, relational, economical, social scale, to conciliate what comes from top-down, very, very, top-down, and very, very, bottom-up, and it is maybe at this scale that the essential questions for society... (...) The region is the most interesting scale to deal with the real issues of society. And thus it is... participatory democracy cannot be just reduced to the management of municipalities, neighbourhoods, proximity, but must integrate the management of far-distant places, where it can find originality. In the same time, it is harder and it is more interesting. To implement participatory democracy, it is easier in neighbourhoods than in a territory which has got the size Switzerland, and the population of Denmark.” (Interview 18)

But this “politics” of participatory democracy, argued by advocates and stakeholders within the regional institution, is not the only factor of the minimization of the size issue. Indeed, the regional scale of government is also defined by actors as a decision-making place. The regional “policies” and their implementation could justify the use of EPG devices. Indeed, the region is considered as a provider of public services and political outputs which can impact on people. Yet, the size argument could be reversed. The regional space, as a space for service providing, on precise policies (transport policy in the following exemple) is a better place for “participatory” management:

“Thus, the difficulty is... Because, there, we are at the regional scale, it is not the same thing. But at the local scale, it is more complicated. The problems of power and oppositions at the local level are less obvious. In other words, for us, ultimately, the railroad service, there is no harm in trying. On the contrary, us, we are not exactly on participatory democracy. We deal with good management. It is how provide a good service to the users? It is not the same thing.” (Interview 24)

Following this definition of the regional council as a service provider, EPG becomes an obligation, especially at this level of government. Indeed, compared with other local authorities (especially in France), the regional council is not well-known by citizens, and needs to communicate about its own public policies:

“For me, it is obvious that it must be the participatory democracy, within all the democratic and elected institutions, but even more important for this kind of elections and authority, which is very farther from people, very, very farther. So, participatory democracy must be as closely as possible from people (...)” (Interview 3)

“When you lead a regional electoral campaign, we perfectly know that the region is absolutely unknown, that its policies are unknown. And before want to implement very complex things to associate the citizens, there is a necessary first step, which is to communicate to the citizens the same references, in order to create the conditions for the debate. Hence, this participatory process during the electoral campaign...” (Interview 6)

The managers of EPG devices consider the region as a political space, that is to say a place for politics and policies. They do not consider the issue of democracy abstractly, but according to their own “regional” problems and issues. It is the same thing for size: even if the interrelation

between regional scale and strong democracy is not self-evident, the “need” for more democracy relies on political projects, which aims are precisely to transform the very nature of the regional authorities. But these political ambitions are not enough to guarantee the implementation of interesting devices, that is to say methods of EPG who go beyond the institutional “communication”.

3-b) Method vs. Size

Each of the 25 actors that we met argues that the regional size impose a clear and rigorous methodology. Consequently, the main issue of this “large” participatory democracy is the methodology. Indeed, even if the argument of size could be “politically” minimized, the implementation of participatory democracy for a large community must be methodologically guaranteed:

“The important, if you prefer, is that the relationship with the citizen, the more you deep it, the more we go up in the scale of the authority, the more we have a big size to manage, the more it is necessary to have a seriously thought and organized participatory approach. Well, the president of the regional council, contrary to a mayor... a mayor is always in this town, the Saturday and the Sunday, he can meet a lot of people. The president of the regional council, even if he is here... I mean, the region is a country, as big as Denmark, Switzerland, so it is not possible. Thus, we must, if we want to consult, we must equip ourselves with some formalisation, it seems to me very important” (Interview 1)

“The participatory democracy in a city is in effect... it is organized... the pressure is there. The population is expecting for action from the mayor. Not all the population, indeed we could see who is expressing itself, but they are at the door of the belfry. They are at the door of the city hall, they are expecting... and finally, it is not a big deal to realize that ten of hundred citizens in the city are ready to debate, bring disagreement, contest, or at the opposite try to do... For a regional policy it is more complicated. One must find the relevant frames, organizations, the good territorial level, in order to manage this consultation, to manage this participatory democracy” (Interview 19)

“Because one of the things I say about participatory democracy, it is that beyond the question of how you justify and legitimize it, it is above all how do you practice it? Because the question of the implementation is hyper important and hyper complicated and professional. It is anything but not “we will argue, and thus we will act together”. It is anything but not “all together, all together”. It is really... it is necessary to be rigorous, to have method, and to be professional, otherwise we cannot succeed...” (Interview 9)

All of the managers of participatory devices (political and administrative) consider that the methods, and consequently the financial and human means provided to create or buy these methodological tools, are indispensable to concretely implement a “regional” participatory democracy:

“It is necessary to provide huge means. A lot of financial, material, human means, for engineering. When I say that it is necessary that the civil society rise, it obviously needs huge means. So, that is all, it is a question of the means we provide.” (Interview 15)

All the same, the issue of size has not disappeared. Indeed, the size is not correlated to a potential impossibility of the “participatory democracy” at the regional level, but can disqualify some devices. The size of the community is still a problem, which requires imagination and caution in the choice of the adequate device. The regional practices of participatory democracy could not be exactly the same than in other scale:

“For the region, I think it is obviously limited, firstly because of the very nature of the institution, and because of the particularity of this one, the Ile-De-France region, which is

colossal. So, it is true that to imagine effective participatory practices, which concern everyone, on a scale of 11 millions of inhabitants, it is really very, very complicated. (...) I think there are things which are not necessarily possible.” (Interview 17)

“It (*EPG at the regional scale*) is an absolutely different approach. The geographic non-proximity, the regional policies and competencies, and the number of concerned citizens, oblige us to not have the same approach than a city, a town, even an agglomeration, I think.” (Interview 25)

But the methodology is not only a way of diminishing the issue of large size. It could also break the self-evident link between small size and democracy. Indeed, the choice of the adequate methodology also depends on the type of democracy which is reached through EPG. For instance, in the case of a regional civil-servant who advocates for more deliberation, the local scale is not synonymous of more democracy. According to the importance of deliberation, the credibility of the EPG process has nothing to do with the scale:

“It depends of scales. A referendum on a district, about a project of city-planning, which was worked and debated, it can have sense, but a large general question, large thrust, though up like this, whereas people are not informed, I think that... compared with deliberative poll or citizen’s jury. I think that these processes are more interesting, even if they are not more representational of the whole population if I may say, for the decision-makers than answers to a yes-no question in a referendum, or thirty seconds answers to a poll.” (Interview 23)

Yet, the large majority of the 25 actors consider that the size must be managed and taken into consideration during the “implementation” process. Even if they don’t ignore the specificity of a “participatory democracy” at a regional level, a lot of actors raise the issue of the necessity to be aware of the size difficulties. For example, an active support of EPG devices within a regional council argues that the promotion of participatory democracy through networking is not efficient:

“What is the main objective? It is to convince people who don’t come (*in the place for deliberation of participation*). If we only practice networking, we fail our aim, we must fail. Of course, we can succeed within little cores, little places, but we will fail a lot of territories at the scale of the regions.” (Interview 10)

The choice of the “good” method or device is very pragmatic. Some devices, even if they are appreciated, are excluded because they are maladjusted. A regional councillor considers that the implementation of any device needs that every practical element is taken into consideration, especially at the regional scale:

“When you practice such a device, when you implement it at the regional level, it means that you ask for people who have a job in addition to take some time, to incur costs, eventually to not work during an half day, because they come from far away, it requires an half day, whereas us, we are paid for this, so to say, the administration even further than us (...). We must clear things up. I don’t think that it is specific to our region it may be a limit of this device everywhere. Maybe it is relative to the size of the territory upon which we act, which is quite significant. It is a very big region, geographically.” (Interview 12)

For a vice-president, the choice of the adequate instrument does not obey to a universal rule. His choice to implement participatory budget was motivated by the supposed efficiency of this device, according to the imperative of high schools policy:

“Either we decline it (*participatory democracy*) in different forms within each sector, but it requires an exacting and meticulous work, but I don’t believe in homogenous forms which should be applied to the whole region. I haven’t got any pretention to speak for other sectors. But what has motivated the participatory budget in high schools, it was

precisely to find a political form, which made us create a site for bandying and make decision, together, and which was not only a clap-trap, which was based on a real potential of decision-making, which was linked to a financial capacity, and as a result it was the will to give a sense of responsibility to everyone, and to go as far as possible in the chare of decision-making” (Interview 7)

The importance of methodology is not only the consequence of a pragmatic discourse. Indeed, the general claim for more “methods” could be considered as a “technical” justification which de-politicized the issue of participatory democracy. It seems obvious that the politicians use several ranges of justification when they argue their action, according to the weakness of the frontier between politics and policies, values and instruments within the decision-making process (Radaelli 1999). But the implementation of “regional” rigorous methods for participatory democracy is not only a political pretext. It is also the testimony of an organizational reality. Indeed, within the regional administration, some civil servants are hired as “experts” or “technicians” of participatory democracy. One of them tells us how he overcame the issue of size thanks to his professional skills. This civil servant was previously in charge of the implementation of “participatory democracy” in the capital city of the region, and was hired by the regional council (in 2004) to implement “regional” type of participation. For him, each scale corresponds to specific tools and methods of EPG.

“When I arrived, I told myself that I couldn’t do the same thing for the region that for the city, there was no sense.

Q : Because of the size?

Of course! Because in the city, if you can plan a meeting in one month, some people will come, even if everybody will not come. In the region, if you plan a meeting in one month, nobody will come! Because it is so complicated, it is so scattered, the times for transports, and the region was, and still is far from the regional citizen. (...) So, we invented this method of public meetings with the consultant, who was doing the same thing in another region. But they didn’t many experiment it before. They practice it in cities, firms, but never in a region such as here...” (Interview 20)

Another EPG “technician”, who is also an active advocate of participatory democracy in region (Ile-de-France then Poitou-Charentes) argues that the size could disqualify a device, without discouraging her to implement the same type of device at the regional scale. Despite she observed the failure of the nationalization of the participatory budget in Rio Grande Del Sul (Brazil), she decided still and all to implement a “regional” participatory budget (Poitou-Charentes), based on another relationship to territory:

“We observed it at the level of the town (*Porto Alegre*), but we wanted to see, as they just generalized it at the national scale, we were really interested in seeing if it was transposable to a higher scale, geographically higher. I came back from Porto Alegre saying that at the municipal level, it is ok, at the national level it is gasworks...” (Interview 16)

Instead of a regional budget, she decided to create participatory budgets in every high school. She substitutes a *puzzling* management to a *non territorial* management: the regional council is not directly affected by the device (there is not regional conference or meeting), but guarantee the financial resources and the probity of the deliberative process within each high school. But the adequate tools are not only justified by technical issues. Indeed, as we said earlier, the regional territory is not an empty space: local authorities, associations, firms are also important actors of the regional regulation. Consequently, the EPG devices are thought according to these equilibriums. A regional councillor, who manages a specific mission of promotion for EPG, considers that the devices must be adapted to the political reality of the regional territory, and more precisely to the latent conflict between scales of authority in French regions:

“For example, the idea of a Regional Commission for Public Debate, it is to do something which is adapted to the regional scale. And we cannot copy as it is the National Commission for Public Debate, and put it at the regional scale. I guess that when we do it at the regional scale, we are more in contact with the local authorities, and there is always a high huffiness between local authorities, in order to prevent everybody to entrench within their own territory. So, we must propose a device which takes in consideration the question of territory when we are in region. Strongly. Because we cannot provoke regional debates about issues with high stakes, if we don't jointly develop the device with the local authorities, who own a large part of the decision capacities...” (Interview 14)

Some managers try to redefine the “role” of the region according to the existence of local actors within the regional territory. Beyond the necessary association of local authorities to the regional public debates, the regional institution could be seen as a resource provider for the actors who decide to follow the regional “participatory” elicitation. The practices of networking, congress, which are very popular in our four regions, follow this regional position:

“It (*the region*) is a potential place for dialogue and mutualisation for all the actors. In other words, if finally it (*participatory democracy*) should be a regional policy, it could be focus on citizen's conference, in terms of tools or process, it also could be focus on the creation of a centre which provides resources and mutualisation for all the implied actors” (Interview 21)

“I think that the role of the region is double. It is to deal with its own action. And secondly, it is to support the local actors. Two ways for supporting them, either financing their initiatives, or create the conditions for capitalization and exchanges between several initiatives. I think we have a real part to play for a regional support, and I should say synergism between several experiments within the regional territories.” (Interview 22)

The claim for an adapted methodology has two main outputs. The first output is explicit and obvious: according to the technical difficulty of a regional implementation for EPG, the uses of “legitimate methodology” are an efficient way for pulling the rug from under critical observer's feet. Moreover, the relationships between regional EPG experiences across Europe and a part of the social sciences are very strong. For example, the growing use of deliberative device (citizen's juries, consensus conferences, etc.) is analysed, accompanied, and sometimes advised by social scientists. Even if these scientists can be critical, the very presence of this reflexive analysis is a guarantee for regional authorities to obtain “the benefit of the doubt”. The regional EPG could be discussed, analysed and studied as well as other EPG experiences. In other words, even if political practices are not “dictated” by social sciences, practitioners join up with social scientists about the capacity of EPG methodology to overcome size effect.

The second output is less obvious, but as important as the first. Since the beginning of this paper, a crucial question has not appeared: the social demand for more participation. Yet, it does not exist, at the regional level in France, a pressure for more participation: no social movement, no lobbying and no demonstration for more EPG in regions. The impact of “pressure” or demand within the rise of EPG has been studied through various scientific narratives. Kitschelt (1986) argues that the impact of pressure depends on the type of state and polity of each country. Thus, the weakness of the French regional power partly explains the success of EPG. Therefore, the change of the civic structures and the forms of activism could be correlated to the evolution of the political behaviour of citizens who change the nature of their civic pressure (Berry 2000; for France see Ion 1997), and impose renewed types of regulation. For example, Denters and Rose argues that the local governments (mostly cities) should be confronted to micro trends of change in their “civic” environments (new participatory demands and activism), which oblige them to reinforce local democracy

(Denters Rose 2005: 5-9). This adaptation fits with other major challenges: urbanisation, Europeanization, globalisation, new substantive and participatory demands are macro and micro trends that must be integrate (differently) by every local government, in every country, in order to survive in the “age of local governance”. Even if these elements are absolutely relevant, they are not sufficient. This elements need to be materialized by political actors: none of the regional actors only refers to these civic change and new era to legitimate his action. They need to materialize the social demand, to prove that they do not only act following their own interests. The politics, through electoral program, could be substitute to this demand: as we seen it earlier, the EPG could be defined as political programs, confirmed by the electoral success. But this electoral determination is not sufficient either. Although, the use of disposable methods and devices is the main tool for materializing the social demand:

“When we have done the big public meetings, I was in my city, and there was... when we’ve seen these full auditoriums, and the people who came, we told ourselves that there is an interest, it is not... we are not talking to ourselves, it is not dogmatism, the is an interest, people come searching information (...) So, we told ourselves that there were ferments...” (Interview 11)

“Honestly, I think that it is a very important indication. There were public meetings at the beginning of the mandate, which had been real success, as qualitatively as quantitatively. There were a lot of people. On the other hand, the professionals of the exercise didn’t come. We have really seen, in the public meetings, peoples who come in order to express themselves, to say what they expect from the region, to try to understand what the region is, and precisely I guess that is very important that the region, young authority, implement this type of device.” (Interview 12)

“We send the invitations, and thus, the consultant say to us, don’t worry, it will have a lot of people! But we didn’t know. We arrived in the first meeting, and there were not enough seats! A guy from the local section of Socialist Party told me, you know Sir, we have made the electoral meeting in the same room, there were just the three first rows which are taken... So, everyone was surprised, and agreeably surprised” (Interview 20)

The strength of numbers is a very important element of the methodological obsession. The regional EPG relies on a simple equation: the big size of the region imposes adequate tools which physically re-creates the feeling of the face-to-face democracy. The methodology is not only a speculative obsession. The regional managers need to be physically confronted to “their” population, in order to prove (maybe to themselves) that the regional EPG is a good and useful thing, and the selection of tool is crucial, because each tool propose to “create” a specific sort of public, large and quantitative, selected and qualitative, as the Fung’s democratic cube reveals. The use of method has got a spill over effect which provides empirical proofs to general narratives about political disaffection, and necessary renewal of democratic forms, whatever size, topics and consequences.

4) Conclusion: size, politics and science

In this article we examined how the relationship between size and democracy is empirically managed through politics. Based on qualitative data, concerning four French regions, our analysis argues that the size problem, even if it is not deny, is subordinated to the political definition of the regional space and the democratic pattern. The regional advocates and practitioners of Empowerment Participatory Governance rely on methodology and “science” of participation to guarantee that the size of their territory concretely become a more democratic place.

Apparently, the “regional” attitude towards size and democracy is shared by a growing number of political authorities. During the year 2007, the Brazilian state of Pará has implemented a territorial participatory planning, based on regional (17 public meetings), municipal (143 public assemblies) and national (general conference) devices. With 1,2 millions Km², 7,1 millions of inhabitants, the state has invented an original process of several level of participation, divided into three steps (regional/municipal/national). The same year, a European NGO (*Notre Europe*) organized the first deliberative poll about European Union (Tomorrow’s Europe project). 362 citizens from the 27 states members participated to this two days events. After several discussions and confrontations with experts, they deliberated in order to produce a common view about the future of Europe. More or less connected with decision-making process, more or less open or restricted, deliberative or participatory, these EPG devices testify that our research findings about French regions correspond to a general trend. More and more actors argue that “big size must be democratized”, even if the path toward nation-state strong democracy is not perfectly defined.

However, the “science” of democracy is still divided about the issue of the “democratic” large size governments, as prove, for instance, the debates about transnational democracy. While Yves Mény (2005) argues that the democratic principle is progressively “denationalized”, as a consequence spill over integration, democratic consolidation of candidate countries, international relations, Robert Dahl (1999; 2005) is still “sceptic” about the possibility of a transnational democracy. Indeed, Dahl considers that the *sine qua non* criterion for democratic regimes¹⁰ could not be ensured at the international level. Even if this scepticism could be discussed (Erthal 2008), it seems obvious that the interrelation between democracy and size mainly depends on the definition of democracy. According to the Dahl’s criterion, size and democracy can only thought in the framework of the “democratic trade-off”, defined with Tuffte in 1973. According to Fung and Wright, democracy, as a social state shackled by a permanent process of deepening, could be adapted to every scale of government.

That is the crucial point of the relationship between decision-makers, size and democracy. To be managed, the issue of size must be confronted to a political output, from policy problem to ideology. Finally, our French cases studies remind us some lessons from Bernard Manin (1995) about the representative democracy. This type of regime did not establish itself as evidence. The elective principle of delegation of political responsibilities to a small group of individuals was consciously chosen instead of other democratic systems, as drawing lots:

“To explain this phenomenon”, Manin argues, “the idea that spontaneously comes to mind is that in large modern state, with a numerous and heterogeneous population, spread out on vast territories, the drawing lots of the government had become “unpractical”. [...] These explanations surely entail elements of truth. Nevertheless they fail because they obscure the part of contingency and choice that almost inevitably subsist within every historical action, and that has definitely played a part in the triumph of election over drawing lots”¹¹

Even if the drawing lots were definitively practicable in the Europe of the 18th century, neither the state (which gather a restricted political community before universal suffrage) nor the

¹⁰ E.g. the creation of institutions that enable citizens to participate, control and influence power of population on government and bureaucracy, available information about the policy process, public debate and political parties,

¹¹ « Pour expliquer ce phénomène (Le fait que le tirage au sort n’appartient plus à « l’horizon des possibilités envisageables »), l’idée qui vient spontanément à l’esprit est que dans les grands états modernes, à la population nombreuse, hétérogène est dispersée sur de vastes territoires, le tirage au sort des gouvernants était devenu « impraticable ». [...] Ces explications comportent sans doute des éléments de vérité. Elles ont cependant pour défaut d’obscurcir la part de contingence et de choix qui subsiste presque invariablement dan toute action historique, et qui a assurément joué un rôle dans le triomphe de l’élection sur le sort. » (Manin 1995 : 111)

local level used it. For Manin, this reject depends on beliefs and values that underpinned the democratic project. In other words, the best scientific demonstration of the drawing lots' feasibility could not convince the English, American and French constitutionalists. Because democracy is first of all a political project, always discussed, never ending, the Aristotelian "jumbles" of constitutions. Instead of being considered as a "progress", the EPG devices should be seen as testimonies that democracy is always searching its very nature, within and without the political institutions.

References

- Amin A., Thrift N. (1995) "Institutional issues for the European regions: from markets and plans to socioeconomics and powers to association », *Economy and Society*, vol. 24, n°1, pp. 41-66
- Barber B. (1984), *Démocratie forte*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, French edition (1997)
- Berry J. M. (2000), *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*, Brookings Institution Press
- Dahl R. A. (1994), "'A Democratic Dilemma: System Effectiveness versus Citizen Participation", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 109, pp. 23-34.
- (1999) "Can International Organizations Be Democratic? A Skeptics View," in Shapiro I., Hacker-Gordon C., (eds.) *Democracy's Edges*, Cambridge University Press, 19-36.
- (2005) "Is international democracy possible? A critical view", in Fabbrini S. (eds), *Democracy and federalism in the European Union and the United States: exploring post-national governance*, London ; New York: Routledge, pp. 194-204
- Dahl R. A., Tuft E. R. (1973), *Size and Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Denters B., Rose L. E. (eds) (2005), *Comparing local governance: trends and developments*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dryzek J. (2001), "Legitimacy and Economy in Deliberative Democracy", *Political Theory*, vol. 29, pp. 651-669
- Erthal J. (2008) "Discussing regional democracy", in Hoffmann A. R., Van der Vleuten J. M. (eds) *Closing or widening the gap? legitimacy and democracy in regional integration organizations*, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 33-49
- Falkner G. (1999), "Interest Groups in a Multi-level Polity: The Impact of European Integration on National Systems", UI-RSCAS Working Papers 34, European University Institute (EUI), Robert Schuman Centre of Advanced Studies (RSCAS).
- Fishkin J. (1994), *The Voice of the People. Public Opinion and Democracy*, Yale University press.
- Fung A. (2006), "Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 66, pp. 66-75.
- Fung A., Wright E. O. (2003), "Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance", in Fung A., Wright E. O. (eds), *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, London, New-York: Verso, pp. 3-44
- Ion J. (1997), *La fin des militants*, Paris : Editions de l'atelier.

- Kitschelt H.P. (1986), "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies", *British Journal of Political Science*, 16 (1), pp. 57-86
- Ladner A. (2002), "Size and direct democracy at the local level: the case of Switzerland" *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, vol. 20, N°6, pp. 813-828
- Lang A. (2007), "But Is It for Real? The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly as a Model of State-Sponsored Citizen Empowerment", *Politics & Society*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 35-70
- Le Roy M. K. (1995), "Participation, Size, and Democracy: Bridging the Gap between Citizens and the Swedish State", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 297-316
- Mansbridge J (1980), *Beyond adversary democracy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Manin B. (1995), *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*, Paris : Flammarion.
- Mény Y. (2005) "The EU and the challenge of a post-national constitution", in Fabbrini S. (eds), *Democracy and federalism in the European Union and the United States: exploring post-national governance*, London ; New York: Routledge, pp. 183-193
- Ott D. (2000), *Small is Democratic: An Examination of State Size and Democratic Development*, London: Routledge,
- Pateman C. (1970), *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge University Press
- Radaelli C. (1999), *Technocracy in the European Union*, London: Longman
- Rowe G. Frewer L. J. (2004), "Evaluating public-participation exercises: a research agenda", *Science technology and Human values*, vol. 29, n°4.
- Sartori G. (1987), *Democratic Theory Revisited*, Chatham, Chatham House Publishers.
- Scharpf F. (2009), "Legitimacy in the Multilevel European Polity", *MPIfG Working Paper* 09/1
- Scokpol T. (2004), *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*, University of Oklahoma Press.
- Thomas J. J. R. (1984) "Weber and Direct Democracy", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 216-240
- Tomaney J., Pike A. (2006) "Deepening democracy and engaging civil society? "Economic and social partners" and devolved governance in the UK", *Regional and Federal Studies*, vol. 6, n°2, pp. 129 -135.

Annex 1 : Selected interviews

| N° | Position | Policy¹² | Category | EPG | Region |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Vice-president | Research | Elected representative | Citizen's jury | Rhône-Alpes |
| 2 | Vice-president | High Schools | Elected representative | <i>(Political support)</i> | Rhône-Alpes |
| 3 | Vice-president | Tourism | Elected representative | Consultation | Rhône-Alpes |
| 4 | Vice-president | Participatory democracy | Elected representative | Several devices | Rhône-Alpes |
| 5 | Vice-president | Land Panning | Elected representative | Local development councils | Bourgogne |
| 6 | Vice-president | Budget, communication and participatory democracy | Elected representative | Several devices | Bourgogne |
| 7 | Vice-president | High schools | Elected representative | Participatory Budget | Bourgogne |
| 8 | Vice-president | Regional democracy | Elected representative | Several devices | Ile-de-France |
| 9 | Vice-president | Land Planning | Elected representative | <i>(Political support)</i> | Nord-Pas-de-Calais |
| 10 | Regional Councillor | Participatory democracy | Elected representative | User's committee | Ile-de-France |
| 11 | Regional Councillor | - | Elected representative | User's committee | Rhône-Alpes |
| 12 | Regional Councillor | - | Elected representative | User's committee | Rhône-Alpes |
| 13 | Regional Councillor | - | Elected representative | User's committee | Rhône-Alpes |
| 14 | Regional Councillor | Participatory democracy | Elected representative | Specific mission | Nord-Pas-de-Calais |
| 15 | Regional Councillor | - | Elected representative | User's committee | Nord-Pas-de-Calais |
| 16 | Cabinet councillor | Participatory democracy | Political assistant | Several devices | Ile-de-France ¹³ |
| 17 | Cabinet councillor | Participatory democracy | Political assistant | Several devices | Ile-de-France |
| 18 | Cabinet councillor | Participatory democracy | Political assistant | Several devices | Rhône-Alpes |
| 19 | Cabinet councillor | CEO of the president cabinet | Political assistant | <i>(General management)</i> | Rhône-Alpes |
| 20 | Civil Servant | Participatory democracy | Department manager | Several devices | Rhône-Alpes |
| 21 | Civil Servant | Regional Democracy | Department manager | Several devices | Ile-de-France |
| 22 | Civil Servant | Participatory democracy | Department manager | Several devices | Nord-Pas-de-Calais |
| 23 | Civil Servant | Planning | Department manager | Citizen's jury | Nord-Pas-de-Calais |
| 24 | Civil Servant | Participatory democracy | Project manager | Specific mission | Nord-Pas-de-Calais |
| 25 | Civil Servant | Participatory democracy | Project manager | Several devices | Rhône-Alpes |

¹² This section specifies the specialization of each actor. Some of the regional councillors can be "generalist" and unspecialized, so there is no indications;

¹³ Therefore, Poitou-Charentes (in 2004).

Annex 2 : Map of the French regions



Source: French Senate