What is political participation good for?
Theoretical debate and empirical data from Austria

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Abstract

In democratic societies, citizens' participation is of crucial importance. But in today's western European societies, the willingness to participate politically seems to decline. As a consequence, political parties try to re-mobilise citizens. In this context, also theoretical discussions and ideological struggles have become stronger in the last decades. This article tries to shed light on the different theoretical aspects of participation and suggests to enlarge the categories of conventional and unconventional participation by a new categorization in direct and indirect political participation on the one hand and system-maintaining and system-critical participation on the other hand. In political theory and in the public debate, there are two opposing concepts on what participation is good for. One strand highlights a *civil society* that articulates political interest and is system-critical; the other focuses on system-maintaining participation and on a common good. The article tries to shed light on these theoretical considerations by discussing the case of Austria, a state with a high level of conventional participation and an on-going demographic change.

Keywords

Introduction

In talking about political participation, one has to distinguish between participation in a directly political context, such as elections or political institutions, parties or interest groups and participation in social contexts. We can refer to the former as direct, to the latter as indirect political participation. These contexts, the political as well as the social, can be further categorised as either supportive of the system (system-maintaining), or critical of the system (system-critical) (Trinkle 1997). Democracies allow for both forms of participation and do not exclude the latter (Zittel/Fuchs 2007; Brettschneider 2007). Other forms of regimes usually only accept participation which is supportive of the system. Furthermore, participation can be voluntary or obligatory. In democracies, it is in most cases, voluntary. Thus, in a democracy, one is not obliged to participate either politically or socially. One of the most important principles of a democracy is the freedom to decide autonomously whether one participates or not (Alexander/Inglehart/Welzel 2012; Bühlmann/Merkel 2011). This aim was and is shared by proponents of a *civil society* as well as by many members of the *civic society*. However, in social sciences and also in the political debate, there is an on-going discussion on the duty of citizens to engage in society. This theoretical debate between political liberalism and communitarianism (Rawls 1992; Taylor 1988; Taylor 1989) is especially vital in Western Europe and it puts the principle of individual freedom under pressure. In the Anglo-American debate, the concepts of *civil society* and civic engagement or civic community are used synonymously. This is not the case in the German speaking world, where Jürgen Habermas and others defined the *civil society* (Zivilgesellschaft) as emancipatory and system-critical, while *civic society* movements and civic engagement are mainly considered as system-maintaining activities without an inherent emancipatory notion (Habermas 1995; Honneth 2011; Negt 2010; Böhnisch 2008). The neo-conservative concept of the so called "Bürgergesellschaft" could be best translated into English as *civic society*[1], refers to main aspects of social capital theories and focuses on citizens' obligations and on system-maintaining participation while it tends to neglect system-critical activities (e.g. Khol 1998;

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[1] The translation may still produce confusion, but seems to fit better than others. Undoubtedly, civic society bodies such as religious communities, neighborhood associations, cultural initiatives or charity groups etc. can act in a system-critical way and thereby be part of a critical civil society as well. But still, in neo-conservative and communitarian theories of social capital and the "Bürgergesellschaft", these system-critical aspects are widely neglected.

Putnam 1993). Although, according to Putnam and other theorists of social capital, citizens need not overcome their self-interests, they should be servants of the state and of a common good. In the words of Putnam (2002): "In the civic community, however, citizens pursue what Tocqueville termed "self interest properly understood," that is, self-interest defined in the context of broader public needs, self-interest that is "enlightened" rather than "myopic," self-interest that is alive to the interests of others. (…) Citizens in a civic community, although not selfless saints, regard the public domain as more than a battle-ground for pursuing personal interest"(Putnam/Leonardi 2002, 88). This concept of a responsible citizen as a member of a civic community who has the common good in mind is promoted by neo-conservative politicians and theorists (e. g. Fukuyama 1999; Putnam 1993) as well as communitarians (Taylor 1989; Etzioni 1995; Walzer 1998). Putnam criticises a radical individualism in "Bowling Alone" (2001) and ever more disengagement among citizens. In Austria and Germany, neo-conservative politicians and theorists share this criticism and try to stress the necessity of more civic engagement. In "ageing societies" where ever more people are more than 60 years old, the system-maintaining and conventional forms of participation shall – according to proponents of this concept – lead to a reinforcement of traditional values and identities (Eisentraut 2012; Stricker/Strasser 2008). Furthermore, a *civic society* would take the burden off the State by distributing social obligations or duties to its citizens. Hence, participation is closely linked to and measured by its profit to the system (e.g. Dettling 2002). In Austria, where this demographic change comprises a decrease in employed persons and an increase in unemployed persons (including pensioners), this question is of specific relevance. This article categorizes different forms of participation and gives insights into the respective debate in Austria.

1 Participation reconsidered

Participation is not an end in itself. One can participate in an election, in a sports competition, in a social activity or many other things. Not all forms of participation are politically relevant (Perrineau 2007; Nolte 2011; Zittel/Fuchs 2007). Political participation itself is not, per se, a democratic activity, as it is also possible to participate in non-democratic activities or events. Thus, in order to better understand the term, it is necessary to define and categorize it.[2].

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[2] For definitions and categories of participation see Hirschman 1970, Barnes/Kaase et al. 1979, Ühlinger 1988 etc.

"Certainly, the term 'participation' refers to taking part in some activity with other people; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as a 'taking part (with others) in some action or matter' and that seems clear enough" (Richardson 1983, 8). Since the political and social dimensions of participation are of special interest for democratic societies, we can distinguish between direct and indirect political participation. It is important to mention at this point that there is an already existing definition of direct and indirect democracy: the former referring to voting in elections or referenda, where the will of the majority is directly translated into law, and the latter referring to engagement in various interest groups such as NGOs etc. having indirect influence on political decisions (e.g. Kaase/Beyme 1979). According to this definition, it is the decision-making procedure which is the decisive indicator. Contrary to that, the difference between direct and indirect political participation as it is understood in this article, bases on the political interests and aims of citizens as the chief indicators (e. g. Pausch 2011, 5 f.).

1.1 Direct political participation

Direct political[3] participation is defined by the expression of a political interests and a political aim. A citizen who participates directly is politically motivated, either with the aim of making his/her favourite political party or personality win in elections, or with the aim of promoting his/her own political convictions or interests within a certain field. Such direct political participation is usually categorized into conventional and unconventional participation (Barnes/Kaase et al. 1979). Voting in elections or referendums, party-memberships, trade union affinities or activities in other political organisations as well as interest groups and non-governmental organisations present conventional forms of participation, while demonstrating and striking represent activities which are usually considered as unconventional, although they could as well be qualified as conventional, if they are organised by conventional interest groups. Some scholars criticise the vague distinction of conventional and unconventional as too simplistic (Kühberger/Windischbauer 2010) and dependent to the conventions of the respective political communities, cultures and traditions (Michalos 2006). An alternative categorisation could be useful, e.g. regular and non-regular participation, to distinguish elections from other forms of political action.

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[3] The understanding of „political" in this context is an Aristotelian and includes every human action that has an influence on the society. Directly political is thus everything that has the intention of direct influence, while other social action may have a non-political intention, but still influences the society.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that direct political participation is not the same as direct democracy, but the latter is part of the former.

1.2 Indirect political participation

Indirect political participation is a voluntary engagement in social activities or networks with political implications but without clearly defined political interests or political aims (e. g. Fuchs 1984). The main intentions for participation are thus not political. The motivation in such instances can be solidarity with others or the wish for self-fulfilment (e.g. Maslow 1943; Taylor 1988; Fromm 1978; Sen 1999). It can take place in informal networks like the neighbourhood or in formal associations. Examples are again charity clubs, neighbourhood associations, social initiatives, sports or cultural projects etc. Indirect political participation is a very wide field and is difficult to grasp in a clear definition. There are some fields of participation in social contexts that have fewer political implications than others. In some cases, even sports clubs can have strong political implications as was the case in the Nazi Regime and other totalitarian systems. In general, indirect political participation is, in most cases, implicitly political through its influence on society and societal values, thereby either affirming the status quo or triggering political reactions and changes in the structures of a state (Putnam 1993, 178 f.). The term "social capital" can be used to describe this kind of participation. In Putnam's definition, "social capital" is essential especial for democracies. According to his concept, general moral resources can be divided into trust (positive values), social norms and obligations, as well as social networks of citizens which mostly comprise voluntary associations (Putnam 1993, 179). It is especially the last aspect which is relevant to indirect political participation.

Activity	Direct political participation		Indirect political participation
	Conventional	Unconventional	
Voting in elections or referenda.	X		
Party-membership	X		
Membership in interest groups, trade unions, political NGOs.	X		
Letters to politicians, petitions, citizen movements.	X		

		X	
Demonstrations		X	
Strikes		X	
March-ins		X	
Civil disobedience		X	
Membership in social organisations, charity associations, religious groups.			X
Participation in cultural organisations, sports clubs, etc.			X
Help in the neighbourhood			X

1.3 System-maintaining and system-critical participation

The other important aspect of participation is the relation of the act of participation to the particular political system (e.g. Trinkle 1997). Any political system allows for and has an interest in system-maintaining participation. In some regimes, such a system-maintaining participation is even enforced and strongly supported by the state (Riederer/Teitzer 2012). A political system can be understood as a set of institutions, actors and procedures and their relationship and interdependence. In a democratic state, interest groups and political parties aggregate and represent the interests of the people and bring them as input into the system (e. g. Easton 1957). The concrete institutional and procedural setting of democracies differs from state to state. Political scientists distinguish between parliamentary, semi-presidential or presidential systems, federal or centralised entities and along other criteria. The principles of the functioning of a democracy are usually written down in state constitutions. In general, voting in democratic elections can be qualified as a system-maintaining activity as long as there is no intention to change the political system (Rosenberger/Seeber 2011). If participation has to be qualified as system-maintaining, depends on the intentions of the participants (Pausch 2011). Thus, any kind of participation, no matter if direct or indirect, can be system-maintaining or system-critical. System-critical participation has to be further divided into emancipatory and in non-emancipatory system-critical participation. Emancipatory system-critical participation bases on a liberal democratic conviction (Rawls 1992) or on procedural, participatory or deliberative democracy (Habermas 1995) and considers the system too restrictive and thus aims at enlarging political and democratic rights, while non-emancipatory system-critical participation considers the system as too liberal and thus aims at restricting

rights to exclusive groups. The best example for emancipatory participation would be a demonstration for democracy in an authoritarian system, like the protests during the so called "Arab spring" in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. Also, the clandestine resistance to fascist, national socialist or other dictatorships fall in this category. But even in already consolidated democratic systems, such a kind of political action is possible. Claiming for equal rights for women, immigrants or other underprivileged groups is emancipatory as well. Current phenomena like the "Indignados" in Spain, the "Occupy" groups in different countries or party-like movements such as the Pirates in Sweden, Germany or Austria are system-critical and do have emancipatory aims. On the contrary, demonstrations for a restriction of immigrants' rights or for other kinds of political exclusion are a form of non-emancipatory participation.

Democracy is the only state-form that allows for system-critical participation. This does not include illegal forms of criticism and it does not imply that democracy as a concept itself is subject to doubt. Nevertheless, it is a democratic principle that critical participation must be possible. System-critical participation can thus be qualified as oppositional to the political system. It doubts and criticises the system, either out of emancipatory or out of non-emancipatory motivations. It focuses on conflictive forms and contents rather than on consensus. Demonstrations, marches, strikes etc. are such forms of system-critical participation, as are the conscious abstention at elections or the engagement in system-critical organisations or political parties[4]. In general, emancipatory participation bases on communication, public discussions and political equality and therefore needs a public sphere (Habermas 1995; Brüll/Mokre/Pausch 2009; Mouffe/Laclau 1985). Direct democratic instruments which simplify debates to yes/no-questions and radicalize the public discussions are less useful for emancipatory objectives. On the contrary, non-emancipatory political actors, putting in question equal rights and dividing majorities from minorities, are more in favour of direct democratic instruments (Zittel/Fuchs 2007; Rosenberger/Seeber 2011).

2 Participation in the *civil society* and the *civic society*

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[4] For the importance of conflict for democratic systems compare Mouffe/Laclau 1985, Habermas 1994, Gerhards 1993, Risse 2003, etc.

In democratic societies, participation can either take place in official and institutionalised contexts, such as elections, or in a space between the state and the private. The latter can be considered as a 'third space', the so called *civil society* (Almond/Verba 1963; Habermas 1968; Gerhards 1993). Usually, it is associated with organisations that mediate between the state and the society, but this definition remains very vague and includes all kinds of organized groups. In the European Quality of Life Survey, it is formulated as follows: "There is a diverse range of *civil society* organisations in Europe. Social networks involving informal relations between family and friends, between neighbours and, among those who are employed, between colleagues at work can bring people together on a daily basis. Individuals rely on informal networks for relaxation and as a source of help and emotional support." (Rose 2006, 4). This definition does not really assist in clarifying the meaning of the term *civil society*. The German language offers a helpful distinction. There is, on the one hand, the so called "Zivilgesellschaft". According to Jürgen Habermas, this "Zivilgesellschaft" (translated in the following as *civil society*) referred to the rebirth of the so called critical public sphere and was represented by the movements of the late 1960s and 1970s of the last century. In this definition, the *civil society* has system-critical and emancipatory roots. It is not limited to organised groups but also includes informal means of political participation. It was out of the *civil society* that the Green parties and different NGOs as well as other citizen movements emerged. It is usually associated with direct political participation, and thus the engagement in politically active groups and the participation in political demonstrations.

On the contrary, the model of the *civic society* in Germany and Austria has been promoted by conservative political theory and is mostly associated with system-maintaining functions[5] (e. g. Hepp/Schneider 1999). Although it historically comes out of a republican ideal (Arenhövel 2000; Tocqueville 1876) and was closely linked to the emancipatory idea of a *civil society*, it is today mainly discussed as an ideological alternative to the European welfare state (Böhnisch 2008; Raitelhuber 2011). It often incorporates to values as religion, patriotism, family (Khol 1998). In Germany and Austria, the *civic society* is thus mainly a political concept of neo-conservatism and communitarianism. It is debated as an alternative to the social democratic type of welfare-state and aims to disburden the social systems. As Böhnisch

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[5] Since conservatism by definition tries to "conserve" traditional values, it tends to be system-maintaining as long as the system represents and protects these values. However, there is a wide range of historical examples where conservative groups criticized political systems not only for neglecting conservative values, but also for being too restrictive and authorarian, especially in socialist dictatorships.

puts it, the citizens shall not be motivated to enhance the democratic quality or the public debate, but fill a gap of governance (Böhnisch 2008, 100). This shows that the theoretical terms are part of a strong ideological struggle over an ideological hegemony.

While an emancipatory and liberal idea of a *civil society* promotes the rights of citizens, their freedom and their self-determination, the neo-conservative idea of a *civic society* focuses on the obligations of citizens and their duties to society and the state. Thus, *civil society* focuses on the question: What should the state provide for the citizens and their freedom? While the neo-conservative promoters of a *civic society* ask: What should citizens provide for the collective good? In other words: the nodal point of the *civil society* is the right of the individual or, sometimes, the right of the minority, while the nodal point of the *civic society* as it is discussed among neo-conservatives is the profit of the collective.

This distinction is a theoretical frame and does not mean that one could easily put associations or interest groups into one of the two categories. Bodies or actors which are usually qualified as members of a *civic society* like churches or sports clubs can undoubtedly become strong proponents of *civil society* under certain systemic circumstances. Buchowski (1996) describes the role of the church in Poland in the 1980s: "The church not only maintained religious freedom, but preserved elements of freedom of speech through its preaching. After martial law was imposed on 13 December 1981, the church structures became 'safe havens' for secular dissidents and independent cultural activity" (Buchowski 1996, 84). This example perfectly shows that *civic society* bodies can play an emancipatory role in the sense of a *civil society* ideal as well.[6]

Table 1: Civil and *Civic Society*: Perceptions in the Austrian debate

	Civil Society	*Civic Society*
Relation to system/government	Mainly emancipatory and system critical	More system-maintaining than critical (e.g. Khol 1998; Putnam 1993)
Participation	Direct political participation preferred (parties, NGOs, elections, demonstrations, etc.)	Indirect political participation preferred – social participation (volunteer organisations, etc.)

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[6] For further reading on the relationship between civic society bodies and civil society see Buchowski 1996.

Relation to citizens	Citizen's rights	Citizen's obligations
Values	Freedom and self-determination	Society, common good
State	Enabling State	Motivating/Activating State

2.1 Profit of participation in the *civil society* perspective

According to the theories of participatory democracy, the *civil society* offers more individual freedom and self-determination and contributes to the feeling of efficacy among citizens (Lüdemann 2001, 44). Political freedom then means the possibility for individuals to participate in the political process. For Jürgen Habermas, another profit of the *civil society* is identity-building through participation. The important difference to the communitarian and neo-conservative idea of a *civic society* is, however, that such an identity is not based on already existing values, but, more precisely, on the process of participation. Participation in this sense is considered as a discussion and debate among equal citizens. The existence of a public sphere is vital for this kind of participation (e.g. Habermas 1995).

2.2 Profit of participation in the *civic society* perspective

The profit of participation out of a neo-conservative and/or communitarian perspective is a collective profit (Taylor 1989; Putnam 1993; Berlin 1969, 10 f.). Especially social and system-maintaining participation contribute to the strengthening of cohesion and a stabilisation of a given identity in a political collective. Furthermore, it disburdens the state because many tasks are expected to be fulfilled by the *civic society*. The system as well as the power and ruling-structures of an entity are maintained and enforced by participation. Unconventional and system-critical direct political participation can be necessary, if the conservative values are threatened by the system, but it is explicitly promoted neither by social capital theorists nor by neo-conservative politicians.

2.3 Profit of participation for the individual and his/her quality of life

Yet another aspect of participation is the citizen's quality of life or their subjective well-being (Veenhoven 2000, 64). The European Quality of Life Survey includes data on participation, stating that: "From the perspective of ordinary individuals, participation in *civil society* is not so much an end in itself as it is a means of achieving life satisfaction." (Albers J. et al. 2005, 51). The proponents of a c*ivic society* argue that the engagement in voluntary work is also a means to self-fulfilment. Those who favour a c*ivil society* would state that participation in the relevant fields and decisions is necessary for a good quality of life. However, the EQLS provides no evidence for these assumptions. It says, on the contrary, that "…analysis finds no significant correlation between life satisfaction and conventional political participation, and only a very limited link between life satisfaction and the ability to participate in European public space" (Richards 2006, 54). Contrary to that, Frey and Stutzer show at the example of Switzerland, that there are indeed positive effects (Frey/Stutzer 2000, 74 f.). However, it is empirically not proven that system-maintaining forms of participation were better for the citizens' subjective well-being than system-critical ones (Inglehart 2006, 5 f.).

2.4 Participation and "older people"

In general, it appears that participation among unemployed people is below the average (Popp/Hofbauer/Pausch 2010, 147 f.). Unemployed persons as well as pensioners seem to be less engaged in voluntary work and tend not to be associated with different organisations, associations or interest groups. Nonetheless, it is these groups which benefit most from the social system and which thus place the largest burden on the State. Conservative politics, promoting a c*ivic society*, reacts to this phenomenon by penalising those who are unwilling to participate. According to Andreas Khol's concept, citizens who are unemployed should be liable to lose their benefits if they are not willing to engage in social projects or voluntary work. Pensioners are also expected to be actively participants. Their retirement is thus not to be disassociated from the State: not only should they profit from the State, but the State should profit from them. Only the active citizen is a good citizen in this view. According to the concept of a c*ivic society*, the citizen aged 65 or more should participate in various neighbourhood associations or organisations, help family and friends, provide the benefit of experience and knowledge for younger generations and have traditional values and principles. This differs significantly from liberal models, in which democracy does not ordinarily

presuppose any clear ideal as to how citizens should act in, or for the state. It is the decision of the individual as to how active he/she wishes to be politically engaged. A state which honours or favours citizens for participation breaks with this liberal democratic tradition.

3 Participation: Theoretical debate in and data from Austria

Austria is said to be a conservative country with a conservative and passive political culture. After the Second World War, a consensual political climate has emerged. Politicians of the dominating groups came together with the aim to avoid the cleavages that led to the end of the First Republic in 1934 and to rebuild the Austrian democracy after the war. The social partners and the two big parties, Social Democrats (SPOe) and People's Party (OeVP), dominated the political scene over many years. Direct political participation was and still is mainly limited to conventional forms. During the 1970s, a strong welfare state was constructed by the social-democratic influence of Chancellor Bruno Kreisky. In the late 1990s and especially in 2000, this consensual climate changed (e. g. Dachs et al. 1997). Politically, the conservatives built a coalition with the extreme-right FPOe. Theoretically, discussions came up about the future of the Austrian welfare state and about the importance of participation.

Theoretically as well as politically, there is one prominent politician who promotes his concept of *civic society* ("Bürgergesellschaft"). Andreas Khol was an important figure and master mind of the Austrian OeVP over many years, especially during the chancellery of Wolfgang Schuessel, his party-leader, who became famous by integrating the extreme-right FPOe into the Austrian government in 2000. Today, Khol is representative of the pensioners of his party. In two publications of the late 1990s, he promotes his model of a *civic society* which presents a possible third way between a paternalistic state and a liberal state (Khol 1998, 1999).

3.1 Main assumptions and aims of the *civic society* in the Austrian debate

One of the main assumptions is that the Austrian welfare state can and should no longer provide a wide range of social services, but delegate certain tasks to the citizens. Khol often stressed that his model does not doubt the sense and the necessity of a social system. In an interview he criticized the Swedish welfare state and cited the example of Astrid Lindgren who had "a social heart", because she wrote about the poverty in Sweden in the 19th century, but at the same time gave up her Swedish citizenship because of the high taxes she had to pay (Khol 2000, 1). The example demonstrates Khol's conservative view considering the social question[7]. Support of the very poor by the State should stem from moral obligation. Thus, the motive for social support by the State is not to assign equal opportunity to all citizens or even equality, but to fulfil a moral task derived from a Christian ideology. The achievement principle is of highest importance: Those who are able and willing to deliver high quality and output should not be penalised by taxation but must on the contrary be remunerated by the state and the society (Khol 1998, 94). On the contrary, those who are indolent and show no desire to work for the benefit of society should be penalised. The unemployed should be liable to lose their benefits if they are not willing to engage in social projects (Khol 1998, 77). Khol underlines the need to change society and to reinvent values (Khol 1998, 68). In accordance with other neo-conservatives – but also with some thinkers from the left – Khol identifies a strong egoism in today's societies (Khol 1998, 71; Beck). At the same time, he pretends to give more freedom to the individual. Thus, there is an ambivalent view of liberalism in his theory. On the one hand, he criticizes egoism and individualism; on the other hand, he wants to release the individual from the state.

The main critique concern the State's tendency to over assist and to undermine the real sources of stability and statehood, i.e. the *civic society*, the engagement of citizens and their political participation. According to Khol, free, self-determined, rational thinking and acting are the aims of the *civic society*. (Khol 1998, 68). At the same time, he argues that this is not the real aim, the latter being rather the voluntary and altruistic engagement and participation for the good of society (Khol 1998, 158). Thus, at the end of the chain or at the top of the pyramid, it is the collective good, not the individual good that counts. At this point, the main assumptions of the model become inconsistent. Firstly, one has to ask if the analysis is correct. The paternalistic state is a catchword that seems to meet perfectly with the West

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[7] Khol underlined in different occasions that he considers himself a pure conservative.

European Welfare States. But what does it mean? Paternalistic in the pure sense means, that an authority pretends to know what is good for its citizens and what is bad for them. Freedom and self-determination are not the characteristics of a paternalistic state. Now, one has to ask if the Welfare States as we know them fulfil these criteria or, if other states with other social systems are less paternalistic. Aside from dictatorships and other non-democratic states, we can conclude that states with strong social systems are not per se paternalistic in a sense that state authority takes the responsibility for the individuals. It is more about providing equal chances for every citizen to lead a self-determined life. Countries with distinct social systems like the Scandinavian have better data concerning subjective well-being and life-satisfaction than all the others. Khol's presumptions are overtly wrong. Secondly solidarity is not less developed in welfare states than in others? Quite the contrary is true. In societies with strong social systems there is more solidarity among citizens than in others.

3.2 Values of the *civic society* in the Austrian debate

Khol identifies a loss of values in recent decades and therefore highlights the importance of honesty, diligence, decency, fairness, responsiveness, parsimony, courage and reliability (Khol 1998, 94). These values should be cultivated in the family and in the school. According to Khol, the family is the most important nucleus for the *civic society*. Parents have the task of educating their children in this sense (Khol 1998, 141). While they are expected to teach participation and social engagement, authority remains important and thus discipline and respect must also be taught. It is democracy which provides the means for the structure of society, but smaller entities (such as families, clubs, parties, etc.) do not necessarily adhere to democratic procedures, he argues. Pluralism was essential in a larger social context, but it must end at the frontiers of those different organisations where the values and aims are more important than pluralism (Khol 1998). In school, pupils should learn the rules of participation, submission to authority and solidarity. Values should be taught and discussed in different school subjects, especially in religious classes (Khol 1998, 99). According to the traditional values of conservatives, society is based on strong family-structure as well as on nationhood. The third pillar of conservative thinking, religion, also plays a role in Khol's theory. Although he does not exclude persons with a non-Christian faith, it is obvious that he is convinced of the importance and the predominance of Christianity in Austria. The line of argument is that

all the liberal and democratic values like freedom, peace, etc. are derived from the Christian religion (Khol 1998, 182). Consequently, Khol also pleads for mentioning the religious heritage in the Austrian as well as in an eventual European Constitution. His *civic society* bases on solidarity coming out of Christian love or benevolence.

3.3 The active citizens and the older people

The citizen in the model of the *civic society* is the one who shows solidarity, is self-determined, tolerant, assiduous, responsive, reliable, decent, honest and active. He/she helps his/her family and others, is a member of at least one voluntary association/organisation and respects law and the State. Direct political participation is less important than indirect political participation or social engagement. In an ageing society, these foremost traditional virtues seem to become ever more important.

Examples of *civic society*

Khol argues that everything that is self-organized and is inside of the constitutional framework is part of the *civic society*. This is little helpful for a clear definition, and it does not correspond to other aspects and statements in his books. Khol suggests classifying the different voluntary works in regard to their value for society. He gives some examples for what the *civic society* stands for. As already mentioned pupils shall be taught the important values in family and school. To strengthen their formation of citizenship, they shall decide themselves over pupils who have broken rules and their possible punishment. Children shall visit retirement homes and enter different organisations. Already in the kindergarten, they should learn how to act in a *civic society*. For Khol, regional and local cultural initiatives are especially important as well as fire brigades and rescue services. These organisations shall be honoured and recompensed. Citizens participating in these important organisations should be remunerated by the community. They could get diploma for their engagement, benefits in social and security concerns, etc. The author does not take into account groups organising political demonstrations, petitions or other directly political initiatives. In such activities he obviously does not identify a profit for the society. While a cultural association of Austrian

folk-music would be honoured and welcomed, a group claiming a referendum on a change of the Austrian constitution would not. This underlines that direct political participation is less appreciated by neo-conservatives than indirect political participation.

3.4 Political participation in Austria

In Austria, participation in political elections has declined in recent years. Only 53,6 % went to the polls in 2010 to elect the Austrian President, 78.8 % in 2008 to elect the Austrian *Nationalrat* (84.3 % in 2002). Despite this decline, Austria has still a high conventional political participation and one of the highest voter turnouts in Europe. Therefore, concerning the democratic input there is no reason to consider the Austrian democracy as being in crisis. Conventional political participation in Austria is high. Only Malta, Denmark, Sweden, Cyprus and Italy have higher values (European Foundation 2003, 19).

Pensioners' participation in elections is higher than the participation of most other groups and they usually vote for one of the big parties, OeVP or SPOe. People aged 65 or more do prefer conventional political participation which can be considered system-maintaining. Besides elections and their memberships in political parties or interest groups, the Austrian people are, in general, politically not very active. Demonstrations or strikes are relatively seldom and not well accepted in the Austrian society. Especially older people only rarely participate in political protests (e.g. Pausch 2012).

3.5 Social engagement and indirect political participation

Social participation in Austria is rather frequent compared with other European countries. The Index of voluntary participation in Europe shows that in Austria, the average number of organisations of which respondents are members is relatively high and over the average with 1.0 (average 0.9). Only Sweden (3.0), Denmark (2.5), the Netherlands (2.3), Luxembourg (1.8), Finland (1.6) and Belgium (1.1) have higher indices, while at the end of the scale, are countries like Portugal, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary (0.3), Romania (0.2) or Bulgaria (0.2)

(European Foundation 2003, 16). This statistics shows that in countries with highly developed social systems like Sweden, the voluntary participation of respondents is highest.

The Austrian Institute for Statistics defines voluntary work as voluntary and non-profit-oriented engagement of persons out of their own household. A study in 2007 showed that 43.8 % of Austrian citizens older than 15 provide such voluntary work (47.1 % of men, 40.7 % of women). Most active are people between 40 and 59. Those who are older than 70, are less active. Austrians between the ages of 30 and 69, provide most of the voluntary work (Statistik Austria 2007, 15).

Voluntary Work in Austria in % (according to age)
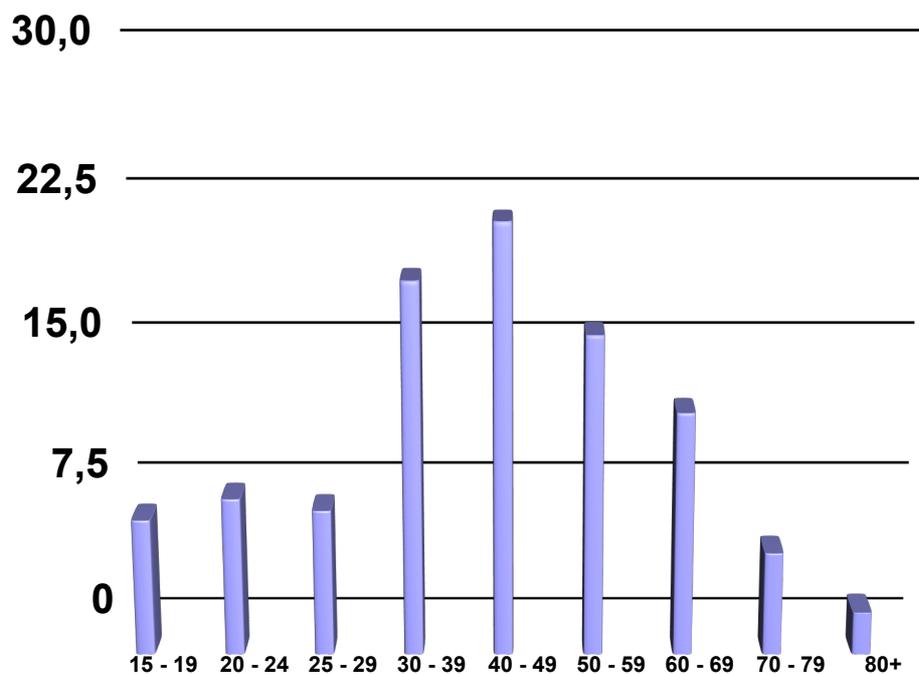
Source: Statistics Austria 2007, 18.

A closer look at the fields of voluntary work is necessary in order to find out more about the political relevance of these activities. 62 % of all persons engaged provide their tasks in informal fields rather than in the framework of an institutionalised organisation, and mostly in the context of the neighbourhood. 17.1 % are engaged in "art, culture, entertainment or leisure" organisations, 15.7 % in sports, 14.2 % in religious organisations, and 13.7 % in fire-

and-rescue-services. Only 4.8 % of the respondents are active in citizen movements (Statistik Austria 2007, 21).

Assistance in the neighbourhood can be qualified as a voluntary work which is potentially important for and relevant to the social system. In the logic of the *civic society* model it could, in the long term, become an alternative to a welfare state. Statistics show that there is indeed a connection between the social systems and the social consciousness of the citizens. In other words: in states with strong social systems the willingness to help others is higher than in states with weak social systems. This analysis is not really surprising if one considers state structures and principles as a mirror of society or vice versa. In consequence, it is possible that in a State with limited social help, solidarity among citizens will also decline as is the case in many countries with high discrepancies between the rich and the poor. The second field of activity is art, culture, entertainment and leisure, which is plausibly less relevant for the political dimension. It should, however, not be ignored that many cultural organisations provide for identity-building and patriotism. Religious organisations can partly be qualified as politically important, not only because they influence many different fields of life but also because religious leaders publicly take positions regarding different questions concerning society. In Austria, Catholicism is by far the strongest faith and one which embraces neo-conservative convictions. Finally, the most political organisations, i.e. citizen movements, are not very popular in Austria. Thus, in general, we can undoubtedly state that in Austria direct political participation is in most cases conventional and system-maintaining as is the social participation.

3.6 Participation of older people in Austria

Various surveys show that political interest is related to age. Older people are more interested in politics than are younger. There are also significant differences between men and women. Men aged 80 and more still tend to be more interested in politics than women between the ages of 20 and 29. Most people above the age of 60 believe that their possibilities of participation are limited to elections. Demonstrations are not considered as an option. In general, they tend to vote for one of the big parties such as the SPOe or OeVP. According to

demographic data regarding an ageing society, the percentage of older people participating in elections increases. The average age of voters in 1981 was about 44.7 years, in 1996, 46.8 years. In 2016 it will be more than 50, with a clear tendency for yet further increase. Prognoses assume that the percentage of people aged 60 or more will rise to 30 % in 2016 and to 40 % in 2030. Thus, the importance of older people for competing political parties is undoubtedly on the rise.

Austrian pensioners are in general politically highly organised. Almost 50 % of those who are 60 or older are member of one of the pensioner's organisations. The two most important ones are the Pensionistenverband of the SPOe and the Seniorenbund of the OeVP. Andreas Khol is president of the latter. Besides political memberships, older people are highly active in various Austrian Catholic organisations as well as in social work, cultural groups and sports. Interestingly, most actively participating older persons were asked by others to participate. Consequently, it is the State and various ministries that have created agencies for volunteers.

Conclusion:

Political participation in a democracy can either be system-maintaining or system-critical. The theoretical model of a c*ivil society* underlines the necessity of system-critical participation, while the neo-conservative concept of a c*ivic society* prefers system-maintaining activities. In many European countries such as Austria, the debate on the needs and goods of participation goes along ideological lines. Neo-conservatives focus on system-maintaining participation and want to disburden the state from certain social services. The active citizen should fulfil his/her duties for society. At the same time, the state should remove an overarching welfare-system. As the case of Austria shows, this argumentation is not confirmed by empirical data. On the contrary: it is empirically proven that solidarity among citizens is higher in states with a strong social system such as in Scandinavian countries. The value and the profit of participation strongly depend on ideological positions on the duties of the citizens on the one and the duties of the state on the other. In Austria, the demographic change could promote system-maintaining participation and thereby strengthen the concept of a c*ivic society*.

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