



Civic Voice, Public Recognition, and the Struggle for Inclusive Governance

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary democracies have expanded participatory mechanisms, yet many citizens continue to experience exclusion because opportunities to speak do not necessarily result in recognition or institutional responsiveness. This article examines how civic voice, public recognition, and inclusive governance interact to shape democratic belonging. Drawing on deliberative democratic theory, recognition theory, and institutional governance scholarship, it develops an integrative framework in which voice generates claims, recognition confers legitimacy and standing, and governance institutions translate recognized claims into binding or semi-binding decisions. The study also presents a comparative typology of participatory arrangements and a multi-level model linking individual, community, institutional, and societal processes. The analysis shows that procedural inclusion alone is insufficient because institutions may invite participation while withholding epistemic, moral, or political recognition. Inclusive governance therefore depends on institutional designs that sustain recognition, reduce power asymmetries, strengthen social trust, and create accountable feedback between citizens and decision-makers. The article concludes that democratic inclusion requires not only wider participation but also the redistribution of recognition as a precondition for meaningful voice and responsive governance.

Keywords: civic voice, recognition, inclusive governance, deliberative democracy, participatory institutions

1. Introduction

The paradox of contemporary democracies is that while their formal means of political involvement have multiplied in the last three decades, from participatory budgeting to citizen assemblies to digital consultation platforms, many citizens still believe they are deceived and that the institutions of governance are deaf to their concerns (Fung, 2006; Gaventa, 2006). This paradox indicates that while the spread of participatory mechanisms is in itself not enough to yield inclusive governance. This article argues that what is missing is public recognition the social and institutional recognition of the legitimacy of a speaker's claims, identity, and standing, and the recognition that these claims warrant a response from the government. There is a long history between voice and recognition, as political philosophy. Habermas (1984, 1996) theorised the public sphere as a communicative space where the validity claims can be redeemed through reasoned discourse, Honneth (1996) and Fraser (2000) rethought social justice as a struggle for recognition as well as one for redistribution. However, the two traditions have seldom been systematically integrated with the scholarship on governance which focuses on how institutions practice the inclusion of citizens' voices in the decision-making process (Ostrom, 1990; Bevir, 2010). The upshot is that there is a conceptual gap: theories of voice are underdeveloped when it comes to conditions for social recognition of speech, and theories of governance are underdeveloped when it comes to participation as a relational achievement that is structured in hierarchies of status.

This article tries to fill this void by building an integrative theoretical framework of civic voice, public recognition and inclusive governance. Civic voice is not just an expressive one but a claims-making practice that requires recognition which can be provided by an addressee. recognition is a socially contestable and graduated process, the outcome of which is what claims are included in the governance agenda, and how. Inclusive governance comes not as the result of a formal policy, but as a consequence of a substantial restructuring of institutions, so that the voice is routinely translated into governance, decisions are being made on the basis of recognized voice, and citizens' habits of speaking are shaping those of governance.

The article goes on to present a review of the theoretical underpinnings of voice, recognition and governance, followed by the construction of a comparative typology of participatory arrangements, an integrative multi-level model and implications for theory, policy and future research. This investigation is not just about grades. Over the past generation, governments, multilateral institutions and civil society have put in a lot of resources in participatory reforms, from having a constitutionally required public consultation process to using digital platforms to allow citizens to contribute to policy making through crowdsourcing. Yet assessments of these changes have led to a persistent and problematic conclusion that although these might be procedural changes, these are often accompanied by substantive exclusion (Cornwall, 2008; Gaventa, 2006).

Sometimes, communities are formally invited to speak and, while they may have an impact, this does not result in a shift in the nature of the decisions, and the outcomes are arrived at on other bases, so that the process can be seen as a legitimacy trap. To understand why this is so, one needs a theory which can account for the speaking as well as the listening and which can account for the lack of automaticity of hearing. This is exactly this theoretical lack that the notion of public recognition is to fill and it is this lack that drives the model developed in the sections that follow.

Objective of the study

1. To examine how civic voice and public recognition interact in shaping inclusive governance and democratic belonging
2. To develop an integrative, multi-level theoretical model linking individual, community, institutional, and societal processes of voice and recognition
3. To compare participatory governance arrangements and identify the institutional conditions required to convert recognized civic voice into meaningful governance outcomes

2. Theoretical Foundations

The present analysis is drawn from three bodies of theory which overlap. One is that of deliberative democratic theory, which stipulates that legitimate political results can be achieved through public deliberation that involves as many people as possible, and that is based on reasons rather than the addition of preferences (Cohen, 1997, 2005; Chambers, 2003). Deliberative theorists highlight the importance of having the right procedures in place for voice to be politically meaningful, such as access to discourse, freedom from coercion, and the justifiability of claims (Mansbridge, 1999; Felicetti & Holdo, 2024). The second is the recognition theory, which is based on Hegelian philosophy and has been reasserted by Honneth (1996), Taylor (1994) and Fraser (1990, 2000) that people rely on intersubjective recognition for their self-respect, self-esteem and social status and that misrecognition is a specific form of injustice that cannot be reduced to material deprivation.

The third is institutional governance theory, which focuses on the formal and informal rules which shape collective decision making and the distribution of power of state, market and civic actors (Dahl, 1971; Ostrom, 1990; Bevir, 2010). All three traditions share a common, but little explored, core assumption: political inclusion is at the same time a communicative, a relational, and an institutional achievement. The communicative dimension is provided by Civic voice, the relational dimension by Recognition and the institutional dimension by Governance design.

The framework presented in this article sees these dimensions as analytically distinct, but also as interdependent, which is the topic of the remaining sections of this article, which will attempt to theorise this interdependence in greater detail. Interestingly, all of the traditions have been individually the object of searching critique for blind spots. Deliberative democratic theory has been attacked for assuming that such a form of rational-critical argument is culturally specific, and often masculinist, to the detriment of those who do not express themselves in that way; instead relying on testimony, or narrative or embodied experience (Young, 2000).

In turn, recognition theory has been criticized for potentially diminishing structural inequalities to “attitude” and “cultural esteem” issues, thus masking the material and distributive aspects of inequalities that can only be addressed through recognition (Fraser, 2000). Institutional governance theory has also been criticized for failing to theorize the symbolic and relational elements of how to identify a legitimate governance partner it is a largely technical issue of incentives (Bever, 2010). However, this integrative approach created in this article is designed to make these traditions productive tensions with each other and use the strengths of one tradition to compensate for known weaknesses of the other, without relying solely on any individual tradition as adequate to the task alone.

3. Conceptual Foundations

3.1 Civic Voice:

Civic voice is the ability of individuals and groupings to express interests, complaints, and desires in a public forum (at least in theory, directed to the authorities) (Warren, 2002). Voice is not just Expression: a diary or a private complaint is expressive, but not civic; it has no institutional addressee on the other side, with whom one can engage in a relationship. Civic voice is always-already oriented to uptake, it is not an expression but a claims-making practice which presupposes, even if it doesn't get, a listening subject. This uptake focus implies a number of theories.

Firstly, there is uneven distribution of voice within the social structure. Cultural and social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), is useful for explaining some of the reasons why certain individuals and groups have the linguistic

repertoire, institutional literacy and social network to make their claims intelligible and actionable to governing bodies, and others do not. Second, voice is also socially negotiated: According to Foucault's (1980) theory of power and knowledge, the categories themselves that make up and constitute claims of legitimacy, such as what constitutes a legitimate grievance or a reasonable demand, are socially negotiated, historically situated products of power relations. Third, voice is mediated at various levels, as people can voice their opinions in a public hearing, or in the broader community via social movements and associational networks (Putnam, 2000).

As important as it is to have channels for voice for example, open comment periods and online petitions it does not mean that voice is heard in any meaningful way. Cornwall (2008) adapted Arnstein's (1969) classic typology of citizen participation in decision making, pointing out that many of the current participatory devices work as what he termed "invited spaces" in which citizens are given opportunities to speak, but in which the power of the decision making process remains unchanged. But, civic voice, in other words, is required for inclusion but not sufficient. Whether or not voice leads to influence depends on ensuing recognition, the topic of this article. Another theoretical distinction that is important to make is that between individual and collective voice.

Individual voice expressed in a public hearing or written representation to a regulatory body is usually assessed by the governing bodies according to the criteria of credibility and relevance, which are in turn, framed by the dominant culture (Foucault, 1980). Collective voice, in the form of social movements, advocacy coalitions and associational networks is different: it is based on the greater validity of numbers and organization to offset the defenselessness of any individual claimant (Putnam, 2000). Mansbridge (1999) also distinguishes between two types of deliberative voice: formal deliberative voice, which happens in designated deliberative frames, and everyday deliberation, the informal political talk that takes place in workplaces, households and social networks that is often a precondition for deliberation in formal settings. All of these types of voice respond differently to the mechanisms of recognition explored below, which is crucial in designing governance mechanisms that are truly inclusive of any form of civic voice.

3.2 Public Recognition: From Redistribution to Recognition

Recognition theory provides a unique terminology to explain how some voices are listened to and acted on while others are ignored and/or made invisible (Fraser, 2000; Giles, 2020). According to Honneth (1996), there are three spheres of recognition: The sphere of love refers to intimate relationships, the sphere of rights to legal and political status and the sphere of solidarity to shared social appreciation. The last two are the most relevant spheres for the governance theory. Recognition in the sphere of rights gives formal voice as an equal member of the political community, recognition in the sphere of solidarity gives social prestige and consequently the question of whether claims are taken up or not as credible and valued for institutional attention. Fraser (2000) further argues that the two claims of recognition and cultural affirmation can't be collapsed recognition is a matter of participatory parity that is how institutional conditions enable all members of society to interact as peers in social life. This status-based model of recognition is especially relevant for governance theory as it moves the focus from the experiential to the institutional formation of recognition (or lack thereof) and parity of participation.

On this perspective, misrecognition is not just an affront to identity but a systemic obstacle to the whole category of citizens in this instance, racialized minorities, women, migrants and the poor from being recognised as governance interlocutors, even when they speak up frequently and effectively (Anderson, 1999; Young, 2000). The process of voice to governance influence thus becomes a threshold phenomenon, as theorized in this work. For analytical purposes there are three mechanisms of recognition. Epistemic recognition is about the credibility of a claim as a source of knowledge of the social reality. Moral recognition deals with the question of whether a claimant deserves to ask that the collective resources and/or collective policy be used to address a particular problem.

Political recognition is about whether or not a claimant has legitimate claim to be involved in binding collective decisions. Each can take place separately: a community can, for example, receive epistemic recognition, in the form of some form of consultation on local knowledge; whilst not receiving political recognition, that is, having no say in the eventual decision. This separation of recognising mechanisms, this article argues, is one of the key ways that governance systems can generate a sense of inclusion and generate a reality of exclusion.

This decoupling is not only a structural one, but also a temporal one. Recognition within a policy domain does not automatically translate to other policy domains and/or recognition at a specific moment does not imply recognition over time. But the political recognition of a community organisation during a period of extreme crisis such as after a natural disaster or a public health emergency can be lost when normal governance processes are resumed, as has been reported in many disaster-recovery and post-conflict governance contexts (Gaventa, 2006). This volatility is indicative of a deeper aspect of recognition as a social good: recognition is not like material resources which can be stored up or accumulated but must constantly be done, repeatedly to be renewed in the context of on-going relationships of mutual recognitions. Thus, governance institutions that do not create 'structures of recognition' over time, but only 'episodic recognition' are likely to generate a process of inclusion and exclusion rather than a more stable process of democratic inclusion.

3.3 Inclusive Governance: Institutionalizing Voice and Recognition

Inclusive governance can be viewed as the establishment of systems or processes that enable recognised civic voice in a systematic manner to be added into collective decisions, which are binding or semi-binding (Held, 2006; Bevir, 2010). This definition emphasizes institutionalization because an ad hoc or episodic responsiveness, though well-intentioned, is not sufficient to change the “structure of opportunity” which the marginalized groups have in politics. There has been a long-standing tradition in governance scholarship to recognise varying levels of participatory arrangements, from manipulation and therapy on one end of the spectrum, to informing, consultation and placation in the middle, and partnership, delegated power and citizen control on the other (Arnstein, 1969; Renn et al., 2026).

There are a number of variations on this typology that have emerged in later scholarship that have tried to capture the complexity of governance innovations today, such as deliberative mini publics, co-production arrangements and networked governance structures (Fung, 2006; Gaventa, 2006, Fernández-Martínez et al., 2023). A theoretically-informed account of inclusive governance cannot, therefore, simply document the presence of participatory mechanisms, but also interrogate what they institutionalize with respect to the relation between voice and authority. Fung (2006) suggests that governance architectures can be compared on a number of dimensions including: who is authorized to participate; how participants communicate and make decisions; and which authority/power are associated with the result of their deliberation.

Taking this insight as a starting point, the current analysis considers institutionalization not just a binary state, but also as a variable: some governance arrangements institutionalize voice but leave recognition as rather loose and informal, dependent on the goodwill of officials; and other arrangements institutionalize recognition, for example by requiring statutory representation, but not necessarily institutionalize opportunities for deliberative voice. It is important to differentiate these possibilities, as it is the key to theorizing the different outcomes of formally similar participatory reforms in different governance settings.

Table 1 is a typology of these approaches, juxtaposing them based on the level of formal recognition of the governance approaches and the level of voice that is institutionalized. The typology is not considered to be an instrument of measurement but a heuristic tool in order to think about the joint variation of voice and recognition in different forms of governance.

Table 1. Comparative Typology of Governance Arrangements by Degree of Institutionalized Voice and Recognition

Governance Arrangement	Degree of Voice	Degree of Recognition	Illustrative Mechanism
Informing / broadcast consultation	Minimal-one-way transmission	Low citizens as audience	Public notices, information sessions
Symbolic consultation	Low Invited comment without obligation	Low to moderate-epistemic only	Public comment periods, surveys
Advisory participation	Moderate structured input sought	Moderate-epistemic and partial moral	Advisory councils, stakeholder panels
Collaborative governance	High-joint problem framing	Moderate to high moral and political	Co-production, multi-stakeholder boards
Deliberative mini-publics	High-reasoned deliberation valued	High-epistemic, moral, and political	Citizens' assemblies, deliberative polls
Delegated / devolved authority	Very high-binding local decisions	Very high-full political standing	Participatory budgeting, community trusts

Note. Typology synthesized from Arnstein (1969), Fung (2006), Gaventa (2006), and Cornwall (2008).

The typology in Table 1 demonstrates a core theoretical argument of this article: voice and recognition are more often than not co-varying, but by no means equivalent and can be uncoupled through governance, resulting in hybrid and unstable forms of inclusion. Civic voice can also be powerful and the extent to which citizens feel their voice is heard can be modest, as with symbolic consultation, where their contribution is mostly taken without offering a significant degree of transformation. On the other hand, delegated authority mechanisms provide both high recognition and high voice, but are relatively uncommon mechanisms because they involve a certain degree of discretionary power in the hands of governing institutions, which is difficult to surrender by those currently in power (Gaventa, 2006).

3.3.1 Historical Trajectories of Voice and Recognition

It is also possible to give a historical dimension in the typology presented in Table 1. The vast majority of governance

systems today have shifted (at least discursively) toward the higher end of the spectrum in the past century or so, with the ever-greater enfranchisement of adult citizens, the fight for civil rights, and the movement for decolonisation gradually eroding the idea that certain groups of people should be excluded from political standing (Held, 2006; Dahl, 1971). But this historical path has not been a straight one nor is it uniform. This has often been followed by a procedural formalism, corresponding to what Fraser (1990) calls a "retreat" to formal political rights for previously unrecognized groups without the substantive changes in the resources available to them to exercise the rights effectively.

The theoretical finding argued in this article, that voice and recognition are not necessarily outcomes of institutional reforms, but ongoing and contested, is further supported by this historical pattern: governance systems that do not focus on the reciprocal and cyclical relationship between voice and recognition risk losing hard won gains in recognition over time. Comparative governance scholarship also suggests that the trajectory of the history is different across political and cultural context with regard to its speed and nature.

In other places, however, governance reform took place through continuous community mobilization that achieved a degree of political recognition beyond just voice - this time in long-term, legally binding local laws, such as in some Latin American municipalities, which have been implementing participatory budgeting since the late 1980s. In other contexts participatory reforms have been adopted as "governance conditionalities" imposed by external actors, such as in international development programming, but without an investment in associational infrastructure and societal legitimation as shown in Table 2 as necessary conditions for community and societal level recognition. These divergent trends are indicative that the integrative model outlined in this article is not prescriptive but rather an analytical tool for determining the extent to which the elements of the voice-recognition-governance cycle are (or are not) included or weakly institutionalized in a particular historical and political context.

3.4 Toward an Integrative Theoretical Model

Based on the above analysis, this article suggests an integrative model of the three forces, civic voice, public recognition and inclusive governance that is shown in Figure 1. It represents these three elements as a sequence of stages that are also circularly linked: civic voice feeds into 'claims' (the object of civic engagement) which are mediated through 'mechanisms of public recognition' that in turn affect the response of governance institutions in terms of 'binding or semi-binding action'. Importantly, the results of governance trigger future voice, in the sense of either strengthening civic capacity and trust, hence reducing the threshold for future claims making, or constricting civic capacity and trust, deepening the withdrawal and disengagement of many marginalised communities (Putnam, 2000; Young, 2000).

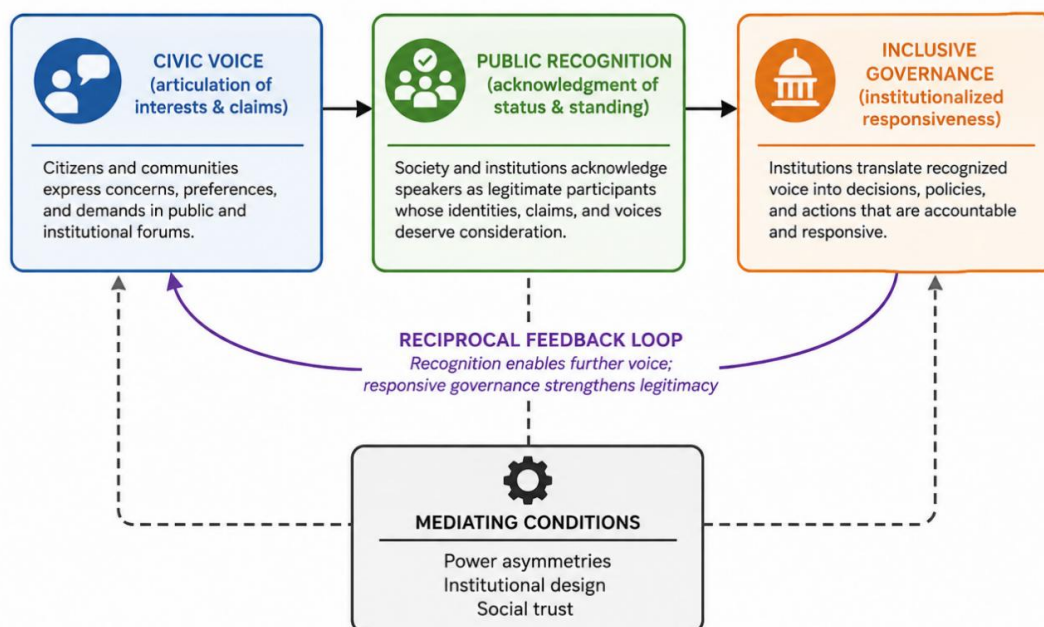


Figure 1. Integrative Model of Civic Voice, Public Recognition, and Inclusive Governance

Note. Solid arrows depict the forward sequence from voice to recognition to governance response; the dashed arrow depicts the feedback loop through which governance outcomes reshape the future conditions of voice, mediated by power asymmetries, institutional design, and social trust.

The model in Figure 1 is specially chosen to be non-linear. The elements voice, recognition, and governance are shown in the diagram in a left to right direction to explain the expository process of the document, but the theoretical

argument is that they are mutually constituting over time. Recognition has a positive effect in a previous cycle of governance which adds to the civic voice in the next cycle, and vice versa. This can be interpreted in terms of what Young (2000) refers to as the 'structural inequality of participatory situations': in formal participatory settings, conditions of equality in access to the floor sit alongside unequal conditions of probability of being heard: the probability of being heard depends on the social, cultural and political resources of the claimant, which are accumulated over the course of history (Bourdieu 1986; Sen 1999).

This process is not only within any given governance episode, the individual claimant and the community or associational network, the formal institutions of governance, or the wider societal discourse that may legitimate/delegitimize types of claims, but also across these different levels of the social order. It is this multi-level structure that is illustrated in Figure 2, where civic voice is embedded within a set of overlapping contexts which will all influence civic voice's chances of being recognised.

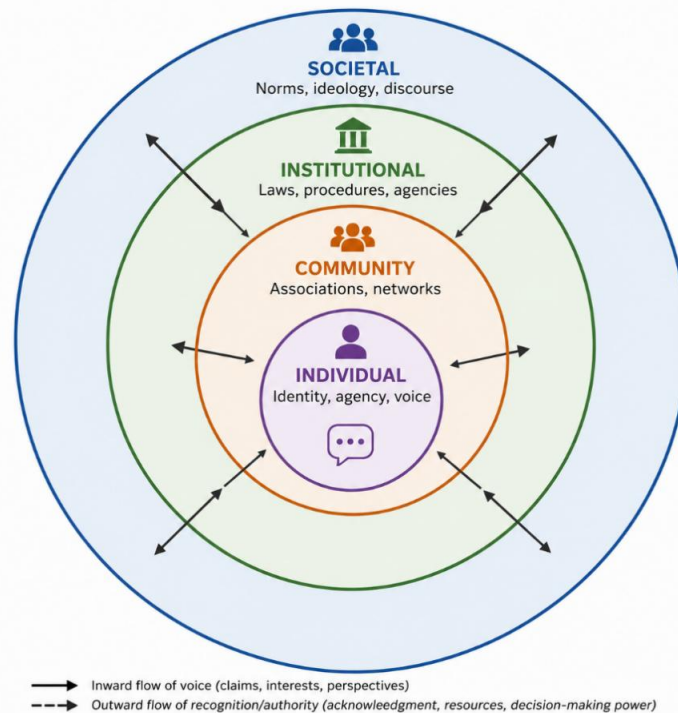


Figure 2. Multi-Level Framework of Voice, Recognition, and Governance

Note. Reciprocal arrows indicate that voice moves outward from the individual toward societal discourse while recognition and institutional authority move inward, structuring the conditions under which subsequent voice is possible.

Table 2 expands upon the multi-level framework shown in Figure 2 and provides details about the key mechanisms of voice and recognition that exist at each of the levels, and some representative sources of theory. The table serves as a guide for future theoretical and empirical research to help to clarify what level of analysis a particular governance intervention is likely to impact, and what level it is likely not to impact.

Table 2. Mechanisms of Voice and Recognition Across Levels of Analysis

Level	Primary Voice Mechanism	Primary Recognition Mechanism	Key Sources
Individual	Testimony, self-advocacy, narrative claims	Epistemic and moral recognition of identity claims	Honneth (1996); Taylor (1994)
Community	Collective mobilization, associational advocacy	Solidarity and social esteem within networks	Putnam (2000); Cornwall (2008)
Institutional	Formal participatory mechanisms, hearings	Political recognition via procedural standing	Arnstein (1969); Fung (2006)
Societal	Public discourse, media framing, social movements	Legitimation of claims within dominant norms	Fraser (1990); Foucault (1980)

This multi-level approach emphasizes another theoretical consideration: Governance reforms that do not address issues of societal-level discourse and community-level solidarity will not necessarily lead to lasting inclusion simply by

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changing the institutional consultation process such as by creating a new consultation procedure. This argument can be seen in Escobar's (1995) critique of development discourse, which showed that participatory development programmes tended to seek the voice of the marginalised communities, and yet at the same time reproduced the discourses of the society that sought to have the voice of the marginalised recognised thus undercutting the participative recognition they sought.

4. Discussion

The framework presented in this article has a number of implications for democratic theory, as well as for the design of participatory institutions. Firstly, it proposes that conflicts about the appropriate range of citizens' participation be reconceptualised as conflicts about who gets recognised where. It is tempting to conclude that procedural changes that allow more voice without tackling epistemic, moral, and political processes of recognition can yield something that could be called hollow inclusion: lots of voice and only tepid responsiveness to it on the part of governance. This situation could be one of the reasons why the much noted phenomenon of participation fatigue and the decline of trust in democratic institutions has occurred even in places where there has been increased participation (Warren, 2002; Beck, 1992).

Secondly the framework suggests that inclusive governance needs to be looked at at the level of the society and community within the model as well as at the institutional level where most governance reform initiatives are occurring. Together, media framing, dominant social discourses and association structures help shape the intelligibility of a given claim as a legitimate governance issue, well before it makes it to a formal decision making space (Fraser, 1990). Rather than change patterns of recognitions, governance reformers who only focus on procedural consultation without regard to the discursive and associational context of the procedure are likely to recreate the patterns of recognitions.

Thirdly, the model emphasizes theoretically the role of feedbacks. The civic capacity available in a governance system in one cycle depends on what was recognized or not in the previous cycle(s), and governance systems have path-dependency, meaning they can either compound advantage or disadvantage over time (Ostrom, 1990). This implies that participatory governance projects should be considered not only for their short-term procedural results (turning up to a public hearing), but also for their longer-term trajectory in terms of civic trust, associational density and claims-making capacity, among affected communities (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999).

Finally, there are normative implications of the framework about the adjudication of justice claims in governance systems. While voice may be heard in governance institutions, governance institutions also have a responsibility to actively redistribute the conditions that make voice possible, such as access to information, deliberative competence, associational resources, and so on, if participative parity is the right normative standard for voice as Fraser (2000) suggests. This again sees inclusive governance as being essentially a redistributive project in which it is not sufficient to tinker around with the procedures, but attention has to be paid to the structure of social and political inequality (Anderson, 1999; Rawls, 1971).

Fifth, the framework has practical implications for institutional design and so these need to be briefly elaborated. The model proposes three design levers (aspects of governance) which need to be simultaneously addressed when moving arrangements rightward along the typology presented in Table 1, that is, towards a collaborative or delegated form of governance. The first lever relates to the epistemic infrastructure that claimants can access and use, such as access to relevant information, translation and interpretation services and technical support to enable them to translate claims into institutions that are understandable by governing institutions.

The second lever relates to the durability of recognition, which, as the analysis above indicated, can be achieved through standing institutional positions, rather than through ad hoc invitations, that are a consequence of specific policy windows or crises for affected communities. The third one is about the bindingness of governance response: If an institution has no formal responsibility to explain its decision in terms of the inputs received, it is most likely to continue to exhibit the symbolic consultation pattern described in Table 1, even if it requests a lot of input (Fung, 2006; Warren, 2002). All three levers need to be tended to at the same time according to the account developed here, this is a precondition for governance reforms to transcend the "hollow inclusion" of recognition theory's definition of democratic justice and for participatory parity to become a reality.

4.1 Limitations and Directions for Future Theoretical Development

This article is a theoretical one and is not an attempt to validate the proposed model through empirical examples; there are several limitations which need to be acknowledged. First, the model illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 is a rather idealized view of what in practice are highly contextual and culturally variable processes; the relative importance of epistemic, moral and political recognition may vary significantly from one political system to another, as well as from one policy area to another and from one historical period to another (Held, 2006).

Second, the article largely focuses on theoretical frameworks that emerged in the contexts of western liberal-democracies and more research is required on the translation of the framework to and/or across governance systems with alternate histories of colonialism, authoritarianism or communally defined governance traditions (Escobar, 1995;

Kolopaking et al., 2025).

Future theoretical studies could also further expand the model to include digital governance platforms, which involve new forms of voice represented by algorithmically mediated participation and new forms of misrecognition through algorithmic filtering, that renders some claims invisible to those exercising governance (Sadat, 2025; Waelen & Wieczorek, 2022). Comparative and empirical studies that use the multi-level framework in Table 2 in a variety of governance contexts would provide further insights to the factors that encourage the civic inclusion cycle to expand or contract as illustrated in Figure 1.

A second line of future research relates to how the framework presented here is connected to intersectionality theories which highlight that people hold various, overlapping social positions which have co-constitutive impacts on their recognition that do not simply add up. Claimant's chances of epistemic, moral and political recognition may be affected at the same time by class, racial/ethnic, gender and/or disability, migration status and other axes of social differentiation, which may intersect in different ways in the governance structures.

An intersectional perspective would also contribute to further theorising the multi-level approach outlined in figure 2 in a way that more precisely describes how compounding forms of misrecognition lead to the exclusion of certain groups from governance processes, even in political systems with far-reaching formal ideas of participatory and inclusive governance. Last but not least, further theoretical and empirical research should be done in a longitudinal manner, namely, to observe the feedback loop in Figure 1 over different political governance cycles, as the cross sectional focus of most of the existing participatory governance scholarship does not indicate whether recognition, once provided, accumulates, decays, or fluctuates in response to changing political conditions.

5. Conclusion

This article has suggested that inclusive governance is not synonymous with participatory mechanisms: it is about public recognition and its mediation of civic voice and governance responsiveness. The article has created a theoretical model based on three aspects: voice, recognition and institutional governance, and how each is mutually constitutive and how each reinforces the other, as part of a recursive cycle at the individual, community, institutional and societal levels. The comparative typology and multi-level framework presented here is offered as conceptual instruments for future theorizing and empirical research on how this can stimulate a democratic society to become more (or less) inclusive. In short, the quest for inclusive governance is tied to the quest for recognition: the more societies will engage with questions of recognition, who is seen as a legitimate speaker, knower, the more inclusive and democratic the opportunities to speak will be, and the more complete it will be. This framework is a reminder that critique of the current governance arrangements must go hand in hand with constructive thinking about the institutional conditions for genuine inclusion, as is the aim of this journal in the progressive tradition. It is not sufficient to describe how exclusion is reproduced, however: theory must also identify the levers that could be used to dismantle exclusion, and the mechanisms by which it is reproduced. The civic voice, public recognition and inclusive governance notions presented in this article are presented in the spirit of building blocks for a social science not only attuned to what societies are, but one that is also mindful of what, through persistent struggle and institutional imagination, they can yet be.

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