

Usability of the Concept of Local Democracy in Achieving Democratic Process at Local Level

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Abstract

Democracy is advocated by the majority of societies and countries today. The dictators of the past were an important factor in adoption of democracy. Such administration types in which certain individuals, groups or classes make the decisions and seize the power in their hands shifted to dictatorship. Democracy has been adopted instead of these administration types. In democratic administration, certain rules and principles are actualised some of which are achieving public participation into administration activities, assuring fundamental rights and freedoms for everyone, adoption of principles of the state of law by the state, not destroying the rights of the minority for the sake of the majority and vice versa. Achieving the public participation that is required in democracy is discussed at local level.

There is a close relation between local administrations and democracy. However, there are controversies in defining this close relation conceptually which centre around such concepts as democratisation of local administrations, democratic local administration and local democracy. In the literature, whether these concepts can be used interchangeably has been discussed and it has been decided that one can be used for another. However, preference of one gives the understanding of democracy a different dimension at local level. Therefore, a conceptual preference is a factor in achieving democracy at a local level.

Local democracy can be understood as validation of democratic values in local administrations. In this sense, concepts of local democracy, democratic local administration and democratisation of local administrators are considered to be very close, but at the same time, they also appear to have different meanings. In order to determine which of these concepts will be used, these concepts should be defined clearly first. After that, the main elements of these concepts should be put forward analytically. Afterwards, the differences between these concepts should be revealed. Subsequently, different approaches to the problem of applying local democracy at local level should be put across. Also, what kind of a local administration does applying each concept at local level stipulate? What role do these concepts play in achieving democratic participation at local level? Answers to such questions will not only enable sorting out the problem of conceptual expression but also give an idea about which concept is more appropriate to use.

Keywords: Local Administration, Democracy, Local democracy, Democratisation of local administrations, Democratic local administration.

Introduction

Oppressive and centralist administration models have lost their functions today, having been replaced by an administration model based on strong local administration and

democracy. A perception consensus has occurred about strengthening local administration and democracy on national and global level. Therefore, the relation between democracy and local administration, its foundation stone, has gained importance each day(Yıldırım, 1993).

Principle of separation of powers is sought in limiting the government, in which judicial body limits executive body. A state of law is achieved through preventing the intervention of the state to basic rights and freedoms and separating judicial body, which is in charge of saying what law is, from executive body. However, adoption of principle of separation of powers hasn't been found to be adequate in limiting executive power completely and forming a democratic life. In order for democracy to take root and to diffuse in the society, administration, rather than being concentrated in one person, is considered to have to involve multiple people in administrative activities, in which people can influence the administrative decisions and join in decision making processes. Local administrations, therefore, have appeared as the most crucial democracy tool in achieving people's participation in administration and spreading democracy amongst people.

The role local administrations have taken on in achieving democracy and spreading it amongst people has increased their importance in terms of democracy. The indispensable role local administrations have taken on in achieving the functionality of democracy has caused local administrations to be called local democracy. Particularly those local administrations in countries with strong local administrations and local autonomy where democratic culture has taken root have been named local democracy thanks to their strong democratic structure and culture(Görmez, 1997).

The Relation between Local Administration and Democracy

Today, in almost all the countries, local administrations are regarded among the prominent democratic institutions. This is because local administrations enable the public to rule themselves and to participate in administration. The people determine the head of local administration organs through elections. However, this is not enough for these institutions to be called democratic local administrations because, in order to democratise local administrations, the people have to be made sure to participate in administration (Keleş, 1992).

There are three different opinions that explain the relation between local administrations and democracy(Hill, 1974). One of them, Toulmain Smith, Moulin, e.g., argues that local administration, conflicting with democracy, is a sacred institution that has its power only from traditions. The second is Langrod's opinion. Langrod states that there isn't a cause and effect relation between democracy and local administration and that when and where one does not exist, the other can(Langrod, 1953). The third opinion advocates the fact that there is an imperative relation between democracy and local administration. For instance, according to John Stuart Mill, tax liabilities should by all means have a say in administration; they should always be consulted in administration and these people should be informed about the proceedings(Keleş, 1992). Like Mill, Tocqueville also regards local administrations as the main units of democracy and political education tools. Tocqueville states that local administration institutions form the actual power of free nations and that local councils have a crucial contribution to freedom(Yıldırım, 1993).

Usability of the Concept of Local Democracy

For decades, democracy crisis, mostly known as liberal democracy crisis or representative democracy crisis, has caused a new democracy pursuit during which local democracy concept has been put forward as a model suggestion(Üskül, 1993).

There are other scientific opinions that look into local administration concept from a different perspective one of which mentions about a pursuit of a new democracy definition. It is believed that today's classic liberal democracy perception is insufficient in solving social problems and the suggestion of electronic democracy as a solution to sort out this insufficiency cannot solve these problems. In this context, it is stated that democracy is being redefined and the main action point of this redefinition effort has to be reversal of political and administrative decision making mechanisms on top-base plane. Accordingly, the core of a new democracy perception is thought to be the fact that sovereignty should not be based on nation but on the people and that the one higher authority should take action when the people do not decide at local level(Üskül, 1993).

In another study on the concept of local administration, a different emphasis stands out. Accordingly, local democracy exists before the state appears as a sovereign order which is a self-governance form per se and takes its shape through the needs of the society and contributions. Local power is meant by local democracy; however, in the concept of democratic local administration, democracy of local administration system is emphasized. In the concept of local democracy, democratic culture- defined as local democratic values- are emphasized whereas, in democratic local administration concept, democracy of administration processes and administration function is emphasized(Pustu, 2005).

In the literature, the use of local democracy concept is controversial because in the literature, there are opinions that the concept of local democracy is wrong and that the concept of democratic local administration can be used instead(Görmez, 1997). Hill states that it sounds artificial when democracy is separated as national and local(Hill, 1974) and uses the concept of democratic local administration instead of local democracy. Using the concept of democratic local administration instead of local democracy arises from the idea that local administrations cannot be named as local democracy. However, in local autonomy, local people are supposed to govern themselves within the borders laid by a central authority, in which case local power isn't meant by the concept of local democracy. Local democracy means that democratic values are valid in local administrations(Görmez, 1997).

The idea that local administrations can be used as a suitable tool to develop the quality of representative democracy(Ertan, 2004) also refers to the relation between local administration and representative democracy. The importance of the function of local administrations in the development of democracy is addressed here. While evaluating the quality of the relation between local administration and democracy, we see that the difference between local administration and democracy isn't put forward and that a conceptual definition as local democracy isn't made.

Local democracy is nothing more than validating democratic values in local administrations(Görmez, 1997). When defined as such, the concepts of local democracy, democratic local administration and democratisation of local administrations appear to have very close meanings to one another but in fact have different meanings. Democratisation of local administrations denotes the process of making democratic

principles dominant in local administrations. This process will end by applying all the democratic principles in local administrations. By ending the process of democratisation of local administrations, that is applying all the democratic principles in local administrations, democratic local government will be achieved. Local democracy, on the other hand, will appear when democratic principles are applied at local level. The institutions that will make sure that democratic principles are applied at local level are local administrations.

If a distinction between democracy and local democracy is to be made, it can be said that local democracy will appear by applying the principles of democracy, which are adopted and applied at national level, at local level. In this perspective, democracy and local democracy match up with each other and belong to the same root, but settling of democratic institutions and rules at local level and at national level will show different characteristics. Therefore, it can be argued that these two concepts rely on the same principles but these principles appear in different appearances in local and national areas.

Another idea in defining local democracy emphasizes that local democracy occurs when democracy principles are applied local level(Çelik et al., 2008). In this definition, it is stated that there is no differentiation between local democracy and democracy and local democracy doesn't have a different conceptual dimension from democracy.

The concept of local democracy is used as much for the local administrations of certain federal states as those of the unitary states. In this context, it is seen that the concept of local democracy is used for the local administrations in such federal states as the USA, Germany and Sweden and for those in such states with strong local administration tradition as England and Holland(Görmez, 1997). This shows that the concept of local democracy doesn't have any relation with federal-unitary state structure.

The basic principles of local democracy can be exemplified as formation of decision bodies through elections, decision making processes and public participation, sharing of responsibility and income between central and local administrations and the relation between local and central administrations(Görmez, 1997).

Conclusion

Although there are cases determined as the crisis of representative democracy, no local democracy model involving a political and administrative structure that can solve this crisis of representative democracy has been put forward. In this context, it is seen that the concept of local democracy neither has a meaning itself and different from democracy nor provides a new democracy model.

There is a close relation between local administrations and democracy that has led to such debates as democratisation of local administrations, democratic local administration and local democracy. In the literature, whether these concepts can be used interchangeably has been discussed and become a matter of preference. In my opinion, democratisation of local administrations takes us to a process in this context, while democratic local administration takes us to the result in this process and achieving democracy principles at local level and in local administration perspective, on the other hand, takes us to local democracy. In this perspective, these three concepts can be regarded as various expressions of achieving democracy at local level.

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