

# COMMUNICATIONS AND NEW MEDIA PROGRAMME

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## Measuring Participation as Communicative Action

A case study of citizens' involvement in and assessment of a city's smoking cessation policy-making process

A Talk by Leanne Chang  
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The values of and need for citizen participation have been addressed across various disciplines. Yet participation is a concept that lacks theoretical definition and systematic evaluation methods. Among conceptual and evaluation frameworks for participation, one approach employs Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action as the theoretical foundation in defining participation. This theory is relevant to discussions of participation due to its inclusive analysis of how dialogue can be practiced with an aim toward reaching mutual understanding.

In the study that forms the basis for this dissertation, an operational protocol of participation was adopted that was derived from the action theory's central propositions. The research setting is citizens' participation in a city government's smoking policy-making process. Participation is evaluated according to the extent to which citizens can accept the validity of policy-makers' speech and raise concerns about a proposed policy in an unrestricted communication environment. The expected outcome is the granting of legitimacy to the government's new smoking policy.

Two focus groups and two surveys were performed to test the methodological significance of the measures of participation as communicative action. Findings indicated that participants' perceived validity and speech conditions reflected the theoretical properties of communicative action. Hierarchical regression demonstrated that the independent variables exercised significant predictability on the dependent variable. Construct validity was supported by the measures' success in predicting citizens' positions on the legitimacy of the smoking policy.

The approach taken in this study in measuring participation as communicative action raises five suggestions for subsequent research. First, the conceptualization of participation should focus on dialogue. Second, procedure evaluations should be fundamental to participatory processes. Third, outcome evaluations should focus on participants' acceptance of the decision-making, not immediate on attitudinal or behavioral change. Fourth, the measures of participation should rely on participants' self-reports. Finally, the relations among the participation variables should be understood as a system, rather than as a causal model.

### About the Speaker:

Leanne Chang was born and grew up in Taipei, Taiwan, where she received a B.A. degree in Political Science from National Taiwan University and an M.A. degree in Journalism from National Chengchi University in 1998 and 2000, respectively. In May 2007, she received her Ph.D. degree in Mass Media and Communication from Temple University in Philadelphia, U.S.A.

Dr. Chang's research focuses on development communication and health communication. She is particularly interested in social change theories, behaviour models, and new measures of community participation. Her current interest focuses on how dialogue increases mutual understanding among stakeholders and how this process may result in individual and collective change.