

Food Policy Councils and Food Citizenship Events: success criteria

Zusammenfassung

Die Bürgerbeteiligung an der lokalen Lebensmittelpolitik kann als ein Bereich der Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung betrachtet werden, der in einem krisengeschüttelten Agrar- und Ernährungssystem dringend benötigt wird. Vor diesem Hintergrund wurden die Erfolgskriterien von Bürgerbeteiligungsveranstaltungen im Bereich Lebensmittel mit Experteninterviews erfragt und mittels Grounded Theory analysiert. Die Erfolgskriterien wurden weiterentwickelt, indem die Interviewergebnisse mit radikaldemokratischen Konzepten aus der alternativen Ernährungsbewegung, der partizipativen Demokratie und der Theorie der demokratischen Governance in Beziehung gesetzt wurden. Insbesondere die Beteiligung von sozialen Gruppen, die im modernen Agrar- und Ernährungssystem benachteiligt sind, erweist sich als entscheidend für den Erfolg von Food Citizenship Events.

Schlagworte: Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung, Nachhaltigkeit im Agrar- und Lebensmittelbereich, Food Citizenship, demokratische Governance

Abstract

Citizen participation in local food policies can be framed as a field of education for sustainable development, critically needed in an agrifood system in crisis. With this in mind, the success criteria of these food citizen participation events were elicited through expert interviews and analyzed using grounded theory. The success criteria were further developed by relating the interview results to radical democratic concepts from the alternative food movement, participatory democracy, and democratic governance theory. In particular, the participation of social categories that are disadvantaged in the modern food system emerges as critical to the success of food citizenship events.

Keywords: education for sustainable development, agrifood sustainability, food citizenship, democratic governance

1. Introduction: the modern agrifood system in crisis

As the crisis in Ukraine reveals, agrifood education is dealing with a modern global agrifood system (AFS) reaching its limits. Ukraine and Russia play a critical role as global granaries: fifty countries, of which many states of the 'global South' in North Africa, the Orient and Asia, depend for 30 per cent or more of their wheat supply

on them. But the recent food price increases, forecasting a global food crisis, are also induced by rising fossil fuel and fertiliser prices (Haerlin et al., 2022).

Related to this fossil vulnerability of industrial agriculture is its impact on global greenhouse gas emissions (Scialabba & Müller-Lindenlauf, 2010, 158). The sum of what is emitted directly by agricultural production, fossil fuel inputs in agriculture, deforestation for agriculture and food processing activities already counts up to thirty per cent of the total. Simultaneously, the climate crisis dramatically affects agriculture through rising temperatures, changing precipitation levels and increased frequency of extreme weather events. Until 2030 such an unfavourable impact on agriculture will mostly be seen in tropical areas disclosing the increasing global injustice of the AFS. Although enough food is produced to feed up to 10 billion mouths (Altieri et al., 2012, 595), in 2020, 3 billion people were excluded from a healthy diet due to poverty and income inequality. 2.37 billion people could not access adequate food, and up to 811 million were suffering from hunger (FAO et al., 2021). Sixty percent of the undernourished are women (Patel, 2012). Some numbers in the US also suggest how the global AFS is structurally racist and classist (Coleman-Jensen, 2020, 17). In 2019, the rates of households with Black (7.6%) and Hispanic heads (4,9%) that were in a situation of very low food security were significantly higher than for the average US household (4,1%); the prevalence was also substantially higher (11,2%) for families with incomes below 185 per cent of the poverty line.

Overnutrition has become an even more significant problem than undernutrition. The WHO (n.d.) confirms that since 1975, the number of obese people has almost tripled. Being overweight is a risk factor for ischaemic heart disease, stroke, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, and some cancers. The increase in overweight is connected to a worldwide nutrition transition: a diet consisting mainly of starches is replaced by a higher intake of meat and dairy combined with more fruits and vegetables but also high levels of sugary, fat-rich, and processed foods (Adair et al., 2012, 3ff). However, this nutrition transition and its health outcomes do not affect everyone equally. In developed countries, lower socioeconomic status (SES) correlates with more obese bodies for all genders (McLaren, 2007, 29). In low-income countries, obesity is a problem for all genders of the higher classes (Dinsa et al., 2012, 1067ff). Still, in middle-income countries, less affluent and educated women and children from lower-class families are more likely to be affected. In the US, women, racial and ethnic minorities, groups with low SES and rural residents have relatively more obese people. People of colour and people in poverty disproportionately reside in 'food swamps', defined as areas with more characteristics that promote obesity (Bell et al., 2019, 861). The unsustainability of modern AFS is, last but not least, uncovered by some numbers, indicating the unviability of farming. In 2013 about 65% of the people in extreme poverty and 52% in moderate poverty with a minimum age of 15 worked in agriculture (Azevedo et al., 2017, 255). In the West, probably also related to decreasing economic prospects, farmers are ageing: in 2016, 57,9% of the EU farmers were 55 years or older (Eurostat, 2019, 25); in 2017, the average US farmer was 57,5 years old (USDA, 2019, 578).

2. Theoretical appetising for food citizenship

The modern AFS proved to be not ecologically sound, socially unjust and economically unsustainable for many farmers. In response to agricultural unsustainability, an alternative food movement (AFM) emerged, including academic theories such as food regime analysis. Food regime analysts point out that undemocratic, capitalist power relations lead to a situation where profit comes at the expense of the planet and people. A 'food regime' can be defined as the dominant power structure that determines how decisions are made in the global AFS (McMichael, 2009, 142ff). In recent decades, large transnational food corporations (TFCs) have become the true rulers of the global AFS. TFCs have managed to integrate global production chains and have become increasingly independent of the state or any democratic control. Conversely, their influence over public institutions increased. Thus, from the perspective of a food regime analysis, radical democratisation represents a promising solution to the agro-food sustainability crisis.

The AFM has introduced the idea of 'food citizenship' to tackle the issue of inadequate democracy in the AFS. This concept is based on participatory democracy principles. 'Political participation' is one side of the coin of food citizenship. It can be defined as the process that enables citizens who are not officially part of state institutions to make and implement substantive decisions for their AFS (cf. Roberts, 2004, 320). On the other hand, there is 'civic engagement' or the active participation of citizens in community activities to improve their society (cf. Adler & Goggin, 2005, 241). The term 'citizen' here is not used as 'legitimate member of a sovereign state' but refers to 'any member of society' in an AFS.

Practices of food citizenship can provide a crowbar to break the vicious cycle between socio-economic inequalities based on class, race, ethnicity, geographical location, gender and sexuality, and a lack of political participation structured by the same determinants qualified as unjust. This idea is consistent with the original participatory democracy strategy, as it emerged in the 1960s, to create not only a more equal but also a freer society, by adding direct democratic practices to liberal, indirect democracy and extending democratic decision-making to social domains other than the state (Held, 2009, 207). Instead of being governed by supply and demand, people, especially those from disadvantaged social groups, become truly free when they can participate equally in collective decision-making in all areas of society.

By emphasising citizenship facilitation in agrifood education, the principles of education for sustainable development are implemented in accordance with its participatory democratic core. Indeed, De Haan (2006, 22f) defines the competence to sustainably shape one's own social environment as fundamental. This 'shaping competence' can be cultivated by enhancing the ability of citizens to participate effectively in policies on sustainability issues.

In the 1980s, AFM activists in the US created a model for facilitating food citizenship with the Food Policy Council (FPC) that spread worldwide. An FPC can be described as a governing body, with no official public decision-making power, that forms a coalition and a deliberative space of different – at least civic, but pref-

erably public – actors from different sectors of an AFS. An FPC seeks to establish an equitable and sustainable AFS by building the political capital of the food system community (cf. AG Stadt & Ernährung, n.d.; Alkon et al., 2009, 2; Food Policy Networks, 2019; Hamilton, 2002, 443; Kaufman & Pothukuchi, 1999, 219; Schiff, 2007, 86f; Winne, 2013, 3). By organising genuine political participation in food politics, FPCs can practise a more democratic way of governing the food system beyond corporate dominance, and thus, according to the participatory democracy perspective, potentially promote a more socio-economically equal and freer AFS. Defining what successful facilitation of food citizenship means in their context support FPCs in promoting a more sustainable AFS. A framework of success criteria provides guidance on identifying success factors and useful practices for food citizenship facilitation.

Since the emergence of FPCs in the 1980s, a vast body of literature on these new governance institutions, academic and non-academic, has grown entangled with the activist writings and scholarly research of a broader AFM. Dahlberg (1994) is the first scholar to introduce explicit success criteria for FPCs, but without reference to empirical data. This omission is compensated by Schiff's (2007) thesis on the roles of FPCs, from which criteria could be distilled. The conceptual framework developed by Carboni et. al. (2016) to measure dimensions of representation in FPCs provides another building block to refine success criteria for food citizenship. They focus their research on membership meetings of FPCs, where aspects other than its formal dimension can be observed. In general, it makes sense to take the level of meetings and events to investigate the success of food citizenship, as it can be assumed that (co-)facilitated food citizenship in FPCs basically takes place through a series of such organised happenings, where people actually interact with each other and collectively make decisions as well.

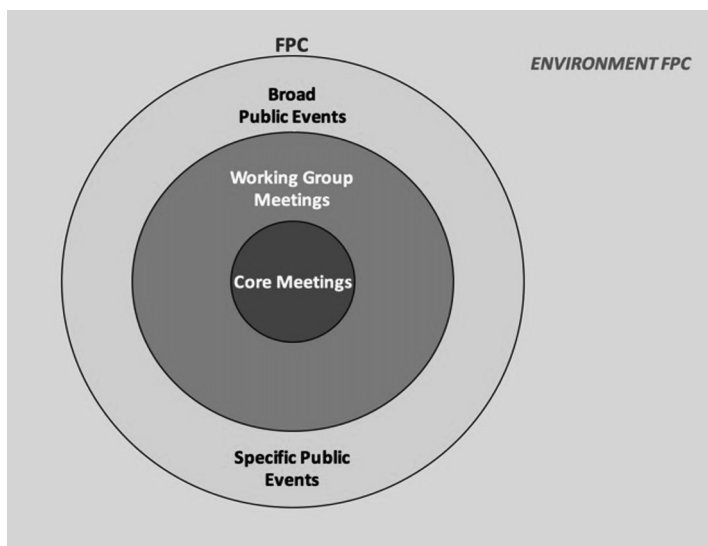


Figure 1. A structural Typology of FPC (co-)facilitated Food Citizenship Events

Based on the research for this paper, these food citizenship events can be broadly categorised into four types according to their specific place in the structure of an ideal type of an FPC (Figure 1). In this ideal type, an executive or central body facilitates FPC policy development. Here, a group of core members meet in a 'core meeting'. Various 'working groups' with specific meetings are placed around the core. The broadest form of participation, certainly in terms of numbers, takes place in the outer circle with 'broad public events' for the general public and 'specific public events' to reach one or more explicitly defined target groups.

Apart from Carboni et al. (2016) and a book chapter by a manager at the influential TFPC (Roberts 2010, 180), most FPC literature focuses on the level of the FPC itself and not on their food citizenship events. To fill this gap, this article explores how to define the success of food citizenship events (co-)organised by FPCs at the level of urban food policy. In cities, food has become invisible as an urban subsystem for city dwellers in recent centuries. The power to consciously shape the urban food system shifted beyond local democratic control to the national and international policy level and private companies (Kaufman & Pothukuchi 1999, 214). The disappearing act of food in the city meant that (para-) governmental institutions monopolise less the urban food policy level. This is where the AFM has the most potential to push for institutionalised food democratisation through FPCs. An urban research focus also makes sense because most European FPCs were established at this level.

3. Method

This article develops a framework of success criteria for urban FPC food citizenship events by bringing conceptual building blocks from the AFM literature and participatory democracy into dialogue with the knowledge and reflections of FPC experts. FPC staff, chairs and core members who have actual experience of participating in, organising and leading food citizenship events can develop a deep understanding of their success and can help articulating non-articulated aspects.

Based on evidence in academic and non-academic literature, several FPCs with leading or pioneering roles in North America and Europe were contacted, as well as Mark Winne, a general expert on North American FPCs working at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Futures Food Policy Network. Finally, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Winne and eleven other individuals with coordinating or leadership roles in FPCs (Table 1). To prepare for the interviews and to understand the context, online material on the respective FPCs was collected as well. The verbatim transcripts of the interviews were analysed using Mortelmans' grounded theory-based method (Mortelman 2018, 295). The serendipity feature of grounded theory makes it possible to unlock dimensions of successful food citizenship events that are insufficiently articulated in the literature. After an initial phase of open, axial and selective coding, the emerging categories were compared with the literature and re-evaluated, to establish a coherent, multidimensional framework of success criteria with a radical-democratic horizon.

This article is based on an undergraduate thesis study that had a broader scope, which included success factors of FPC food citizenship events. A more detailed description of the method used, as well as the interview guidelines, and a matrix of categories and references to transcript sections are published in Govaerts (2021). In the following chapters, the interview quotes were not written verbatim but edited, and references to the respective transcript sections were omitted to enhance readability.

Name Organisation	Abb. Name	Name Interviewee	Position	Date	Duration	How/Where
Center for a Livable Future	CLF	Mark Winne	Senior Adviser	10.04.19	01:39	Online
Toronto Food Policy Council	TFPC	Lori Stahlbrand	Coordinator	07.06.19	01:03	Online
Toronto Youth Food Policy Council	TYFPC	Emma Tamlin & Melana Roberts	Co-chairs	09.04.19	01:18	Online
Detroit Food Policy Council	DFPC	Kibibi Blount-Dorn	Program Manager "Education & Engagement"	21.05.19	01:56	Online
Los Angeles Food Policy Council	LAFPC	Clare Fox	Executive Director	31.05.19	01:01	Online
Bristol Food Policy Council	BFPC	Joy Carey	Member	13.05.19	00:44	Online
Voedselraad 'Gent en Garde'	GFPC	Maarten Crivits	Steering Group	10.05.19	00:53	Ghent
Brugs Food Lab	BrFPC	Lobke Vermeire	Steering Group	23.05.19	01:44	Bruges
Ernährungsrat Köln	KFPC	Valentin Thurn	Chair	08.05.19	01:00	Cologne
Ernährungsrat Köln	KFPC	Florian Sander	Coordinator	08.05.19	01:11	Cologne
Ernährungsrat Berlin	FPCB	Christine Pohl	Coordinator	29.05.19	01:34	Westermark

Table 1: Interview Overview

4. Specifying food citizenship event functions

In the most general sense, the function of urban food citizenship events is to facilitate participation in urban food policy. But how can this function and its associated success be specified? In their responses, eleven interviewees suggest that food citizenship as such is a democratic value, associated with notions of ‘ownership’, ‘participatory democracy’, ‘food justice’, ‘food democracy’ and ‘food sovereignty’.

‘Food sovereignty’ is a central notion in the radical-democratic trend in the AFM (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, pp. 115–118, 128, 130) and is defined as a double right:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.” (“The Declaration of Nyéléni,” 2007)

Fox (LAFPC) and Pohl (FPCB) suggest that on an ideological level, the function of events around food citizenship is to redefine ‘consumers’ as ‘citizens’. Consumers make individual purchasing choices on the food market and passively watch from the sidelines as public and profit-oriented actors shape their AFS. Citizens actively engage and collectively deliberate at the political food forum on the decisions that shape their food system. This perspective aligns ‘food citizenship’ and ‘food sovereignty’ with ‘food democracy’, defined by Hassanein (2003, 73) as the self-determination of citizens regarding their AFS. However, the concept of food sovereignty adds a radical-democratic purpose to food citizenship. The 2007 Nyéléni Declaration states that food sovereignty

“[...] implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.” (The Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007).

‘Food sovereignty’ addresses here the political dimension of ‘food justice’. Gottlieb and Joshi (2010, 7) relate food justice with the fair distribution of risks and benefits in the AFS.

Five interviewees concur with the radical combo of food justice and food sovereignty and indicate how FPCs try to include those social categories that face barriers to participating in the AFS. Roberts (TYFPC) even sees it as a policy of the TYFPC “to prioritise the voices of those who are less visible” or “most affected”. This radical democratic framing resonates with a statement in Arnstein’s well known paper “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”:

“[...] citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from

the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future.”
(Arnstein, 1969, 216).

Five experts at the FPC consider citizen participation a prerequisite for political effectiveness of food policy. It brings together the technical know-how of various stakeholders and, above all, gives voice to the community perspective. The idea that citizenship leads to more effective policies is a promise in the tradition of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1976, 108), which is also current in democratic governance (Fischer, 2012, 461f). Tamlin (TYFPC) combines this idea with participation as an engine of change:

“[...]broad-ranged participation, what it means to me is having people from every experience, having their voices heard during the decision-making process because it’s those people that are able to seek injustices and inequalities in the food system, and therefore able to actually make the decisions and interventions that will create change in the system.”

Political effectiveness here oscillates between qualitatively better policies and building collective power. Other interviewees are more explicit about the collective power or political capital building aspect of citizen participation. Blount-Dorn (DFPC) and Vermeire (BrFPC) talk about how visible participation of potential voters helps to engage politicians on food issues. In addition, Sanders (KFPC) sees food citizenship as building a social movement to engage civil society in breaking the hegemony of business actors.

These statements are consistent with the function of FPCs described by Schiff (2007) in building political capital for food sustainability. However, some interviews assign food citizenship and related politics a role beyond the field of food. Stalbrand – quoting MacRae & Welsh (1998, 241) – interprets food citizenship as a general sustainability driver of cities because “food is part of everything”. Similarly, Crivits (GFPC) states that if

“you put a food lens and you look at specific public problems, for instance, social cohesion, local economics, greening of the environment, a food solution for all these public affairs can be found.”

Based on the opinions of these FPC experts, the functions of urban food citizenship events can be summarised as follows

- facilitating self-determination of citizens in shaping their food systems, and
- building capacity for urban sustainability and providing political effectiveness in urban food policy and AFM politics,
- both especially prioritising those marginalised by the modern food regime.

5. Success criteria of urban food citizenship events

Besides helping define the function of FPC (co-)facilitated urban food citizenship events, interviewees gave a more direct answer on what constitutes their success. After comparison with concepts from the FPC literature, the dimensions of ‘exercising food sovereignty’ and ‘transformative capacity building’ just described could be refined into the following framework of success criteria (Figure 2).

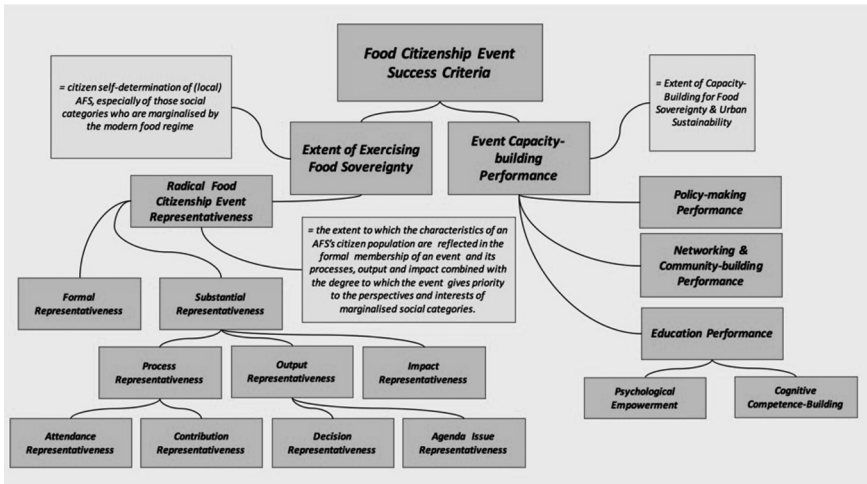


Figure 2: Success Criteria of FPC (co-)facilitated Food Citizenship Events

5.1 Radical representativeness as a food sovereignty indicator

Ten interviewees suggest how ‘representativeness’ is a valuable indicator to capture the extent to which an event exercises food sovereignty. It can be defined as the extent to which the interests and perspectives of all individuals in a governed community are reflected in governance structures, processes and outcomes (Carboni et al., 2016, 1ff).

This notion of representativeness fits well with a statistical-demographic approach. From a food movement and radical-democratic perspective, the quality of citizen participation in a policy-making process should also be assessed in terms of its contribution to democratising the AFS, challenging structural social inequalities and power structures. Therefore, Blount-Dorn (DFPC) and Roberts (TYFPC) link the success of a food citizenship event to the extent to which the perspectives and interests of marginalised social categories are prioritised in policy-making. The combination of both descriptions produces a more complete success criterion, referred to in this paper as “radical representativeness”.

A classification made by Carboni et al. (2016, 3ff) can be adapted for this radical democratic concept. Carboni et al. first distinguish formal versus substantial representation. Formal representation refers to which actors can be identified as the

formal members of governance structures. Which individuals or organisations are officially part of the governance setting, and whom do they represent?

As Winne (CLF) suggests, to speak of successful participation, it takes more than the various food system actors having a seat in a governance structure such as an FPC:

“[...] But I think also beyond that [the composition of an FPC reflecting the diversity of the community] is ‘participation’, so it’s not just that you have members, but it’s also whether they participate. Are they active? And then another – of course, another measure would be performance on what policies have been put in place or implemented. What plans have been developed, what research has been done?”

This opinion is consistent with the idea that in addition to formal membership, the diversity of interests and perspectives of a population should be visible in actual policy-making. For the latter, Carboni et al. (2016, 3–4) use the term ‘substantive representation’.

Carboni et al. (2016, 3–4) elaborate this concept along two dimensions, namely representation in the policy process and the output of the policy process. The success of the former is captured by evaluating the attendance and contribution of participants in the food citizenship event. On the other hand, the representativeness of an event’s output is measured by counting the agenda items and decisions taken and relating them to different participants.

Inspired by Winne’s (CLF) and other interviewees’ focus on policy impact, a third dimension of content representation can be added: to what extent does a food citizenship event shape food policy and other aspects of the food system? Whose interests are promoted by the impact of the event?

5.2 Subcriteria of food citizenship event capacity-building

Responses regarding the capacity-building dimension of the success of food citizenship events can be related to three criteria, which correspond to Schiffs’ (2007, 217f) three general roles of FPCs. First, responses associate successful events with policy-making, which can have a self-supportive effect in addition to the direct exercise of food sovereignty, partially building their own capacity. For example, Thurn mentions how the city of Cologne, impressed by KFPC’s way of facilitating food citizenship, invited the FPC to teach them how to organise civic participation. Another success criterion can thus be defined as the extent to which the policy-making of the event addresses and leads to further institutionalisation of citizenship – prioritising marginalised social categories – in urban food policy and other sustainability issues.

Roberts argues that the core function of the TYFPC lies less in representation than in building relationships “that create a network, that get wider communities invested in food issues”. Several interviewees relate the success of FPC events to their

ability to bring together different food sector actors and social categories around food as an urban political issue.

Stahlbrand sees the TFPC's open core meetings as "essentially educational opportunities". Roberts adds leadership formation of young people in food policy to the core mission of the TYFPC; Fox underlines the importance of events for the LAFPC that focus on leadership formation for the underprivileged. Other interviewees' responses also indicate how a final success criterion for capacity building can be formulated similarly about education. Fox (LAFPC) puts forward two dimensions of education in food citizenship, not mentioned as such by Schiff (2007):

"In other words, we want people to leave the event feeling energised and clear on how to express their enthusiasm. Um, so they get tools, they get skills, they get a way forward. And then it's something that they might leave feeling changed. You know, that they've found a new perspective or they've built a new skill within themselves that makes them feel more empowered. And so we try to create events where people experience something that is useful for their journey as advocates and as change agents. [...] And so, by putting that intention into the events, they become more fun, to be honest, than other people's events, but I also think that this intention produces really different results."

The educational success of an event should thus not only be measured by cognitive results as how much knowledge and skills are developed, but also to extend it empowers participants socio-emotionally.

6. Conclusion

Comparing the interview results with the literature, two main categories of success criteria emerged: first, the extent to which a food sovereignty event (co)facilitated by FPC is exercised; second, the extent to which the event builds capacity for food sovereignty, food justice and urban sustainability.

The extent to which food sovereignty is exercised can be operationalised as radical representativeness, which measures the extent to which disadvantaged social categories are primarily represented. This criterion

goes beyond the statistical-demographic approach of Carboni et al. (2016) which distinguishes between formal and substantive representativeness. For the latter, a third category emerged from the interviews besides process and output representativeness, namely impact representativeness. At events, people with low SES, people of colour and women may be present in low numbers; contributions from these disadvantaged social categories may be more frequent (= high process representativeness). Agenda items and final decisions may be in their concern (= high output representativeness). Yet, this may not lead to actual changes in the AFS that are in their interest (=low impact representativeness).

Furthermore, three dimensions of capacity building can be distinguished, corresponding to the general roles for FPCs as defined by Schiff (2007): policy making,

networking and community building, and educational outputs. The latter has a cognitive and a socio-emotional dimension, an additional differentiation to Schiff's classification.

From this framework, one could distil an equivalent for the more general category of ecological citizen participation events¹. Such events resist the neoliberal reduction of citizens to consumers, opening up spaces for ecological democracy and building a social-ecological movement. Focusing on movement building and representation of the disadvantaged in structure, process and impact to measure the success of such events can help ground education for sustainable development in the radical legacy of participatory democracy. This may be urgently needed on a planet facing a crucial ecological multicrisis if both the gravity of the situation and core democratic values such as equality and freedom for all are to be taken seriously.

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1 For an introduction to the concept of “ecological citizenship” see MacGregor (2014). In her conclusion, MacGregor (2014, 127f) suggests how “ecological citizenship” should be reclaimed by a socio-ecological movement as a position against neoliberalism in order to re-politicise both ecological issues and the concept of citizenship.

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