



Overcoming Barriers to Democratic Participation with Minoritized and Marginalized Groups (OBAMA)

Meri Kulmala & Reetta Mietola

Faculty of Social Sciences, U of Helsinki

Helsinki Inequality Initiative (INEQ)

Finnish Co-research Network

Overcoming Barriers to Democratic Participation with Minoritized and Marginalized Groups (OBAMA)

- Participation has become exclusive -> focus on **participation inequalities**
- **Recognition gaps**: interconnectedness of participation inequalities and disadvantaged positions ->
- **Several marginalized and minoritized groups** face multi-layered barriers to different forms of democratic participation
 - Participation as a membership of one's society -> sense of belonging, inclusion, agency and participation linked
 - **Everyday politics and institutional politics** as foundationally connected

Several vicious-cyclic chains of interconnectedness between marginalized and minoritized positions and barriers to participation

- Marginalization and minoritization lower individuals' sense of belonging in society and, consequently, reduce levels of participation
- Simultaneously, low levels of participation might increase experiences of marginalization and exclusion
- Moreover, when individuals lack representation in politics, their trust in political institutions and in the legitimacy of democracy diminishes
- Problematically, existing participatory tools might also reinforce or increase participation inequalities since one-for-all models rarely function the same way, e.g., for disadvantaged groups as they might for the middle classes in contexts of social divides.

In contrast (virtuous cycle)

- Experiences of dignity and recognition positively contribute to senses of belonging and power to act for social impact and can serve as catalysts for democratic participation in everyday life and in formal politics.
- Increased participation can lead to more forms of political representation of marginalized and minoritized groups.
- Different forms of participation strengthen senses of belonging and being valued, which leads to active engagement and, thus, makes participation take the shape of a virtuous rather than a vicious cycle.
- In other words, the democratic participation of marginalized and minoritized groups improves their position in society and, simultaneously, the quality of democracy itself.

Our research strategy

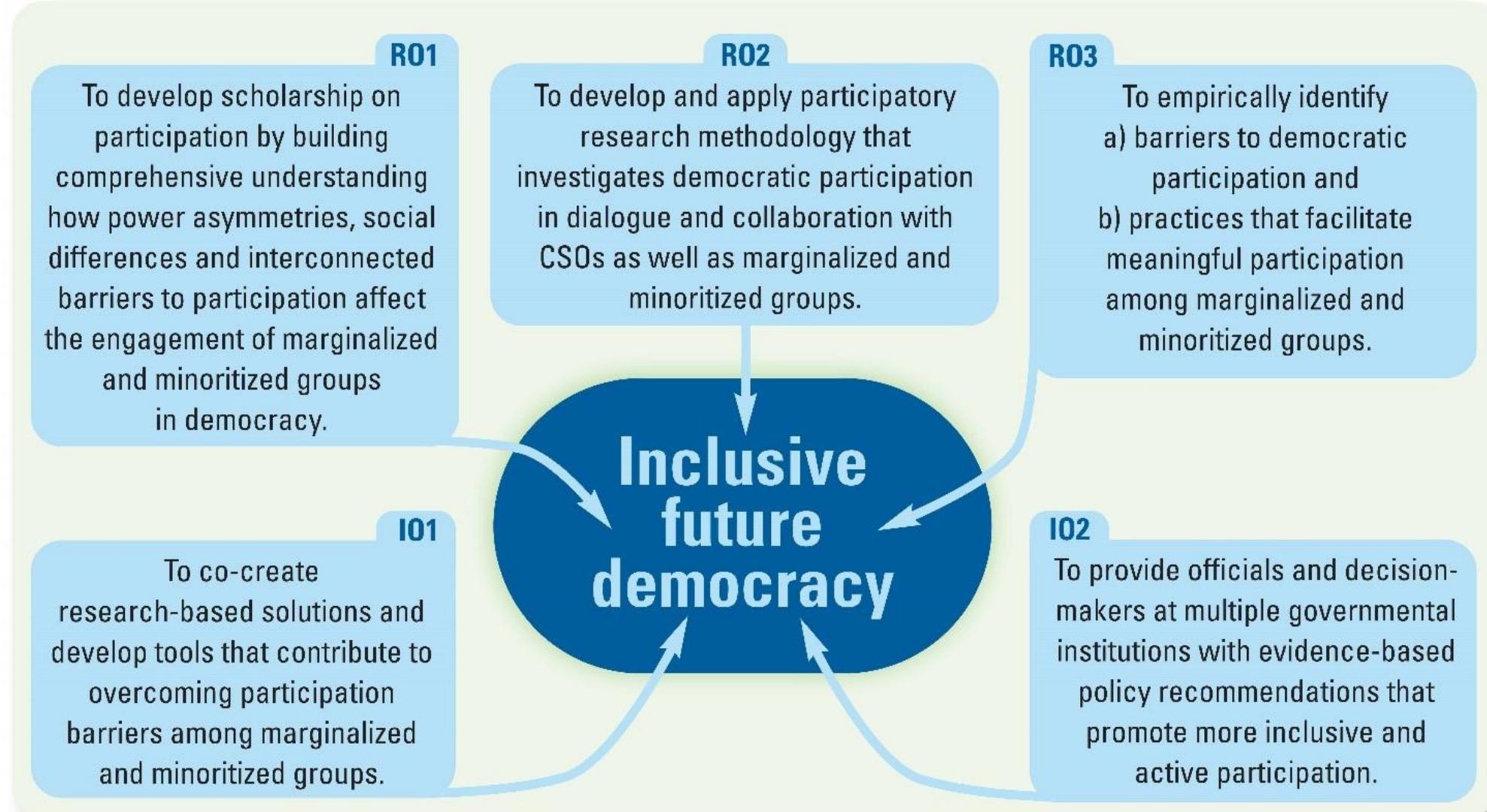


- Commitment to participatory research strategy committed to co-research and co-producing solutions to overcome barriers in democratic participation
 - It would be unethical to study participation inequalities without participation of those affected by these inequalities

Overcoming Barriers to Democratic Participation with Minoritized and Marginalized Groups (OBAMA)

Inclusive participatory research design	Contexts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognition (of participation inequalities experienced by selected groups)• Representation (in the research process of those above-mentioned groups)• Responses (to overcome participation patterns)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disability• LGTBIQ+• Racialization• Lower social class• Substance use

OBAMA's research and interaction objectives



OBAMA Consortium

PI Meri Kulmala, UH
Deputy PI Reetta Mietola, UH

SUBPROJECT 1

Disability

Lead: Reetta Mietola

SUBPROJECT 2

Underclass

Lead: Pekka Tuominen

SUBPROJECT 3

Substance Use

Lead: Kaijus Ervasti

SUBPROJECT 4

Racialized minorities

Lead: Camilla Nordberg

SUBPROJECT 5

LGBTIQ+

Lead: Riikka Taavetti

WP1

Participation through participation (theory, methodology & ethics)

Lead: Meri Kulmala, sociology, UH

WP2

Realization of political and social rights of participation

Lead: Kaijus Ervasti, law, UEF

WP3

Representation in political debates & public discourses

Lead: Riikka Taavetti, history, gender studies, UTU

WP4

Self-perceptions on realization of rights & means of participation

Lead: Reetta Mietola, disability studies, UH

WP5

Lived experiences of non-/belonging, ex-/inclusion & non-/participation

Lead: Pekka Tuominen, social anthropology, UH

WP6

Interaction, communication & dissemination

Lead: Saija Karjala, civic engagement, DF

WP7

Management & coordination

Lead: Meri Kulmala, sociology, UH

Research sites

U of Helsinki (UH)

Faculty of Social Sciences

Helsinki Inequality Initiative

(INEQ)

PI Meri Kulmala

Diaconess

Foundation (DF)

PI Laura

Hakoköngäs

U of Eastern

Finland (UEF)

Center of Law
and Welfare

PI Kaijus Ervasti

Åbo Akademi U (ÅAU)

Faculty of Education and

Welfare Studies

Minority Research

PI Camilla Nordberg

U of Turku (UTU)

School of History,

Culture and Arts Studies

Gender Studies

PI Riikka Taavetti

Thank you!

- meri.kulmala@helsinki.fi
- reetta.mietola@helsinki.fi