Public Participation in Europe

An international perspective

EIPP

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Background

The origin of the project

This report grew from a long-term concern with public participation by members of Mosaico, the European Multidisciplinary Association for Learning, established in Bologna in 1996. Mosaico members worked together on European and nationally funded projects focused on community involvement in innovation and knowledge exchange.

Out of this interest and commitment has grown the European Institute of Public Participation, EIPP. This report is EIPP members' first – partial and interim - picture of the changing world of public participation. In it we identify the challenges in making public participation more available and better able to involve citizens in our representative democracies.

Acknowledgements

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We offer special thanks to our willing and patient interviewees who made research for the report a rewarding experience.

Please contribute

This report is being disseminated developmentally. That is, it is published as a work in progress on the EIPP website, and experts and practitioners in the field of public participation are invited to critique and supplement the material and start new lines of thinking. Alternative opinions, good examples and links to useful sources of information will all be of use to future readers.

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Executive summary

The development of public participation in Europe is held back by the absence of evaluation that asks the really important questions. It is not clear how well participation processes are working, and too many reports fail to show how to make them better. In this report EIPP argues that well-directed evaluation of public participation can make it more effective and ensure it makes its intended contribution to democratic life.

This report presents an account of public participation in contemporary policy-making in Europe. It draws on deliberative and participatory democratic theory and discusses the challenges arising from the attempt to do two important things at once: to involve large numbers of people and to enable deliberation among participants. It defines the concept of public participation, its relationship to representative politics and the scope of its use.

Three chapters, on Germany, the UK and Italy, provide snapshots of the opportunities and challenges of public participation in action. They examine government policy and practice, compare civil society developments and present the main actors in the field. They show how political cultures create both opportunities and challenges for public participation.

If public participation is to develop and achieve the confidence of European citizens, the methods used must be selected and applied more systematically and the quality of deliberation must be enhanced. These improvements can be achieved through empirical work on the effects of the methods currently used in public participation, provided there is also a culture of learning among those who commission and facilitate participation.

Successful public participation therefore needs to be more strongly based on:

1. A clearly defined constitutional framework for public participation. Only through an explicit, shared understanding between politicians and citizens can confidence be developed and public participation realise its democratising potential.
2. A systematic approach to public participation methods to help organisers of public participation processes choose the most suitable and effective methods.
3. Rigorous and challenging evaluation of public participation in practice to develop a culture of learning about participation and advance the systematisation of participatory methods.

EIPP offers this report as an encouragement to debate and learning. Governments and public officials who enable and commission public participation processes need to know more about what they are asking for. Other actors – facilitators, moderators, researchers – need to ask themselves the tough questions that evaluation encourages. Citizens have the right to expect that these things be done.

We are keen to hear from people with interesting experiences to report, and we invite all interested parties to offer their comments on the views expressed in the report and join us in promoting and learning from the approach we have outlined.

Basics

This chapter sets out the assumptions and principles on which we have based our review and argument:

- Rationale
- The approach used in this report
- The transformative potential of public participation
- Definition: What is public participation?
- The challenges of participation
- The requirements of further development

Rationale

EIPP was founded on the principle that contemporary democratic politics can be improved by including citizens more directly in decisions that affect them. Reflecting this conviction, our goal is to increase the impact of participatory methods in public decision-making at the local, regional, national and, perhaps, European levels.

The potential for public participation is growing. Opportunities to include citizens directly in policy-making have been created through technological developments, such as the internet. There is more awareness of participation methods. There is an improved theoretical understanding of deliberation as a mode of democratic exchange. This all has the potential to enable citizen involvement in the form of a deliberative exchange between decision-makers and citizens that encourages both sides to justify their positions.

These evolving methods have been increasingly used, at various levels, in Europe and elsewhere, and the trend is set to continue (Roberts, 2004: 336). There is, however, a disconnection between theory and practice. The theoretical discussion in political theory has examined the opportunities and challenges of public deliberation in great detail, but the design of participation processes fails to reflect these debates. This is particularly acute when organisers of public participation do not have a background in democratic processes or social sciences, but are experts in planning and other subjects of participatory decision-making and focus on the content rather than the processes of participation.

This report tries to bring the strands of thinking together. It takes a critical look at the methods: their theoretical basis and their practical benefits and problems. It discusses what developments are needed against the background of public participation as currently used in several countries of Europe.

The links between practice, research and knowledge are crucial. The intention is to stimulate a continuing process of learning.

The approach used in this report

Given the relatively immature development of public participation, we have chosen to examine it from several qualitative, descriptive perspectives.

We examine some highlights of the empirical literature on public participation from a political science perspective: theoretical works on public participation and practitioner handbooks and materials.

We conducted interviews with participation organisers and public administration officials in Germany, Italy and the UK, reviewing participation in public administration and civil society, and looking at its potential for development.

Public participation is understood in many different ways. The range of interpretations can be a problem. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, we set out how we think public participation can be most usefully characterised. There are three parts to our argument:

- Public participation and its transformative potential for democracy. This in an argument for public participation drawn from democratic theory.
- A definition of public participation and its differentiation from other forms of public engagement or involvement.
- The challenges of participation arising from the increasing or advocated use of public participation in contemporary democracies.

The transformative potential of public participation

In recent decades, significant changes have thrown up challenges to European societies. For example, globalisation, the environmental consequences of our consumer society, mass migration and the rise in cultural heterogeneity and economic pressures to reform the welfare state. A common response to these challenges has been to de-politicise politics. For example, by using scientific and economic expertise to neutralise political conflicts; by techno-bureaucratic legalisation, characterised by obligation, precision, and delegation (Keohane/Moravcsik/Slaughter, 2000: 458) and which excludes all those presumed to be inexpert; by strengthening the power of the courts, the executive branch of governments and their administrations.

As polities, the institutions that shape the way a society is governed, become larger and more heterogeneous and their tasks more complex, citizens are removed from contact with and understanding of decision-making. The loss of democratic vitality may seem inevitable. It can be argued, however, that the problem is not the size and heterogeneity of polities nor the tasks they face, but the way they are designed to address democracy (Power Inquiry, 2005: 29). What then are the democratic practices that polities can adopt that will empower ordinary citizens in new ways?

The contribution of citizens to political decision-making is one of the pillars of democracy. In modern democracies, however, participation has largely been restricted to elections, and political decision-making has been experienced vicariously. Citizens are called to the polls once every number of years and their elected representatives take most decisions. Citizens may feel that this kind of involvement in policy-making is unsatisfactory. The disaffection of citizens with existing political processes is suggested by decreasing voter turnout and falling approval ratings for politicians as a profession. Against this background a new strand of democratic thought has gained in strength, participatory and deliberative democracy. It is based on the proposition that democracy would be healthier if it involved more people in its day-to-day processes.

Definition: What is public participation?

Public participation is the deliberative process by which interested or affected citizens, civil society organisations, and government actors are involved in policy-making before a political decision is taken. By deliberation we mean a process of thoughtful discussion based on the giving and taking of reasons for choices.

Public participation recognises the pluralism of aims and values, and enables collaborative problem-solving designed to achieve more legitimate policies. This linking of deliberation and participation is related to the concept of radical democracy as expressed by Cohen/Fung (2004).

Public participation in this sense is intended to complement conventional modes of policy-making in which elected representatives take decisions based in part on their perception of their constituents' preferences. It can be argued that public participation matters most in those decisions in which there are strongly opposed interests, but social harmony or the commitment of resources requires a collective response. For other decisions political participation can be limited to voting for representatives, influencing public opinion, and protesting. Public participation as an addition to representative processes may provide an antidote to national political elites or technocrats. It can counter the over weighted influence of powerful lobbies. It may also offer an effective way to overcome a citizen's sense of futility and powerlessness in the face of these larger forces.

We recognise that the inclusion of deliberation in our model of public participation sets a high level of engagement of citizens. But we argue that deliberation is necessary if public participation is to make a difference to the way in which citizens think about their role in the democratic process. Deliberation requires more that stating your opinion or allowing someone else to state theirs. It entails the possibility of changing your mind.

Information giving/receiving

Public participation in this sense is more than ensuring people are well informed. Information flow, in various forms (based on Rowe/Frewer, 2005: 254), can be thought of as the first order of a typology of citizen engagement, similar to Arnheim's ladder of engagement (1966), in which the first order is the informing of citizens.

When citizens are engaged through information, the flow of information is one-way, from the sponsor of the exercise to the public. The goal is to increase the information citizens have, and thereby change their understanding of or sympathy for a policy or issue. This may be achieved through information campaigns, information broadcasts, TV debates, open houses, hotlines or public hearings and inquiries. The common feature of the methods is that the people they address are intended to be passive recipients of information, though they can ask for clarifications in settings such as public hearings.

Consultation

Consultation, as a second order of citizen engagement, aims to include the interests of the addressees of policies and/or the general public in the decision-making process. The intention is to develop policies that take into account information delivered to decision-makers by citizens. The decision-making process remains in the hands of politicians. The main flow of information in this case is from the citizens to the sponsors of the engagement process. Consultation is common in the European Union where the EU Commission and national governments regularly call on the public to submit their views on consultation documents, such as Green or White papers. Other methods are surveys, opinion polls, focus groups and study circles. Even deliberative opinion polls fall in this category, combining discussions with sampling of public opinion, but explicitly denying citizens any control over policy or action (Fung 2003: 354/5) The intention of this group of methods is to provide decision-makers with a better understanding of what the 'informed opinion' of a certain population would be.

Public participation

Participation is the highest order of public engagement. In public participation information is exchanged between the sponsors of participation processes and the participants. The term participation etymologically and conceptually refers to 'being part of' and 'taking part in' and carries an active component within it (Steffek et al, 2008: 7). Consultation and participation share the goals of improving the quality of decisions through bottom-up flows and creating 'opportunities ... to shape public policy' (Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2006: 9).

In public participation interactions, dialogue and, ideally, deliberation take place. Rather than simply exchanging information, members of both parties (sponsors and participants) allow the possibility of their opinions being

changed. In deliberative settings participants can come to a shared understanding of issues and solutions and can thus make substantially better decisions (Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2006: 20). Participation encompasses multiple methods, such as citizens' juries, action planning, (21st century) town meetings and planning cells.

Instrumental arguments for public participation are geared towards making use of citizens' wisdom and knowledge. This contributes to better regulation and factually higher quality decisions (Surowitzky, 2004). It might even – as a consequence – use fewer resources as implementation is likely to meet less resistance.

Type of citizen engagement	Flow of information
Information/Communication	Organiser → Public
Consultation	Organiser ← Public
Participation	Organiser ↔ Public

Democratic benefits

Beyond these instrumental uses of improving policy, however, public participation that includes deliberation offers several democratic benefits. By ensuring that the voice of those affected is being weighed in government decisions, by causing decision-makers to justify their choices publicly, and by including deliberation and two-way communication between policy-makers and citizens the legitimacy of decisions is increased (e.g. Fung, 2003: 340). Participation is considered to improve the trust of citizens in the political system (Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2006: 9). This in turn can be expected to improve their stance towards the political system, and act as a counterforce to the growing disaffection with politics. Involving citizens in political processes may bring with it a better understanding of the dynamics of politics.

The democratising potential of information alone is limited, as decision-makers are not bound by it. Consultation is more influential, as citizens have greater access to decision-makers and are able to feed into parts of the decision-making process, though they do not have the power to ensure that that their knowledge or opinions are taken into account. It is public participation, with its deliberative qualities, that is most likely to have positive democratic effects.

The qualities of participation – a tension

Differentiation according to the purpose of a method is only half the story. The methods differ in the manner or mode in which they engage people. For example, the degree and quality of deliberation, the empowerment of disadvantaged groups or the transfer information to the intended addressee.

In democratic theory, a participatory-deliberative approach builds on the practical competence and contextual knowledge that citizens possess as users of public services, subjects of public policy and inhabitants of neighbourhoods and ecosystems (Cohen/Fung 2004: 29). In being participatory, the approach emphasises a deeper engagement of citizens with substantive political issues and the officials' responsiveness to their concerns. This approach favours a more deliberative democracy in which citizens reason together about how best to solve public problems. What counts is the 'force of the better argument' (Habermas 1975). While deliberating, participants are caused to explicate and scrutinise a range of differing positions, thereby engaging one another in a process of mutual learning.

These two strands, however, are in conflict.

- If deliberation is the willingness of participants to be convinced by the 'force of the better argument' and participation relies on the inclusion of the 'wisdom of masses' (Surowiecki, 2004), the greater the dispertion of interests, the harder it may be to create the conditions for fair and balanced deliberation . Deliberation depends strongly on context conditions conductive to it, which may be difficult to achieve (Thompson, 2008: 499-500).
- When actors are seeking to be included in decision-making, the form in which they can make their voice heard may seem relatively unimportant. The desire to establish a deliberative forum may seem spurious compared to representation, the opportunity to get their idea across.
- Large-scale, public involvement of citizens in decision-making carries the risk that declamatory, positional politics might reduce the quality of deliberative exchange, when there is no set of rules that explicitly commits citizens to deliberative interaction (Thompson, 2008:513).

There are various attempts to resolve this conflict. For example, developments in theoretical thought (Pingree, 2006; Fung, 2007) that propose structuring deliberation and methods of reasoning in ways that can embrace wide interests, the limitations of human memory and group processes with large numbers; recommendations for improved e-participation techniques (Albrecht et al., 2008). The shared aspiration is participatory approaches that foster deliberative engagement among decision-makers and citizens without diminishing the range of dispersed interests represented and reflected in the decisions. This requires particularly careful design of conditions and methods for communication, engagement and deliberation. That, however, requires knowledge of the effectiveness of such methods beyond what presently exists.

The challenges of participation

Public participation is promoted as a process in which citizens, civil society organisations and government actors are involved in policy-making before a political decision is taken. While attractive to its proponents, such a description alone is hardly enough to establish public participation as a cornerstone of democratic processes in Europe. Arguments are available to those whose interests are threatened by public participation or who are fearful of the demands of implementing it. Participatory practices can be costly in time and money and so may be perceived as inefficient (Involve, 2005). Citizens are thought not to be knowledgeable enough to participate in complex decision-making processes (Surowiezki, 2004). Participatory arrangements are criticised as lacking representativeness by disproportionately involving the wealthy, well-educated and professional (Urbinati/Warren, 2008). Participatory arrangements can reduce the normative quality of deliberation and reinforce rather than soften pre-existing positions (Papadopoulos, 1995; Cohen/Fung, 2004).

The challenge of cost

Participatory practices must be carefully evaluated as to the costs and benefits (see Rowe/Frewer, 2004), and participatory arrangements chosen to suit to the particular area and level of public governance. Costs are not only financial. The political costs of public participation include the loss of administrative and political control over political processes. In the medium term, these short-term costs may be seen as mitigated, as decisions are linked to a better-defined expression of citizens' preferences, which ease implementation and pre-empt conflict. Financially, public participation is likely to be more costly in the short term, as its organisation requires additional money for public meetings, facilitators and the dissemination of results. Whether there will eventually be lower implementation and administration costs is a debateable point.

Public participation places a burden on the time and finances of participants. These costs are often overlooked, a serious omission because they directly influence who can take part (Involve, 2005). Overuse of participatory processes may also discourage citizens to participate, as the costs of repeated involvement may be perceived as too high.

There are real costs to both administrations and to citizens. They can be carefully controlled, but they cannot be completely removed. The challenge, therefore, is to demonstrate that participation carries benefits that are worth the cost.

The benefits for citizens can be fragile. Citizens may be discouraged if the impact of their contribution cannot be ensured. They may become cynical if the participatory processes are, or seem to, be hijacked by business or political parties. The need, therefore, is:

- for organisers, participants and the public at large to be able to see that the participation process delivers what it promises
- for proponents of participation to monitor the costs and benefits of using public participation in each case

The challenge of complexity

Empirical research has shown that exposing political decision-making to the collective wisdom of ordinary citizens can benefit even complex, technical policies, such as energy and transport (Renn et al. 1993; Surowietzki, 2004). Appropriate kinds of participatory practice can resolve the problem of scale and enable a deliberative search for innovative solutions (Goodin, 1995). These practices can be intricate, run for several rounds and rely on structured input by experts, politicians and facilitators. If far-reaching transparency and media coverage are ensured, processes of public participation may inform and deepen the larger public debate on particular issues (see, for example, the consensus conference on nanotechnology in Wisconsin in 2005 (Powell/Kleinmann, 2008)). Our knowledge of the strengths of different participatory methods remains limited, however, and meeting the challenge of complexity will require systematic analysis of a wide range of examples.

The challenge of representativeness

The problem of representation is a double one: drawing a sample of citizens that involves all shades of opinion and, at the same time, satisfying the broader public not individually involved in the participation process. Take for example the use mini-publics[1]. These may meet the challenge of representativeness while controlling costs (Fung, 2007). If the composition of the mini-public represents the different points of view of the citizenry at large, success then depends on debates within the mini-public being conducted on a sound factual basis and in a manner that allows everyone to make his or her argument (Goodin/Dryzek, 2006; Urbinati/Warren 2008).

They are not representative in the conventional sense of being a statistical mirror of society, but mini-publics can have 'some claim to representativeness' by ensuring that 'the diversity of social characteristics and plurality of initial points of view in the larger society are substantially present in the deliberating mini-public' (Goodin/Dryzek, 2006: 221). A representation of equal strength is not absolutely necessary. The key is the guarantee that, within the forum, argument is the basis for interaction, allowing all points of view to be taken up in the deliberation. Participatory practices may even enhance

[1] Mini-publics are small groups of citizens, such as Consensus Conference, Scenario Workshops and World Cafes, that are convened to deliberate on a particular issue.

political equality if they are properly implemented. For example, participatory budgeting in the city of Porto Alegre, although formally open and thus self-selecting, exhibits an overrepresentation of those who have lesser education and lower incomes (Baiocchi 2005).

Where participative processes are directly linked to decision-making, new institutions must be developed to link mini public-based deliberative processes to broader publics to engage the general public (Urbinati/Warren, 2008: 406). When decisions binding the whole population are dependent on a 'mini public', the representativeness of the whole process is vital for its validity or for its legal status. Representativeness can be delivered through a combination of selection of participants (including self-selection) and the method of bringing all arguments into the process. An alternative is to create an active link between the outcomes of the participatory process and the wider public. For example, the outcomes could be subjected to a referendum by all citizens or the final adoption left to elected representatives who could accept the outcome of deliberation only as a recommendation.

What does the further development of public participation require?

Irrespective of these challenges and present uncertainties about how they can be met, many participatory practices are already more involving and effective than the conventional configuration of elected representation and bureaucratic or techno-bureaucratic administration. Their outcomes may be more fair and equitable (Fung 2004). Participatory practices are helping to legitimate public policies and increase official accountability (Goodin/Dryzek 2006). The inclusion of ordinary citizens in the decision-making process has the potential to democratise the political system (Blondiaux, 2008: 62) and society at large. Public participation allows citizens to re-evaluate their perceptions and take in or at least comprehend alternative views, which in turn may allow contentious issues to be resolved before they become too polarised (cf. CCPARDC, 2007). With appropriate suitable methods, this is even possible for 'hot' issues where emotions run high, as this mobilises participants and sustains the process over time (Fung, 2003: 345). Such practice and potential benefits contrasts with less deliberative processes that have no interest in agreement, only decision. Referenda, for example, are prone to polarisation and do not foster the rational exchange of arguments (Vreess/Semetko, 2002).

The ambition for every sponsor of public participation is to build on these initial successes. For that they need more than good examples. They need in-depth, systematic knowledge of the effects of different kinds of participatory processes on the quality of decision and the democratic benefits and of how they handle the issues of cost, complexity and representativeness.

Later in this report we will examine how such systematic knowledge may be developed. But first, in the next few chapters we look at the state of play in the application of public participation in countries of Europe.

Participation in three countries

Emerging public participation in Europe

Participation has begun to establish itself as a popular alternative for making routine decisions and resolving conflicts in European public life. In most EU member states there are arrangements allowing the direct involvement of citizens in policy-making. Some cover issues such as urban development, planning, environmental questions or science policy. Most are set at the local or community level. The impact on the local community is seen as immediate and questions of representativeness are less pronounced in a small constituency, and the use of citizens' local knowledge is attractive. Participation takes place at the national and even the EU level, but these processes are mostly experimental.

Participation ranges from surveys, through hearings, public meetings, to referenda, citizen juries, consensus conferences or scenario workshops.

Snapshots of participation

The following three chapters present pictures of the ways in which public participation is taking place in the UK, Germany and Italy. A small selection of experiences from other countries is offered as well, and it is hoped that future contributors will augment these. The analysis draws on the general state of participation in the countries and the practice of relevant actors, from national governments to organisations supporting participation processes.

The reports on the UK, Germany and Italy offer distinct perspectives reflecting their authors' cultural and professional backgrounds. Using different perspectives is a valuable contribution to evaluating public participation.

The authors tell three different stories, revealing features of their country's democratic evolution. The contrasts between the stories heighten recognition of some of the influences on the development of public participation.

United Kingdom

Trevor Boutall reports on the situation in the UK, principally based on English experience, against the background of extensive government activity in recent years to establish public participation in local and regional (as well as some national) policy-making. So rather than identifying a need for the broader use of public participation, he identifies the opportunities and challenges as being in the implementation of public participation mechanisms, criticised by some commentators as not being coherent. He paints a broad picture of cooperation between governmental actors and the service providers in civil society.

Germany

Simon Dalferth in his report on Germany emphasises the emergent nature of a public participation framework. This looks different from the British experience, chiefly because of the absence of a binding governmental approach to participation and an understanding of public participation that carries a strong undertone of mutual help. The chapter explores the use of eParticipation, which is emerging as a tool for the federal level, and describes its emergence within Germany and beyond.

Italy

The chapter by Renzo Provedel approaches public participation in Italy from a perspective that is critical of Italian politics. Italy combines strong civil society activity, and therefore strong social capital (Putnam, 1993), with a weakness in democratic trust. There is a strikingly high concentration of information and media resources and a fundamental, long-standing mistrust of the political caste. As a result, Provedel presents public participation as an oppositional instrument that empowers the people rather than as a cooperative effort by civil society and public administration.

Lessons from differences

The three reports illustrate that public participation evokes different expectations and understandings in different cultural contexts. This diversity could be construed as a challenge for public participation: the need to allow for cultural conditions in planning the use of public participation, especially in transnational settings. With further national or regional examples, diversity could also provide useful insights into factors that are significant in determining the success of participation.

Public participation in the United Kingdom

Trevor Boutall

The United Kingdom has devolved an assorted range of responsibilities to assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Among these is the ability to determine means of decision-making within these countries. This chapter draws largely on the experience of public participation in England, which does not have devolved government; the national UK government retains responsibility.

- Government policy and practice
- Government Initiatives to build participation capacity
- Involve
- Flourishing civil society
- Sustainability of public participation in UK
- Organisations supporting participation
- Summary of needs and opportunities in the UK

Government policy and practice

Riding the tidal wave of interest created by the publication of the Power Inquiry's 2006 seminal paper and the explosion of opportunities for individuals to make their voices heard through Web 2.0, public participation in UK Government policy and decision-making at all levels is set to grow exponentially over the next 3-5 years. Already there is much activity at national and local levels (see, for example, *Engage for Change*, *Champions of Participation*, *peopleandparticipation.net*) but, typically, this is still in experimental forms.

Government policy is to give citizens a much stronger voice in decision-making and even, where appropriate, transfer control of assets to citizen groups. For example, the White Paper *Communities in control: Real people, real power* and the *Local Government, Economic Development and Construction* Bill requires local authorities to promote democracy and facilitate petitions and places a duty on public authorities to involve the public in its functions; from a present 20 local authorities practising participatory budgeting, all 400 will be expected to do so within the next three years; transfer of housing management, local parks and community buildings. The Sustainable Development Commission has even proposed a semi-permanent large-scale deliberative citizens' forum to inform long-term political decision-making along the lines of America Speaks (see *UK Citizens' Council for the Future: Creating new spaces for citizens' voices and long-term thinking in politics*).

Government initiatives to build participation capacity

This planned activity will reveal an enormous gap in the capability of public officials (civil servants at national level and local government officers) to engage citizens effectively in policy and decision-making[2]. It will also highlight a culture gap: public officials, unused to, and unconvinced of the benefits of, involving citizens in policy making. A similar gap also exists amongst elected representatives who want to follow their own policy direction regardless of the opinions of the public. *Engage for Change* makes it clear that the culture and capability gaps are far greater at central government level than at local government level, where officials are closer to citizens and have some first-hand experience of engagement and its benefits. These gaps are not unique to government – they also appear within other organisations such as professional bodies that need to engage their members.

The Government has recognised these problems and established or supported a number of initiatives in response:

- The Ministry of Justice's Democratic Engagement Branch, which supports all central government departments in engaging citizens
- The department of Communities and Local Government (CLG), which promotes public participation at local level (called "Community Empowerment")
- The department of Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), which coordinates public consultations across central government
- The Cabinet Office's Government Communicators Network, promoting and disseminating good practice in all forms of central government communications, including engagement activities
- The Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA), an agency of the Local Government Association representing all local authorities, which supports and promotes best practice in engaging citizens at local level. IDeA supports many specialist virtual communities of practice, some of which cover the engagement area.

Two people were interviewed from government, Lisa Sevell from the central government *Department of Work and Pensions* (DWP) – the UK Government Ministry responsible for getting unemployed people to work, paying unemployment and disability benefits, encouraging people to plan financially for their retirement and paying state pensions), and Bridget Williams from

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[2] A distinction is made between policy making (an activity carried out by paid public officials) and decision-making (carried out by their elected political masters).

Shropshire County Council, becoming a unitary authority undertaking all local decision-making and services from April 2009.

Bridget Williams confirmed that: 'Participation is at the heart of policy in Shropshire and will be overseen from the Chief Executive's Office in the new organisation. The new organisation envisages devolving some power and budgets to a number of *Local Joint Committees* in the different communities in Shropshire, where the citizens will be encouraged to play a much greater role in policy-making.'

As Head of Digital Marketing Strategy at DWP, Lisa Sevell has experience of engaging citizens using social media and digital polling techniques. Lisa recognises that she and her colleagues in other departments are learning the rules of using social and digital media as they go along. They seek help and guidance from the Government Communications Network, IDeA's Digital People's Network and a variety of websites, forums, and blogs. She would welcome some more structured guidance, standards and training. She would also like to see social and digital media much more strongly emphasised in professional courses and qualifications.

Players in government

The main users of strategies and methods to engage the public are, and will be, government officials at all levels. They work in:

- UK parliament
- UK government ministries/departments
- devolved governments (Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly)
- ministries/departments within the devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)
- elected regional governments in England (at the moment only London has an elected regional tier)
- non-elected (central government-appointed) regional governments in the other English Regions
- local authorities, which are either unitary (ie with just one tier, like all the counties in Wales) or two-tier (county and district/borough)

There are also many government agencies which need to involve (indeed, will have a duty to involve) people in their decisions, such as:

- National Health Service (by far the biggest and most important)
- Benefits Agency
- HM Revenue and Customs
- National Lottery Foundation
- Arts Council
- Sport England

and many more delivering government policy

Involve

Involve is a relatively small, not-for-profit organisation based in London, which over the past five years has established itself as expert in providing the government at all levels with support for public participation activities. It offers an example of leading edge thinking and practice. Its main activities are:

- research into participation methods and evaluations of effectiveness
- capacity-building, training and developing public officials to become effective facilitators of engagement
- delivering engagement projects for clients on a consultancy basis. consultancy is not core business, but is important for Involve to keep grounded in practice
- promoting good engagement practice through publications, general communication and, particularly, www.peopleandparticiation.net. This is a prototype toolkit (strongly reflecting the work of Archon Fung, 2006) that helps participation organisers to choose the most appropriate method for the issue and context.

These activities create a virtuous circle (research – action – evaluation – action) accumulating knowledge, expertise and innovative potential.

Involve sees public participation as a strategic activity. It is necessary to understand (and be transparent about) the strategic objectives of the engagement and select the appropriate mix of methods to achieve these objectives. Involve does not support any proprietary method of engagement, and is wary of blanket prescriptive policies such as the government's ambition that all English local authorities adopt participatory budgeting.

Flourishing Civil Society

Civil society in the UK is highly developed. There are approximately 141,000 registered voluntary and community organisations in the UK, with over 3 million volunteer staff contributing in excess of 90 million hours of time each year. Although most of these organisations deliver services of some kind, many of them (e.g. *Oxfam*, *Friends of the Earth*, the *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds*, the *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*) are also lobbying organisations, prepared to make representations to government, corporations or individuals in order to defend the values, principles and interests of their members. On local issues (such as a proposed motorway or industrial development or the closure of an old people's home) ad hoc groups quickly coalesce to resist the proposals, using the full range of democratic means and occasionally illegal ones (such as building peace camps, squatting in trees or tunnelling under the

bulldozers). Civil society demonstrates every year its ability to oppose unpopular policies, despite a significant resource gap between civil society and government or corporations, which leads in turn to a power gap.

While civil society could increase its capacity and stamina to engage with policy and decision makers, it is already able to make its voice heard when the issue is important to citizens and when citizens believe they are able to make an impact. There are hundreds of thousands of civil society organisations trying to influence government policy through campaigning, lobbying and other means It is vital to recognise, though, that the poorest, least educated, most marginalised members of UK society – the ones most in need of sympathetic government policies – are the ones least able to engage and advocate on their own behalf. The Community Empowerment White Paper sets aside resources specifically to help develop the capacity of marginalised groups to engage.

Representatives of two organisations were interviewed, Neil Sinden from the *Campaign to Protect Rural England* and David Atkins from *RAGE* (Relatives Action Group for the Elderly) which campaigns at a local level to prevent the closure of care homes for the elderly.

Neil Sinden considers that the public are well capable of participating in decision-making, but that the UK Government has, over the past few decades, taken opportunities for participation away – a very different perspective than that which the Government presents in the Community Empowerment White Paper. He believes there is a credibility gap. On the one hand, the Government is proposing greater Community Empowerment, and on the other it is building a legislative infrastructure that provides less and less opportunity for participation in key decisions that affect people's lives. He also highlighted a natural imbalance of power which needs some adjusting – rich corporations and Government have enormous resources, which the public and NGOs do not enjoy, and marginalised groups may need support to make their voices heard.

The RAGE website describes the *Anatomy of a Home Closure*, the disastrous consequences (including breaches of the Human Right to Life) when a local authority tries to close a care home for the elderly without properly consulting the residents and their families. David Atkins provides good examples of the benefits when either:

- the council genuinely consults with residents and their relatives on the closure (or not) of the Home, or
- the council engages the residents and their relatives in planning the closure of the Home and the transfer of residents to another Home safely (many of the residents have Alzheimer's or dementia and so are completely lost in a new environment).

Organisations Supporting Participation

Involve, as previously mentioned, is the leading organisation supporting the government and public officials to implement good practice in public participation throughout the UK. However, *Involve* is a not-for-profit organisation and recognises that there is so much work to do that other organisations will be required to help in the process. This is why their emphasis is on capacity building, not delivering facilitation services.

The *Young Foundation* focuses on community development through action research projects which can then become models for implementation elsewhere. Its director, Geoff Mulgan, is also the chair of *Involve*, but the two organisatiuons are distinct.

Other organisations in addition to apart from the government ones listed above that are also important include:

- *DEMOS*, the 'think tank for everyday democracy'
- *Institute for Public Policy Research* an independent think tank, one of whose research themes is "Democracy, Citizenship and Power"
- *Institute of Development Studies* at Sussex University, an international research centre. 'Politics and Power' is just one of about 20 research subjects it is interested in
- *New Economics Foundation* working in the area of 'Participation and Democracy' developing methods and tools and providing consultancy
- *NHS Centre for Involvement,* providing resources for the NHS to involve patients
- *Our Kingdom* provides a forum for citizens to debate democracy issues.
- *Participation Cymru,* providing resources for participation in Wales (also in Welsh language)

Sustainability of Public Participation in UK

One question is whether this frenzy of enthusiasm and activity about public participation is just a passing fashion or a sustainable policy that will really enter the mainstream of democratic life in the UK. Two major risks have been identified: a change of national government to one with very different policies; an economic recession with severely limited resources for engagement and a consequent tendency for the government to make more authoritarian decisions.

The three main UK political parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat) all try to occupy the same middle ground and have policies so closely aligned that they are barely distinguishable for each other. This is one of the key reasons the Power Inquiry found to account for the drop in voting in national and local elections. They try to present themselves as the party closest to the people. The Liberal Democrats, although relatively poorly represented

at national level, control many local authorities precisely because of the grass roots activities of local councillors, building trust and rapport with their constituents. Edward Andersson of *Involve* believes that a change of government is unlikely to change the policy of increasing participation, although the headline programmes might change and there may be a shift in focus from partnership approaches to more direct processes such as referenda on council taxes.

While a continuing, severe economic recession would mean pressure on public resources leading to non-essential programmes being closed, this is unlikely to affect the tide of greater participation. Indeed, it could be argued that unemployed individuals will have more time and personal incentives to get involved in policy decisions, and national and local authorities may wish to draw on these resources. The UK has a strong tradition of citizens working closely together in a crisis, which was shown to be still alive during the London bombings in 2006.

Public participation seems set to grow rapidly in the UK during the next government (3-5 years) and seems likely to be sustained at a high level for at least two government terms (10 years), thereafter. The form of the participation and the media used may well, however, be unrecognisable in ten years' time.

Summary of needs and opportunities in the UK

Problems

- **Culture**. Public officials and politicians are unused to engaging citizens fully in the policy development process, believe that the issues are too complex for non-specialists to comment on, do not understand the benefits from public participation and believe that the processes are costly and time-consuming.
- **Capacity and competence**. Public officials do not have the competence or tools to hand to facilitate or commission participation activities.
- **Communication**. Information about the benefits of public participation and methods to achieve it is not reaching public officials. Currently, information comes from a number of sources of varying reliability and is targeted specifically at central government, local government or agency officials, or at voluntary and community sector workers. Many of these sources are firewall- and password-protected, which prevents information and experiences being exchanged between the different sectors.
- **Exclusion of the marginalised**. The poorest and most marginalised in society need special support to enable their voices to be heard.
- **Lack of trust**. People do not trust the government to really want to engage with them. There is 'consultation fatigue' and lack of coherence between what the government says (fine words in White Papers) and what it does (legislation that puts strategic planning in the hands of a non-democratic commission). There is lack of trust also in the other direction – public officials do not trust the public to come up with sensible solutions to problems.
- **Lack of strategic coherence**. Each government department, local authority or agency works in isolation on single issues, whereas, from the citizen's point of view, many of the issues are interlinked.
- **Lack of vision**. No publication from government, think tanks or research institutes really paints a compelling vision of what it would be like (the benefits) to live in a democracy that includes representation, participation, deliberation and direct action.
- **Lack of resources**. Insufficient resources are provided to support the aspirations of government for participation.

Solutions

- **Developing a participation culture and capacity** amongst public officials through communities of practice and through more effective communication. For example, more resources are needed like PeopleandParticipation.net that have the potential to provide reliable and up-to-date tools and information, regular newsletters and a lively forum for exchange of ideas and problem-solving. Such a 'PeopleandParticipation.network' with its virtual activity complemented by face-to-face conferences and local events would allow learning through the exchange of experiences and ideas.
- **Training in use of participation techniques** to develop capacity. Involve already does some of this, as do other providers. The demand will increase significantly in the next few years.
- **Consultancy** in project design, management and delivery of engagement activities. There will be huge demand for consultancy to compensate for the lack of capacity and competence in government. Involve will deliver some of this, but it is likely that a range of new or established consultancies will start offering services based on the major international methodologies.
- **Participation audits** of government polices and legislation. To increase trust in government, an independent body will need to hold government to account by conducting (and publishing) a 'Participation Impact Analysis' of each new policy or proposed law to see the extent to which it is aligned with the government's espoused position on participation.
- **Development of a set of national standards** for public participation. As has happened in Scotland and Wales, this will help ensure that all public officials work to the same standards and consult with colleagues in other departments to ensure coherence from the citizen's point of view.
- **Support for the development of a Europe-wide vision** for public participation. Build on engagement strategies such as European Citizens' Consultation and Healthy Democracy; use techniques such as Future Search and Scenario Planning; create for officials and the public a vision of a Europe in which full public participation is the norm.

Public participation in Germany

Simon Dalferth

This chapter explores public participation in Germany, in particular the following topics:

- Government – policy, practice and initiatives
- Regional and city initiatives
- Zebralog
- Flourishing civil society
- e-participation
- Sustainability of public participation in Germany
- Organisations supporting participation
- Problems
- Needs and opportunities

In Germany official publications identify a high level of civic engagement in the country (Enquete-Kommission, 2000). The significance of participation, however, depends on the issue. In urban planning, participatory structures have been in place for the last thirty years (see Renn et al. 1993, Baumann et al., 2004). In some areas, citizen participation has been legally enshrined as in the German building law of 1976 that states the public must be consulted on development projects. There have been citizen consultations on energy policy (Renn et al. 1993), on questions of environmental policy (Baumann et al. 2004) and recently on health issues (Heimgesetz Niedersachsen).

Government players

The federal government is currently and for the foreseeable future not going to be a major user of strategies and methods of citizen participation. Reasons are primarily constitutional restrictions. The federal government, however, does support inquiries in these matters. Within the federal government the focus of these activities lies with the ministry for family matters, elderly citizens, women and youth.

Regional and local government, in contrast, are quite actively engaging citizens in different matters. They work closely with private companies to organise citizen participation processes. The focus of these processes lies on urban planning, infrastructure development and, partly, investment decisions.

Government policy and practice

Most official activity to engage citizens is restricted to the local and municipal level. At the federal level, referenda, for example, are constitutionally prohibited. At the federal level the possibility of using eParticipation has only recently been examined, but there is now support for the development of tools to foster participatory practices on the internet. Within the constitutional constraints, participation at federal level is focussed on consultation and information. Most innovative methods are to be found at local level.

Government initiatives to build participatory capacity

The current approach of the German government to citizen engagement is strongly influenced by notions of social capital. Civic engagement is not seen primarily as participation in political decision-making, but as a broader concept encompassing everything from donating money to volunteering and showing moral courage. Civic engagement is to a large degree self-organising. This in turn means that government practice and policy focuses on the consequences and costs of social and community engagement. The political dimension of public engagement is merely a subcategory.

This is reflected in the initiative *Zivilengagement* (civic engagement) launched in 2007 based at the ministry for family matters, the elderly, women and youth (*BMFSFJ*).The focus is on issues such as health, social affairs, employment, mutual help and culture. It is strongly linked with corporate social responsibility. In addition, rather than seeking to establishing civic engagement as a fixture in political decision-making, the debate focuses on the conditions which would foster further engagement of citizens through self-organising or voluntary means, such as tax benefits for charities. The formal goal of this federal initiative is to collect data and facts about the state of citizen engagement. In 2009 a new government campaign started, called *Geben gibt*, which seeks to establish citizen engagement more prominently among the public. The goal is to establish a common understanding of what civic engagement encompasses.

There is a separation of civil engagement from political involvement. In a parliamentary hearing this assessment was supported by the estimate that only two percent of those who are actively engaged in civic activity see themselves involved in political activities.

Two institutions have published reports whose understanding of citizen engagement is likely to

determine German policy and the constitutional framework for public participation.[3]

- A committee in the German Bundestag, which exclusively deals with citizen participation (www.bundestag.de/ausschuesse/a13/buerger_eng/index.html).
- A special commission (Enquete-Kommission) on citizen engagement (see dip.bundestag.de/btd/14/089/1408900.pdf)

The Enquete commission and the Bundestag committee are concerned with 'civic engagement', which subsumes all voluntary activity of citizens in Germany. They focus on service delivery through non-state actors in areas such as health, social services or sport. This broad approach evaluates civic activity in line with Robert Putnam's concept of 'social capital' within society as the building block for democracy (1993). Participation in political decision-making, in this frame of reference, is a process within the area of civic engagement that should be supported, but is not an essential or priority feature.

Regional and city initiatives

While the federal level is rather inhibited in its use of public participation processes, in the last two decades new opportunities for this political component of citizen engagement have been written into local laws. This has allowed citizens to participate more widely in local policy-making by initiating referenda and citizens' consultations. Based on this, the citizens of Berlin initiated several referenda on urban development and economic policy. Such opportunities have been only sparingly used. Reasons quoted were the reluctance of local government to concede real opportunities to citizens and the perception of citizens that their efforts would not be taken up (Unterausschuss, 2008).

Here is a significant example. In 2006 and 2007 Rheinland-Pfalz, engaged in a broad and inclusive process to have citizens participate in public sector reform (www.buergerkongresse.de). The goal was to reform the structure of communal administration according to the needs and views of citizens and the administration together. Rather than starting with the needs of the administration, the state chancellery organised citizens congresses and planning cells to find out more what citizens expected from their administration. The administration is keen to emphasise that the undertaking was an experiment, but the state chancellery assessed the results positively. Despite significant costs (the exercise cost somewhere around 600.000 Euro), the important outcome is that the administration was impressed with the quality of the results of the consultations and the debate within the forums. Such an experience is crucial in establishing participation in the future. It does not alleviate all fears of the administration about losing their power and governing capacity, but the results in Rheinland-Pfalz show that citizens are not necessarily opposed to what an administration proposes and are ready to cooperate constructively. It is still uncertain to what degree this consultation will have an impact on the eventual outcome. The citizens' report will form the basis for the government's proposal, but in the end parliament will decide on the nature of reform. Will the impressive nature of the exercise make it difficult to diverge significantly from what the citizens decided?

Projects like this are considered by the organisers to be experiments. This shows that participation is being taken cautiously but seriously by public administration. Experiments also raise expectations, and this suggests there will be an increasing demand for participation. At the same time, participation is still considered rather exotic and not fit or able to be trusted for most political purposes. Some of this can be attributed to a lack of knowledge and experience with participation processes, and some to a cultural resistance. More reliable data about the effectiveness and process characteristics of participation processes may help to dispel some fears about participation.

At city level, the most prominent activities are participatory budgets. Unlike most other activities, they are binding on specified budgetary items. In Germany, as in many countries, they are on the increase. Examples are Cologne (buergerhaushalt.stadt-koeln.de/), Freiburg (www.beteiligungshaushalt.freiburg.de/) and Berlin (www.buergerhaushalt-berlin.de/), where citizens decide about local public investment decisions. A recent research project at the Humboldt University Berlin provides an overview of these participatory processes (www.buergerhaushalt.org/). The importance of these processes is that they allow the administration to have a positive experience of participation.

There is, however, no mechanism for absorbing the results of participation exercises into the political process. The federal and the sub federal levels lack any framework learning lessons about what makes sustainable and democratically effective participation. The organisers and addressees of participatory processes are committed the results, but the absence of a legal framework or policy means that politicians must now improvise to determine the reputation and future of ambitious projects like these.

Zebralog

Zebralog (www.zebralog.de) is a small non-profit consultancy in Berlin. They organise public participation processes with private and public actors and promote cross-media participation tools. They combine face-to-face participation with innovative media and new technology to improve the flow of information. Working with local authorities they have been engaged in several large scale projects. They have organised citizen budgets in Cologne and Berlin-Lichtenberg. They have found that

[3] Ministerial initiatives have been developed in response to their reports and activities.

they had good results where the responsible administrator was open to the new approach. When an administration fully supports the approach, it is possible to integrate with existing institutional processes. As a consequence the citizens' budget in Berlin-Lichtenberg is now in its fifth year, and sufficiently established to work without the involvement of an external organiser. The main problem found with the repeated use of the same process is that it becomes difficult to motivate people to participate in the same numbers when the novelty has worn off.

Zebralog has organised citizen consultations on urban planning projects, such as Tempelhof airport in Berlin. They used a combination of offline (face-to-face) citizens' assemblies and online discussion forums, where citizens could propose projects and vote for or against existing projects, in order to determine the preferences for the future use of the airport.

Civil society actors

There are numerous actors who promote and organise participation. They focus primarily on urban planning and social affairs, in line with the legal constraints.

Beyond these service providers, a number of initiatives aim to foster civil society development and the establishment of more extensive participation in the political system. They do not directly organise such processes, but establish networks and opportunities for exchanging best practice. Some support small-scale, bottom-up or grass roots projects that include citizens in developing their social world.

The federal network of civic engagement (*BBE* www.b-b-e.de/) is an initiative which emerged from the Year of Voluntary Service 2001. It has developed a nice overview of the networked structures of civil society in Germany in the social domain. It focuses on the interconnectedness of those people and organisations developing social capital in Germany. In its overview of initiatives for citizen engagement, the strong role of the state in setting up these projects is evident. Either they are embedded in state structures or have emerged from events such as the year on citizen engagement.

In a similar manner the foundation *Mitarbeit* (co-operation www.mitarbeit.de/) and the initiative *Deutschland zum Selbermachen* (Do It Yourself Germany) work to establish civil society initiatives and help them participate in policy-making at the communal and local level. They also try to bring together those able to contribute to individual projects and organisers searching for help. They can be criticised for being funded and organised by the initiative for a new social market economy, *Neue Soziale Markttwirtschaft*. This is a lobby organisation that is very close to large business and employee organisations and aims for a liberal reform of the economy in Germany.

Flourishing civil society

Civic engagement in Germany is widespread. 34% of the population are civically engaged (Enquete Kommission, 2004: 26). This activity is, however, seldom politically or socially oriented. It is estimated that only 2% of those citizens who do voluntary service engage in socio-political activities on the local level (Unterausschuss, 2008: 5).

The main focus of civil society organisations is to provide services. At the same time, many of these organisations build up social capital. To say that civic engagement is declining seems, therefore, too simplistic. Citizens are not becoming less politically interested. As the latest Shell Youth study has shown, young people are not uninterested in politics, but distrust political institutions. They are politically active in different forms of social engagement (Shell Jugendstudie, 2006). This is reflected in the growing number of activists, for example in Attac, which has taken up issues such as health care reform, German labour market reforms, the war in Iraq and rail privatization.

Why do so few people who are willing to devote time and resources to voluntary work engage, even loosely, in the political domain? It could be that the institutional structures of politics discourage citizens from participating: they think that their activity will not be welcomed. Or perhaps they have bad experiences when attempting to influence policy-making through activism (Unterausschuss, 2008; Offe, 2006).

E-Participation

Germany as a whole lags behind the USA, the UK and others in the use of eParticipation mechanisms., there are calls from government and parliament to support the development of eParticipation tools and methods (Albrecht et al. 2008: 38). Their use is, however, mostly limited to chats, forums and surveys. The federal government is now looking into how the internet and social media can be used to foster participation beyond just information and consultation. This initiative is still in its infancy.

Aside from government, there are numerous established and emergent actors, whose aim it is to promote and develop eParticipation in Germany. For a good but slightly outdated overview see www.initiative-eparticipation.de/. On the research side, the Fraunhofer E-Government centre and the institute for information management (*ifib*) at the University of Bremen are notably active. Their focus is on eGovernment, which includes service provision, rather than eParticipation in the strict sense.

Sustainability of public participation in Germany

There is a potential in Germany to engage citizens in policy-making. Their social engagement shows that they have resources at hand to dispense. At the moment these resources are tapped through referenda, citizen panels and participatory budgets. Beyond these practical innovations, politics is beginning to attend to citizen engagement, but with no great emphasis on political decision-making. After the Enquete commission published its report on civic engagement, the federal government launched initiatives to raise public awareness and to improve the conditions for citizens to become active in the voluntary sector.

This activity has been driven by a growing awareness that such citizen engagement, even when it is not politically focussed, may offer a way to overcome the disenchantment of citizens with politics and the polity more generally. But while the government is set to improve the conditions for social volunteering, demands to improve direct access of citizens to decision-making forums remain lower down the agenda. Representatives of the SPD and the CDU even maintain that existing opportunities for citizens are sufficient (Unterausschus, 2008: 11).

So in order to establish citizen participation in Germany, efforts must be undertaken to reduce the reservations of the administration and traditional politicians by delivering more well-planned and well-executed participation processes together with reliable information about their impact.

Organisations supporting participation

The following are important examples of participation organisers in Germany.

The German Institute for Community Organising (*DICO* www.dico-berlin.org) also fosters community engagement. Dually based in academic research on social work at the catholic university for social work in Berlin and practical community organising in New York and Philadelphia, *DICO* support and advises communities organising themselves.

DEMOS (www.demos-monitor.de) is a Delphi Mediation Online System using a interactive platform on the internet to channel citizen participation. It translates the offline Delphi process, which aims to mobilise expert knowledge through surveys and questionnaires in combination with ordering of options to arrive at better results online. The process is monitored by facilitators and allows dynamic feedback in the deliberation process. It has been used in citizen consultations in Hamburg and Munich (www.wornex.com/content/view/16/83/).

The product has been developed by *TuTech* (tutech.de/), a company to facilitate knowledge transfer between academia and business in the Hamburg region. TuTech organises citizen consultation projects for public administration. Among others, they are responsible for the citizen budget processes in Freiburg and Hamburg. *Tutech* is also active in the area of urban planning where it uses quite interactive tools to integrate citizens directly into the planning process. In addition, *TuTech* coordinates the European network for eParticiaption, *PEP-Net* (www.pep-net.eu).

IFOK (www.ifok.de/) is a consultancy firm specialising in change management using a combination of off- and online tools to foster participation. Their approach to participation is rather instrumental and large scale. They emphasise the economic and organisational advantages of better regulation through participation. In particular they cooperate with large private organisations and public administration to develop new approaches to a particular problem. For example, they organised a 'pact on employment' with BASF and a citizen dialogue on the extension of the airport Frankfurt. In the EU context, they co-organise European Citizens Consultations, where European citizens come together to deliberate on the future of the EU (Nanz/Dalferth, 2009).

Another research-based provider of services on discursive participation methods is *Dialogik* (www.dialogik-expert.de/), which focuses on risk assessment in health, social and communication policy. It is closely connected to the University of Stuttgart, where Otfried Renn holds a professorship, and with *IFOK*, which has the same CEO (Hans-Peter Meister). The application of public participation with direct and constant scientific evaluation is at the core of this enterprise. It focuses on applied research, however, and does not directly organise participation processes.

Together with *Zebralog*, these are the largest providers of participatory services in Germany. They organise participatory processes for the administration. For some this locates them too close to government to represent the interests of civil society. They are very practically oriented. Their primary interest is to convince their often reluctant clients of how effective and useful participation is. In doing so they do not have the capacities to look conceptually– in the words of *TuTech* and *Zebralog* – beyond what they are doing at, for example, the quality of outcomes, the adequacy of the methods they chose (their clients are often happy to use what has been used elsewhere rather than use new methods) and the democratic effects of participation.

The plan of the federal government to increase funding for research into civic engagement and to establish more reliable facts on the issue is promising. It will create public exposure in the wider activist community and, through the focus of 'Giving gives' in the media, the public in general. This creates the opportunity, at least, for discussion of more widespread and sustainable citizen participation in Germany.

Other projects of interest

The Bertelsmann foundation, the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation and the Ludwig Erhard Foundation organised a BürgerForm Soziale Marktwirtschaft (Citizen Forum 'Social market economy') where 350 citizens were invited to develop their views on a new social market economy through a combination of offline and online consultative processes (www.buergerforum2008.de). The Bertelsmann foundation is generally interested in fostering public participation, especially as they are convinced that it can lead to better regulation and can be used as a tool to foster democracy. This is exemplified by the follow up project BürgerForum Europa (www.buergerofurm2009.de).4 As education for democracy is another of their interests, they are willing to invest in this area. This assessment is supported by Zebralog, who work with them.

In a similar vein, the 'Wegweiser Bürgergesellschaft' provides extensive information about participation methods and preconditions for public participation. (www.buergergesellschaft.de/politische-teilhabe/modelle-und-methoden-der-buergerbeteiligung/103413/)

[4] Disclosure: EIPP is evaluating the BürgerForum Europa

Summary of needs and opportunities in Germany

Problems

- **Culture**. Public officials have little experience with public participation. They are uncertain and critical of its potential and usefulness. From the interviews came the impression that a greater openness to the idea comes as a new generation of administrator succeeds the old. At the moment the success of participation still relies on the individual administrator.
- **Policy.** There is no coordinated approach by the government. Each level of government, each ministry decides independently when and how to implement participation processes. The government has no central strategy on how to improve the political participation of citizens. Nor does this aspect of citizen engagement seem to be high on the agenda.
- **Lack of trust.** Citizens do not trust public institutions to take their concerns seriously and to solve their problems.
- **Lack of connectedness.** Civil society actors are not sufficiently interconnected. While there are emerging networks, these could be much stronger and better coordinated. This holds especially for the international networks.
- **Citizens not politically active.** Engagement is primarily focussed on social issues, not on political affairs.
- **Missing knowledge.** There are only few research institutions that deal systematically with citizen participation.

Opportunities

- **Civil society in Germany is strong.** Many people are active and willing to dedicate their time and effort.
- **There is a broad diversity of actors** active in participation in Germany. This includes government and private actors.
- **Participation is growing**, at least experimentally, in German public administration. Many insecurities remain, but the more it is rolled out, the more normal it becomes.

Challenges

- **Growing awareness.** There is increasing realisation of the need to engage citizens more in policy-making on all political levels.
- **Research.** There is limited systematic research with a focus on the democracy-enhancing effects of public participation. Funds are being made available to research into and organise citizen participation. This can help to speed up the broader establishment of citizen participation.
- **Expertise and learning.** Given limited experience, there is a need on the part of public authorities and civil society organisations for expertise in education and consultancy: in-depth knowledge of public participation and its evaluation.
- **Information exchange.** There is virtually no exchange with projects abroad and networks need to be created to take advantage of comparative studies and develop skills in transnational participation.

Public participation in Italy

Renzo Provedel

In Italy, participation can be broadly understood through four characteristics:

- Italians might be unhappy about their current political system, but they are not apathetic.
- There is large-scale participation of citizens in not-for-profit and social associations. Approximately 14% of the adult population are active in these associations, which means about 7 million people. About 50% of them are active at least once a week in these associations. This number grew strongly after judges intervened against political corruption in their *mani pulite* (clean hands) campaign in the 1990s. During this time, party membership rapidly declined and today encompasses only 5% of the adult population.[5]
- In 2001 the principle of subsidiarity was introduced in article 118 of the Italian constitution. This principle gave citizens the right to deal directly with the 'common interests of society'. It also contributed to the decentralization of central political power to regions and cities, which had started in the 1980s and gained momentum in the last 10 years. This presents opportunities for extended citizen participation, already apparent at the local level under the leadership of local governors and mayors.
- A significant problem in Italy is the lack of independent information. This is due to the duopoly in television. RAI, the state owned station, is 'tele-guided' by politicians. Mediaset, privately owned by Silvio Berlusconi, the current Prime Minister, is controlled by the government. As a consequence information is often manipulated and even disappears. The free press is jeopardized by an old and obsolete journalists organisation (ordine dei giornalisti), a kind of corporative body which provides financial aid to newspapers of about 1 billion Euros/year.

These characteristics are explored under the following headings:

- Government policy and practice
- Regions and cities
- Flourishing civil society
- Beppe Grillo and meet-up groups
- Information and the media
- Sustainability of public participation in Italy
- Support for participation
- Needs and opportunities

Government policy and practice

The activity of central government and authorities dedicated to participation of citizens is virtually nil. There is no federal participation policy. There is no minister responsible for participation. There is no systematic approach to participation. The current government intends to complete the federal organisation of the state. Even though it needs to reform the constitution, make significant changes in the power of the prime minister and the president of the Italian republic and reform the election law and both houses of parliament, the government has not published a strategy on public participation.

The absence of public participation from the political agenda is unfortunate. Pressing issues, such as justice, election laws and, the law which grants immunity to the president of republic, prime minister, the head of the house of deputies and the head of the senate, would profit from a more extensive inclusion of citizens.

There is one element of national public participation in Italy. 500 000 Italians can bring forward a legislative referendum to abolish an existing law and a constitutional referendum to approve or disapprove a constitutional law or amendment. Beyond this, the nearest approach to participation is when the government uses surveys to assess the impact of its information activities (OECD, 2001: 65).

During the last twenty years, however, parliament has passed acts that have the potential to enable citizen participation at regional and local level.[6]

Regions and cities

Through these laws and constitutional reform in 2001, regions, provinces and cities have gained responsibilities from the central government for, among others, health, transport infrastructure and mobility. This is a significant decentralization of power. Citizens directly elect the mayors and governors of the regions and they are able to form stable governments for five years. Many regions and cities have created an office of assessor with a duty to promote participation of citizens.

One region, Tuscany, has adopted a regional law – a constitutional framework - dedicated to participation.[7]

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[5] ACLI-IRES: Ninth report on social association. The "anticorps "of civic society

[6] art. 118 *(articolo così sostituito dalla legge costituzionale n. 3 del 2001)* ...Stato, Regioni, Città metropolitane, Province e Comuni favoriscono l'autonoma iniziativa dei cittadini, singoli e associati, per lo svolgimento di attività di interesse generale, sulla base del principio di sussidiarietà

[7] Legge regionale n. 69 del 27 dicembre 2007 (regional Law n. 69, 27th Dec 2007)

This law defines who may participate, and that includes residents and people studying and working in the territory. It guarantees the participation and the methodology to be followed, which takes the form of public debates on key topics like environment and social issues, the provision of information to citizens and the communication of results. It recognises the need for educational activities for public administrators. It offers support for participative projects by citizens, enterprises and public stakeholders. In short, it introduces participation into the regular political decision-making process in the region.

This participation, however, is not deliberative. Its aim is to offer support to shape the eventual decision, to solve problems and to monitor the social environment. In addition, the law will cease to apply after 2012 unless is extended by the regional government.

In 2000 the city of Reggio Emilia started a participative process based on the recognition that:

- Citizens today demand solutions to contemporary problems, such as environmental pollution, mobility, garbage recycling or migration.
- Rising uncertainty, the complexity of problems and the lack of financial resources creates an unbalanced situation for the decision-makers. The open outsourcing of solutions to citizens, who can contribute to decision-making (vertical subsidiarity) and the execution of certain processes (horizontal subsidiarity), has been identified as a way out.

Acts enabling citizen participation

- Law no 266/91 on the governance of volunteer organisations (*Legge quadro del Volontariato* defines voluntarism and deals with questions of direct services to qualifying citizens (ill, old, drug dependent...). It confirms the principle of subsidiarity.
- Law no 225/92 on the governance of civil protection (*Instituzione del servizio nazionale della protezione civile*).
- Law no 460/97 on the governance of non-profit, socially oriented organisations (*Riordino della disciplina tributaria degli enti non commerciali e delle organiszazioni non lucrative di utilita' sociale*). It established the legal form of an *ONLUS* (*Organiszazioni Non Lucrative di Utilità Sociale*) acting in social and health assistance, education, sport, promotion and protection of artistic and historical patrimony, defence and protection of environmental values, civil rights tutorship and scientific research of social value.
- Law no 328/00 on the governance of welfare (*Legge quadro per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di interventi e servizi sociali*).
- Law 383/00 on the governance of 'associations promoting social causes' (*Disciplina delle associazioni di promozione sociale*). Examples covered by these rules are the *Associazione ARCI* and the Christian workers' movement *ACLI*.

The city is committed to the early stages of participation. Its action plan 2007 outlined problems of public administration that first need to be overcome. For example, the ability to listen to citizens and their problems; the willingness to co-design solutions, to provide information to citizens, to monitor public acts and to educate and motivate public officials.

The strategic planning started by Torino was another important initiative by a big city. Florence, La Spezia, Pesaro, Trento and Verona followed and joined forces in a network.[8] These initiatives, however, involved primarily the relevant stakeholders of the territory rather than citizens at large.

Fiscal issues in the wake of decentralisation and the application of the principle of subsidiarity pose a problem for the regions and cities. Not all regions are able to deliver the same services at the same quality to citizens. Some regions are attempting to deal with this challenge by advocating taxation to re-balance the regions which need financial support.

Other regions and cities

In addition to Tuscany and Reggio Emilia other regions and cities support participatory projects, including social balance sheet and participatory budgets (Sintomer et al., n.d.: 5). They have laws and regulations in place, provide information and organise participative debates.

There are projects concerning the involvement of citizens in planning processes, for example:

Bolzano: www.comune.bolzano.it/quartieri_context.jsp?ID_LINK=2318&area=107

Bologna: www.comune.bologna.it/rendicontazione-sociale/

Trentino Alto Adige: www.regione.taa.it/

Lombardia: www.labsus.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1059&Itemid=40

Piemonte: www.cipespiemonte.it/news/numeri/docum/docum_1007/immigrazione.PDF

Puglia: www.partecipazione.formez.it/node/168

[8] *Rete delle città strategiche*: : www.recs.it/it/index.php (Network of strategic Cities)

These examples show that Italy is in the early stages of state organised participation. In Tuscany the politics seems to be 'open' but circumspect. The cities have opened up their decision-making, but are hesitant to expand it to all citizens rather than interest groups.

Civil society organisations

More than 100 000 civil society organisations operate under the principle of subsidiarity as well as many initiatives driven by individuals. As Putnam has discussed in his book about democracy in Italy (Putnam, 1993), most organisations are focused on community services. This kind of civil society contributes to the accumulation of social capital, a building block of democracy.

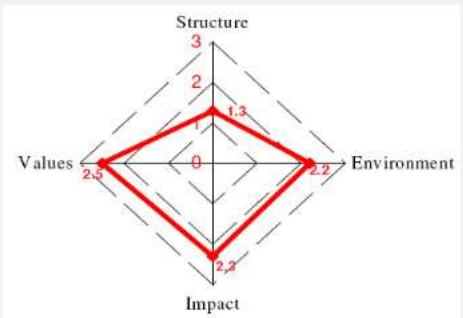
Fondaca, a foundation set up by *Cittadinanza attiva*, has conducted research on the state of Italian civil society (Moro/Vannini, 2006). *Fondaca* participates in the development of the *Civil Society Index* by *CIVICUS*, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation. The index characterises national civil society systems through four key dimensions (Heinrich, 2004: 7; Anheier, 1999):

1. The structure of civil society (eg volunteers, organisations, financial resources)
2. The environment interacting with civil society (eg legislation, public and private stakeholders)
3. The values promoted and practised in civil society (eg democracy, tolerance, environmental sustainability)
4. The impact of activities by civil society actors (eg on public policies, on empowerment of participation)

These four dimensions can be illustrated in a diamond graph that allows the understanding of the gaps and a comparison between countries.

The Italian diamond (see below) shows that Structure is rather weak, mainly due to poor interaction between civil society organisations. Civil society is good at providing social services and has shaped Italy significantly, especially in responding to social needs and rights. But its political and empowering function of holding decision-makers accountable is not well developed (Moro/Vannini, 2006: 5). The environment is well disposed. The values are positive, but civil society organisations need to be more democratic internally and more transparent.

CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond for Italy



Flourishing civil society

Citizens participate widely in Italy. Seven million active volunteers and about ten million registered members in social and political associations, excluding parties and trade unions suggest a great potential for organising participation.[9]

Italian political extra-parliamentary movements are perhaps unique in that strong populist and critical movements form around charismatic individuals, the most prominent of whom is Beppe Grillo. These initiatives are often single-issue campaigns and are primarily confrontational protest movements. They can mobilise hundreds of thousands of people for their purpose, but, in contrast with 'public participation', explicitly distance themselves from the political domain.

Volunteers

Italy is a country of charities - which often subsidize public institutions (Putnam, 1993). They offer concrete assistance to those who are in need. Public institutions at local level have organised equitable arrangements with them. They are active in the area of health, social assistance, culture, civil protection, education, environmental protection and sport. According to *ISTAT*, the national institute for statistics, there are more than 3 million people above 14 years associated with these charities, and about 1 million permanently operating inside them. (www.istat.it/dati/catalogo/20060112_00/). There are hundreds of charities working, for example, on drug rehabilitation. In contrast, only a few charities work politically, promoting legalisation (eg *Libera*).

Consumer associations

There is a growing consumer association movement. The associations defend the citizen-consumer against economic oligopolies or public service malfunctions and inefficiencies in, for example, the National Health Service. The main associations are *Adiconsum*, *Adoc*, *Adusbef*, *ACU*, *Codacons*, *Altro consumo* and *Unione nazionale consumatori*. We estimate that they account for about half a million registered people.

Collective action groups

More and more citizens self-organise and coordinate their actions over the internet. They develop and launch social campaigns at national and local level. Expressions of such collective action groups are the Beppe Grillo meet-up (see the following section) and the petition launched by Andrea d'Ambra which aims to abolish the fees for recharging mobile phones[10].

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[9] ACLI-IRES: Ninth report on social association. The 'anticorps' of civic society

[10] A brief story of 'cellular recharge costs' : www.aboliamoli.eu/

Libera (www.libera.it) exists to convert the confiscated property of criminal organisations into productive activities by young local people. It was founded in 1995 to engage civil society in the fight against the mafia and to promote legality and justice. Today *Libera* coordinates more than 1300 associations, groups and schools in the territories with the goal of creating political and cultural synergies and to spread the values of legality.

These initiatives are each focused on a single issue, and are fundamentally critical or protest in character. They work to revolutionise the political system from outside. They risk alienating citizens from the political system through their confrontational tactics. They are a long way away from being deliberative.

Local committees and groups are most active where decentralisation has allowed participation, such as in the municipalities of Rome, Circoscrizioni in Torino and Bologna. In some cases this has led to spontaneous movements which organise workshops and events, like an open technology forum, in order to develop a shared analysis of a problem, develop bottom-up solutions and clamour to be listened to in the decision-making process.

Cittadinanza attiva

One of the best known and largest established actors in public participation is Cittadianza attiva (www.cittadinanzattiva.it). It was founded in 1978, with the intention of fostering awareness and defence of citizens' rights.

Until 1996 number of members was stable at about 10000. During the *Mani Pulite* years the political *casta* was damaged as judges cracked down on corruption. At the same time citizens were leaving the political parties and more and more committing their energy to civil society organisations. Cittadinanza Attiva's membership is now 92000.

It is organised in 235 territory assemblies, which elect representatives to regional congresses and to the national congress. The headquarters of the association is in Rome. Its president is Alessio Terzi and the General Secretary is Teresa Petrangolini. There is an ethics committee. It is funded on the basis of projects by public and private bodies as well as resources (time, activities and services) donated by individuals. Through the Active Citizenship Network it is connected with 70 other citizen organisations in 28 European countries.

The association encourages the pro-active identification of problems by individual citizens. Nine out of ten problems identified in this way are issues of social and/or political concern. They listen and then develop shared actions. Their approach is an example of grass roots based participation.

Projects and experiences

The most important and successful project has been the 'Tribunal of patients' rights' (Tribunale per i diritti del malato), which has existed since 1980 in the health sector. Today this citizen institution is an influential part of the National Health Service.

Some other areas of current activity are:

- 'Citizen attorneys' (procuratori dei cittadini) in the area of consumer rights
- 'Justice for rights' (Giustizia per i diritti) dealing with endless legal procedures, the standing of individuals in it and helping victims obtain legal support
- 'School for active citizenship' working on civic education with the educational institutions
- Garbage recycling in Campania
- Civic audit of health services
- Consumer issues in utilities services and pricing
- European legislation and their effects on citizens rights

Beppe Grillo and Meetup groups

Beppe Grillo is a unique personality in Italian life. He is a comical and satirical actor with experience in television, advertising, film and theatre. He is also a journalist for the magazine *Internazionale*. In the 1980s he was banned from public television because of his strong attacks on the corruption of politicians. Once he recognised the power of the internet, he launched his blog (www.beppegrillo.it) in 2005, which is today one of the most widely read blogs worldwide (technorati.com/pop/blogs/). Beppe Grillo's strategy is to inform the public with the facts of an issue and involve them in debate. He particularly encourages the involvement of young people. His social network Meetup organises large-scale satirical theatre, and 'V-days' to protest against politicians. He promotes the organisation of people at the local level and allows them to use his image.

The blog is funded by Grillo and the Meetups by the participants registered in them. Big events, such as V-days are funded through public donations and excess expenses are paid by Grillo. The organisation is decentralized, led by the local participants in meet ups.

Grillo does not constructively engage with politics; he is highly confrontational, to the extent of calling upon Italians to abstain from voting.

Key Beppe Grillo projects

Onorevoli wanted: a list of convicted parliamentarians. The goal was to inform the public and lobby for a change in the election law to make them non-electable.

V1-day (September 8, 2007) was an online and offline protest to prevent the election to parliament of people definitely convicted by tribunals, limit the time in office to two election periods and to directly elect people to parliament.

V2-day (April 25, 2008) was a protest day to abolish the compulsory organisation for journalists and public financial aid to the press and to abolish the 'Gasparri' law, governing telecommunications.

Promotional campaigns:

- Awareness of environmental risks of garbage incineration, which frees up dioxin
- Awareness of possible cancer risks through nanoparticles
- Renewable energies
- Class action suits against Telecom Italia and Tronchetti Provera, a former CEO
- Awareness of pharmaceutical lobbies and invented illnesses
- Awareness of civil and constitutional rights
- Transparency in banking operations

Information and Media

Freedom House classifies Italy as free, but in 2007 Italy ranked globally 61st on press freedom with Capo Verde, Guyana, Israel and Sao Tome, and 29th in the EU (www.freedomhouse.org). It was rated 'partially free' during the previous Berlusconi Government from 2001 onwards because of the conflict of interest in the control of television. The provision of impartial information is not ensured in Italy. There is a television duopoly. RAI, the public TV, is controlled by parliament and thus by the government, and Mediaset is privately owned by the prime minister. This situation is unique in European television and government.

While the press is diverse and critical, the television market is highly concentrated and politically influenced. The TV channels usually do involve citizens politically beyond public opinion polls that gather citizens' views by phone or on the street. Independent voices are rare. The TV programme *Report* on channel RAI 3 is one of the last independent voices. The same applies to debates like 'Anno zero' by Michele Santoro who was ostracised for a long period before his comeback thanks to a tribunal ruling.

Feasibility and sustainability of public participation in Italy

There are several limitations to grass roots participation in Italy. The first concerns the content - in which areas of public life participation is possible. A huge number of volunteers effectively substitute state organisations. This type of subsidiarity is recognised by the constitution. Subsidiarity also leads to a focus on service provision and operational activities. This excludes public participation in political decision-making.

The second limitation lies in the capabilities of regions and cities to offer and realise effective opportunities for citizen participation through appropriate local legislation and technical/financial aid. The following are weak or absent:

- Participation in decision-making processes with the goal of co-designing policy. The shift from consultation to decisions taken on the basis of a deliberation with and among citizens seems to be very far from the culture of politicians presently in power.
- The speed and quality of the participative process. The process of participation is in tension, because it needs to respect the institutional rules and focus on timely results at the same time. Better methods are needed to resolve this tension in participation processes.
- Openness in public administration and politics.
- Funding.

The third limitation concerns the lack of awareness or recognition by politicians of the collective intelligence of citizens. They seem not to appreciate it. When reading white papers, party manifestos or the objectives of legislation, it is quite impossible to see any intention for real and concrete participation. The first steps in the right direction are being made by local powers, like regions and cities, but very cautiously, slowly and poorly financed.

Sources of independent information

Radicali web: www.radicali.it/ and *Radio Radicale*

Articolo 21: www.articolo21.info/

LIBERA: www.liberainformazione.org/

Legambiente, La nuova ecologia: www.legambiente.it/

Micromega: temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/

Nando Dalla Chiesa: www.nandodallachiesa.it/public/index.php

Piero Ricca: www.pieroricca.org/

Other organisations supporting participation

Legambiente (www.legambiente.it/), an environmental association, established in 1980. It is a highly diffused organisation which monitors, defends and develops sustainability. It has 115 000 members and 1000 local organisations. They organise initiatives to monitor pollution, volunteer activities, education campaigns, a referendum against the nuclear energy and numerous activities against the so-called eco-mafia and illegal construction.

- *Fondazione Sodalitas* (www.sodalitas.it/) is a foundation with the mission to develop a culture of corporate social responsibility, including social cohesion, social responsibility and sustainability.
- The *RADICALI* movement's political and social campaigns deal with human and civil rights. Their strong commitment, creative communication and involvement of citizens in battles for liberty, led to new rights for the Italian society, as the law for divorce and the law for abortion. They are very active in human rights.
- There are a number of important individuals and self-organised groups. Among them is Beppe Grillo (see above). Another one is Lilia Infelise, an industrial economist specialising in innovation and training policy, information science and regional science. She has conceived and implemented a community regeneration model called Alliance which is a recognised model of community awareness raising and responsible participation in community regeneration programmes.

  In 2005 Lilia Infelise started *Oltre il mare* (Beyond the sea) for participative democracy, promoting people's active participation in politics. She co-founded the movement *rete articolo 49* to promote the active participation of people in the formation of the Democratic Italian Party. When she was elected in the constituency national assembly, she started a new programme, *Forum Itinerante della partecipazione*, which trained a task force of citizens to act as leaders and to be candidates for the local government bodies (*consiglio comunale*), involved citizens participating in identifying strengths and weaknesses and building a vision of feasible development programmes to be implemented in each municipality
- Andrea d'Ambra- generazione attiva (www.generazioneattiva.it/)
- Nando Dalla Chiesa: www.nandodallachiesa.it/public/index.php

What about the citizens themselves? ACLI-IRES identifies four Italies in a recent report. 43% of Italians are passive and not socially involved in any way; another 17% are focussed on their private life, with no interest in the public sphere; 26% are socially oriented and actively listen and participate; 14% are solidarity activists with a social orientation. All in all, 40% of people are in principal open to participation, but only 26 % are presently active in the political domain.

There is still a question about the how likely it is that individual citizens will participate in political matters. The Civil Society Index produced by CIVICUS shows that civil society organisations are most trusted among Italian citizens, followed by the *carabinieri* and in the third place the president of the republic. The lack of trust in politics and politicians poses a significant obstacle to the establishment of public participation. There is no guarantee that Italians inclined to take part in civil society organisations and their associated solidarity and ethics will transfer to the participation in the political sphere.

Summary of needs and opportunities in Italy

Problems

- **Separation of politics.** There is a low level of acceptance of civil society organisations as stakeholders in the political process.
- **Threat.** Politicians perceive civil society organisations and public participation as a threat. This makes the establishment of participatory processes difficult.
- **Protection of interests.** The political *casta* has a strong interest to maintain power and the opposition is weak. The participation of citizens is seen an irritant, if they think of it at all.
- **Capacity and competence.** Public officials are not equipped to facilitate participative processes effectively.
- **Lack of strategic coherence.** Each central and local government department, local authority or agency works in isolation on single issues.
- **Lack of resources.** Local government has insufficient resources to support its aspirations for citizen participation.
- **Profile.** Civil society has a limited presence in the information arena. The media only poorly and often negatively report on civil society activity.
- **Networking.** The cooperation between civil society organisations is limited and not well supported by umbrella organisations. International networking is poor in quality.
- **Inclusion.** Sixty percent of people have no interest in the social sphere. There is a low proportion of women in the management of civil society organisations. Marginalised people in society need special support to make sure that their voices are heard.
- **The digital divide** is an obstacle to the effective use of information to involve citizens in analyses of problems, problem-solving and decision-making.
- **Lack of vision.** No publication from government or from think tanks and research institutes has developed a compelling vision of what it would be like to live in a participatory and deliberative democracy.

Possibilities

- **Build on existing knowhow.** Develop projects where co-design, open innovation and change are resources supplied by citizens and civil society organisations.
- **A vision for public participation.** Using Future Search, Scenario Planning or other similar techniques, participants could build a vision of a system in which full public participation was the norm. This could be used to help the government to develop a strategic vision inspiring both public officials and the public.
- **Politicians.** Change their perception about public participation from threat to opportunity. Raise their awareness of the collective intelligence of citizens and of their strong willingness to contribute to their communities.
- **Capacity and competence.** Train public officials and citizens together in the use of participation techniques to develop organisational and community capacities
- **Audit.** To increase trust in local governments, an independent body will need to hold local governments to account by conducting (and publishing) a 'Participation Impact Analysis' of each new policy or proposed law.
- **Innovate in methods.** The challenge is to avoid and limit the digital divide and to search for suitable Internet tools.
- **Inclusion.** Include a larger share of the population, with a focus on those who are presently and marginalised.
- **Education.** Develop large learning process for adult citizens (andragogia) in order to change the culture from passive to active through participative methodologies.
- **Knowledge base.** Develop and maintain a reliable, detailed, database of civil society structures and experiences with participation. This database ought to adhere to international standards to make comparison possible.

Public participation in other countries in Europe

Elsewhere in Europe participation is also on the rise.

France, for example, has a tradition of involving citizens at the local level. Yves Sintomer, professor of political science, considers France to be the European champion of local democracy. 'We have without doubt more district councils than the rest of Europe put together! But the participation of citizens is limited to the micro-local level. Above all, it is an informal practice, because of the French contempt for formal procedures.' Accordingly, there are numerous initiatives to involve citizens on the local level. In 1992 the 20th arrondissement of Paris established so-called 'quarter councils' and in 2002 the 19th arrondissement instituted a citizen jury on drug policy.

Outside Paris more than 15 towns have been using participatory processes to structure their policy (eg Lille, Nantes, Tours, Grenoble, St. Etienne). This has been structured by the *schéma de cohérence territoriale* (SCOT), an intercommunal strategic planning tool and the *plan local d'urbanisme* (PLU), the operative tool. Since 2004 Pont-de-Claix has made use of participatory budgeting, focusing on the empowerment of the local citizens. The impression, however, is that participation generally is informal, haphazard and subject to the personality of the mayors and officials.

At the national level participation is less wide-spread. But there are some instances of participatory processes initiated by official bodies. One example is the 1998 'Conference de citoyens' (citizens' conference) on genetically modified organisms, organised by the parliamentary office. The same process took place in 2002 and 2003 on climate change. All three conferences took place in the National Assembly. In 2006, there was a national discussion on the use of citizen juries. None of these involved binding decisions.

In the **Czech Republic**, public participation is not very wide-spread at local or federal level. There is no initiative from the federal government to promote more direct citizen involvement. Agora Central Europe, a major civil society actor (www.agora-ce.cz), organises public participation processes with local authorities. Agora believes that public participation will work only when public authorities take a top-down lead. This ensures that a crucial element of public participation, policy impact, is formally guaranteed before the process. Within the process, citizens are then polled, called and brought together in order to identify their preferences, which form the basis for subsequent political activity.

In Agora's view it is necessary to educate politicians about the value of direct local democracy. To do this Agora organises public participation processes, and offers seminars and workshops for policy-makers about participatory policy-making. Politicians were initially afraid to yield control and power, but with experience, they become happier with the costs and results of these processes.

Europeum (www.europeum.org) is another NGO active in public participation. While it mostly focuses on EU-related policy advice, *Europeum* has been part of the consortium which organised the first ever European deliberative poll (see www.tomorrowseurope.eu).

Partners Czech (www.partnersczech.cz) is an NGO promoting public participation in democracy and has been a national partner in the organisation of the European Citizens Consultations which have taken place in 2007 and will take again place in 2009 before the EP elections (www.european-citizens-consultations.eu).

The participation of civil society in policy-making is lower in Central than in Western Europe (Zimmer, 2006). Nonetheless many actors have emerged to propagate the use of public participation in decision-making, but restricted to the local or communal level. It is apparent, also, that promoters of participation repeatedly need to educate decision-makers about the high potential and opportunities of public participation.

In **Austria** the government adopted guidelines for citizen engagement in July 2008. In this it is similar to the UK. The guidelines are directed at administrators, now officially encouraged to engage citizens. They focus on a range of topics on which successful engagement depends: the quality of deliberation; helping citizens to understand and value differing opinions; bringing citizens closer to the decision-making structures; increasing the quality of regulation; addressing the citizens' trust in political structures; improving inclusion; reducing delays and costs in implementing policies. The rules respect constitutional and legal regulations, but it encourages citizens to be engaged whenever the regulations allow for it. In the understanding of the Austrian government engagement can be as limited as informing citizens and does not necessarily extend to full participation.

An innovative actor in Austria is partizipation.at (www.partizipation.at). It concentrates on the dissemination of knowledge about participation and helps organisers of participatory processes. It is independent, but works closely with government ministries. Rather than encouraging a critical civil society, partizipation.at emphasises cooperation between government, civil society, special interest groups and citizens.

Commentary

Europe, it seems, is a laboratory for public participation. Our reporters reveal a range of experiments taking place, with common features that arise from human nature and the character of elective democracy. We need a coherent framework if we are to make inferences and learn lessons.

Governments and participation

In the UK (as in Austria) the government has taken on public participation as an explicit policy, particularly at local level, in an attempt to re-engage the public with political processes and improve the quality of political decision-making. Participation is interpreted broadly and includes simply giving the population more information. The German federal government has recently begun to look into participation. There are constitutional obstacles to participatory co-decision-making at federal level, but it intends nevertheless to explore the possibilities of eParticipation at this level and to fund more research into participation. Citizens in Germany have a stronger inclination to participate in social rather than political activity, so the government has also started to establish structures for cooperation among civil society actors. This may develop into a more comprehensive strategy on public participation. Italy does not profess any strategy on public participation at the federal level, but has a strong tradition of engagement through civil society organisations. Both Germany and Italy have experience of using public participation in policy-making at the level of local communities, but only at the discretion of local politicians, and these uses of public participation are not yet part of a larger-scale approach.

Constitutional arrangements in the three countries make a difference. The UK does not have a written constitution and thus has few formal obstacles to using participation. It has been able to use national legislation to promote participation at local level. In Germany, by contrast, the constitution does not allow the use of participatory methods on the federal level. For example, it is not allowed to hold a referendum on a contested issue. In the Länder, however, regulations have been adopted which make the use of participation much easier than before. In Italy, the constitution does allow for referenda and citizen initiative on the federal level, but the government has not made recent use of this facility, and has not expressed an intention of promoting participation. Thus there are conditions in all three countries that allow participation to develop, but with different constitutional and legal constraints and varying degrees of promotion and enthusiasm on the part of national governments.

Credibility among citizens

Our reporters have detected a shared uncertainty among citizens about whether offers of participation are seen as genuine. In the UK this is expressed as a concern about the misuse of public participation as a legitimising tool for governmental policies, rather than a serious attempt to listen to citizens. Organisers of participation in Germany have expressed a similar feeling, though less pronounced as the governmental promotion of participation is less intense. In Italy views of participation are coloured by the general mistrust among citizens towards politicians. The first challenge here is to develop trust in any initiative that comes from political authority, rather than preventing participation being misused.

In the three countries top-down initiatives are met with a greater suspicion of disingenuousness than are bottom-up or grass roots initiatives from civil society. Trust in public participation is easily damaged if it is seems to be window dressing, used to legitimise decisions already made by public institutions or to pacify public disquiet. This certainly happens if the outcomes of public participation processes are ignored by decision-makers. By contrast, credibility is enhanced when participants are given feedback after the event so that they know what did and did not happen as a result of their contribution, and why. We might describe this as the responsiveness of the process.

Increasing interest

Despite the scepticism of the citizens and critics and commentators, public participation is on the increase in the three countries. Service providers have emerged, especially from civil society, in response to the growing demand of public authorities for support and training. Many of these have a background in the content or subject of participation, planning, healthcare or science, for example. As a result, they do not give much weight to the democratic impact of public participation, even though this is an important part of the theoretical argument in its favour: that it can bridge the current rift between political institutions and citizens. Nor do the service providers, as subject experts, necessarily have the expertise in the processes of facilitation or moderation that participation requires.

There is, in the three countries, a need for clear information about what public participation processes can and cannot achieve. There is also a lack of usable guidance on the range of different methods and how and when they are effective. Public officials in all surveyed countries lack the knowledge and competence to conduct public participation processes or commission them from service providers. We know empirically that citizens must trust the methods of public participation as well as in the way that they are being used, so this lack of expertise is serious. Public officials may also lack conviction that public participation is important, may feel that it interferes with their operations and may share some of

the public scepticism about the motives of the politicians who are promoting it. Yet these public officials are the people with the power to make sure that public participation is used in a manner that realises its democratising potential. They can ensure it is not used merely to manage the public's response to matters already decided by political actors. They may be the ones to coax the politicians into support for participation. Public officials need to know how public participation works and how to make it work best.

Cultural differences

The provision of such knowledge and the development of understanding that can follow it will not be uniform across Europe because of the differences between political cultures and systems. Any approach to understand the use of public participation must take into account the cultural and political context (Albeson/Gauvin, 2005: 32). In UK the inclusion of third parties, offering expertise and political neutrality, is well established. Germany, aside from its constitutional differences, is in some ways similar to the UK, but its administration is less open to third party collaboration. This may contribute to its initial reluctance to embrace participation more comprehensively. Recent experiences with participation, however, and fresh thinking among the new generation of administrators may be increasing the openness to participation, especially at local level. In Italy, by contrast, the main challenge for participation is the seclusion of the political *casta* from the citizenry and the deep seated lack of trust. The strong belief that participation processes can be co-opted to politicians' wishes is a major obstacle to establishing citizen engagement and a renewed affiliation to democratic processes.

The experiences of Germany and Italy, and in a smaller way in the UK, emphasise the importance of the factor of independence in convincing citizens that administrations are really willing to cede power to them. Participation processes and their organisers must be seen to be uncommitted to particular policies and politicians (Dörr, 2008) and have no vested interest in any particular outcome.

Growing the picture of participation

Three different national perspectives serve to highlight, by contrast, features of each country. This is a limited picture, however, and could be much richer given two developments:

- Reports and examples from more countries or from particular locations where public participation has been in use. This is an opportunity for readers to join with EIPP in its exploration of Europe
- Organising the features of public participation, its purposes and methods, more systematically. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Methodologies and tools

What is available?

The growing use of participation in Europe has spurred the development of tools for organisers of participatory processes. They are designed to make the organisation of public participation processes faster, ensure that the methods used are suitable and that the organisers are aware of the limitations of a particular method. This is necessary as there is a vast array of participatory methods that allow citizens to deliberate about collective problems. Citizens' Juries, Deliberative Polls, Consensus Conferences or 21st Century Town Meetings, for example, differ significantly in their assumptions and manner of use (Fung, 2006; Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2005).

The literature includes overviews of participation methods that are in use. Some are directed at academics (Warren/Pearce, 2008; Rosenberg, 2007), others at participation organisers (King Bouduoin Foundation, 2005; Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2005; www.partizipation.at; GTZ, no year; Rowe/Frewer, 2005; Renn et al, 1993). They present the processes, their requirements in terms of time, complexities for the participants, their applicability to different topics according to how controversial they are, the number of participants, the selection processes and group compositions. They discuss the rules and procedures for each step of the process. They identify the few methods most widely used by practitioners. They use this information to offer advice to participation organisers on the most suitable choice of method for their enterprise.

These efforts can be differentiated into three groups:

1. Practitioner handbooks (King Baudouin, GTZ, Lukensmeyer/ Torres, OECD, URBACT/EU)
2. Online tools (Partizipation.at, Peopleandparticiaption.net, Toolkit Citizen Particiaption, Pep-Net, Demo-Net)
3. Academic studies on the use of participation (Fung, 2006; Rowe/Frewer, 2005).

The following analysis is a selection of cases which have proposed how to classify and differentiate between participation methods.

Practitioner handbooks

The handbooks offer several audiences insights from practitioners and findings from projects.

For public policy makers, two examples seek to improve the knowledge within public administration about public participation methods. In one the goal is to 'strengthen the foundation for participatory governance within the federal government' by accessibly presenting information on the different forms and uses of participation through online and offline processes (Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2006: 5). In the other, for public officials, the OECD handbook 'Citizens as Partners' (OECD, 2001) 'seeks to clarify the key issues and decisions faced by government officials' when they set out to use public participation in any form in their work.

In a similar way the 'European Handbook on Participation' compiles experiences with participation from all over Europe, but with a focus on public participation in urban development (Urbact, 2006). They address the question of when in a political process participation can most help to solve issues of various kinds. The authors point out the democratic potential of public participation, through its inclusion of underrepresented points of view and to empower disadvantaged groups (48). They emphasise, however, that to realise this democratic potential, public participation must take place within a contractual framework, which clarifies the scope and impact of participation (68). The book is illustrated with examples from all over Europe.

The German technical cooperation agency has published a handbook on public participation with a focus on involving different actors in development processes (GTZ, no date). They emphasise the opportunity to challenge existing power structures and empower local, perhaps conventionally underrepresented, actors through participation processes. They include an approach to mapping 'actor constellations', similar to the one used to identify networks within civil society by Anheier/Katz (2004).

Other handbooks deal more directly with the sharing of practical knowledge among participation practitioners (King Bauduoin, 2005: 5). The King Baudoin foundation's toolkit focuses on thirteen regularly used methods (21st Century Town Meeting®, charrette (a technique for consulting with stakeholders in urban planning), citizens jury, consensus conference, Deliberative Polling®, Delphi, expert panel, focus group, participatory assessment, planning cell, scenario workshop, technology festival and the world café. The methods include mutual monitoring and evaluation as a process tool. The handbook describes and discusses them in depth. This allows a good understanding of these methods, but comparison of the methods is rather difficult.

These handbooks are all packed with useful information, but do not allow organisers of participation easily to choose the best method for their requirements. Different authors use different names for the same type of process. Is a citizen panel the same as a citizen review panel? Are citizen juries one-off events, while citizen juries occur regularly, even though the processes within are largely the same? How can citizen panels be considered deliberative and not deliberative by the same author (Ableson et al., 2001), whereas others merely see it as a consultation, but not as a participation exercise (Rowe/Frewer, 2005: 277)?

The handbooks are predominantly focussed on face-to-face participation. Even when they talk about the opportunities offered by new technologies, their presentation is geared toward offline usage. They do not cover the opportunities offered by the internet and its interactivity.

Online tools

Partizipation.at (www.partizipation.at), an Austrian website, provides well-structured information on methods for public participation, differentiated, for example, by the size of the mini-publics involved (small, medium or large) and the type of involvement. The systematic overview is illustrated with best practice examples from Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Italy and Ukraine. The presentation and examples are regularly updated. The website interlinks information, and, despite not offering interactivity to users, is a useful information resource.

The Toolkit Citizen Participation (TCP) (www.toolkitparticipation.nl) is more like the URBACT-Handbook in that it does not attempt to categorise methods. Instead it presents experiences from different countries with a structured description of each process. In particular, TCP presents successful practice and examples where participation did not work. As mistakes can be highly revealing, the inclusion of good and bad cases is helpful and welcome. The website is heavy on text and therefore rather cumbersome for practitioners to use. It lacks a structured discussion of methods. The data base is searchable, however, and TCP is useful as an exploration of what other actors have done in similar cases to your own.

Two other projects, Pep-Net (www.pep-net.eu) and Demo-net (www.demo-net.org) focus on eParticipation. They address the question of participation methods less directly, but focus more on the research best practice exchange with eParticipation initiatives and practitioners. Pep-Net is an EU-supported network with the goal of encouraging best practice exchange among actors who organise eParticipation. Demo-net is an EU-funded research project that focuses on better interconnection and on knowledge exchange in eParticipation research across Europe. In its 'practitioners corner' (www.demo-net.org/practitioners-corner) it offers a set of methods and tools for eParticipation. Both websites provide extensive information about projects and approaches on a descriptive level.

The website that makes most use of the interactive features that the internet offers is peopleandparticipation.net, a project by Involve UK. It presents in-depth overviews of 39 methods, complete with examples of when they were used for what purposes. It offers an interactive tool for organisers of public participation processes to select participation methods. Using structured questions, the Process Planner recommends methods to be used for a particular purpose and budget. This is complemented by guidance on each method. It only recommends individual methods for a process and does not give guidance on the combination of different methods for different parts of the process, even though there may be need for such an approach (Renn et al. 1993). The Process Planner takes into account most of the elements generally demanded of good participation processes. It uses more dimensions than the 'Democracy Cube' proposed by Fung (2006, see below), which encompasses the number of participants, the mode of communication and decision and the type of participation (information, consultation, co-decision). It also incorporates the institutional framework within which the process takes place. This has been identified as a core element in ensuring that participatory processes realise their democratic potential and avoid the feeling among citizens of being co-opted to decisions that are already made (Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2006; Goodin/Dryzek, 2006: 237). It also allows for the amount of experience decision-makers have with participation, the cultural context and the identification of possible obstacles to participation (Abelson/Gauvin, 2006: 32).

Peopleandparticipation.net highlights a report on the thorny issue of how much participation costs (Involve, 2005). Even well-organised participation processes might have undesired consequences if they either cost too much money or demand too much from their participants. These issues are significantly under researched (Rowe/Frewer, 2005: 262ff; Involve, 2005), but need to be taken into account routinely by participation organisers.

Peopleandparticipation.net combines rich information about public participation in a similar depth to the handbooks and the other online tools, with the addition of an interactive approach easily comprehensible to experts and lay people. It presents necessary choices succinctly and offers additional information on the methods and related fields.

Its weakness may be that the choices cover only a single step of a participation process. It does not support combinations of methods for multiple steps in a participation process. The complexity of contemporary problems and the need for legitimacy and representativeness in participation commonly requires the use of different methods over successive steps of participation processes. More research is needed on how different methods work with each other. Until then organisers can simply use the Process Planner for each stages of the participation process, provided the goals and purposes of each stage are clearly defined.

Academic studies

These tools for practitioners by practitioners do not provide a theoretical background to public participation. They start with the principle that participation is good and is working in practice. They assume public participation's uniform positive impact on democracy or quality of decision-making. As a consequence, they systematise the methods according to structural characteristics, such as the number of participants and the general intention of the process, but not according to their democratic effects. The overviews are skewed in another sense. The methods included tend to be 'popular', being frequently used or actively promoted. This is misleading. Some of the larger players in the field, such as America Speaks with their 21st century town meeting, James Fishkin with Deliberative Polling, or Peter Dienel with citizen juries and planning cells, actively promote the use of their method. Other methods, perhaps equally worthy of study, lack such vigorous proponents and are less often included in overviews.

Rowe and Frewer (2005) undertook to systematise engagement mechanisms through examination of the underlying characteristics. In their model, participation mechanisms vary along two main dimensions: type of engagement - how they are linked to policy action - and a set of six practical variables. Using this grid they classify methods. They then simplify what they find into six subtypes of consultation and four for participation. They subsume all relevant existing methods into these subtypes. For example, they consider an opinion poll as well as a referendum to by a 'Type 1 consultation'. In the participation category, Deliberative Polling® is Type 3, whereas the town meeting is Type 4. The table below is developed from the Rowe/Frewer classification with additional methods not included in the original.

What remains unclear in the Rowe/Frewer typology, however, is the reason for assigning a particular method to either consultation or participation. The authors argue that the primary basis for their classification is the flow of information between the sponsors and participants of the processes. This 'dialogue and negotiation' (Rowe/Frewer, 2005: 256) is, however, too insensitive to distinguish methods. Citizen panels, for example, can easily contain information exchange with sponsors and, indeed, their existence without such exchanges would render them meaningless. But information exchange is not their principal feature. Then there is the constitutional framework within which the processes take place. For example, could focus groups, citizen juries or electronic consultations be linked to direct decision-making and thus require the exchange of information between sponsors and participants? Equally could a deliberative poll be used exclusively for consultation and not involve any exchange of information between sponsors and participants?

Rowe and Frewer do not explicitly incorporate the quality of deliberation with its consequences for democratic theory. Their approach to the question of public participation is motivated by the need to build a clear basis for the choice of methods and a clearer framework for their use. Underlying their arguments is a notion of problem-solving which seems to be based in democratic deliberation (Mansbridge, 2007: 254), which aims to bring the reasons of participants into the political process rather than increase the democratic legitimacy of policies through rational deliberation on common reason.

A typology of participation mechanisms (based on Rowe/Frewer, 2005:276ff)

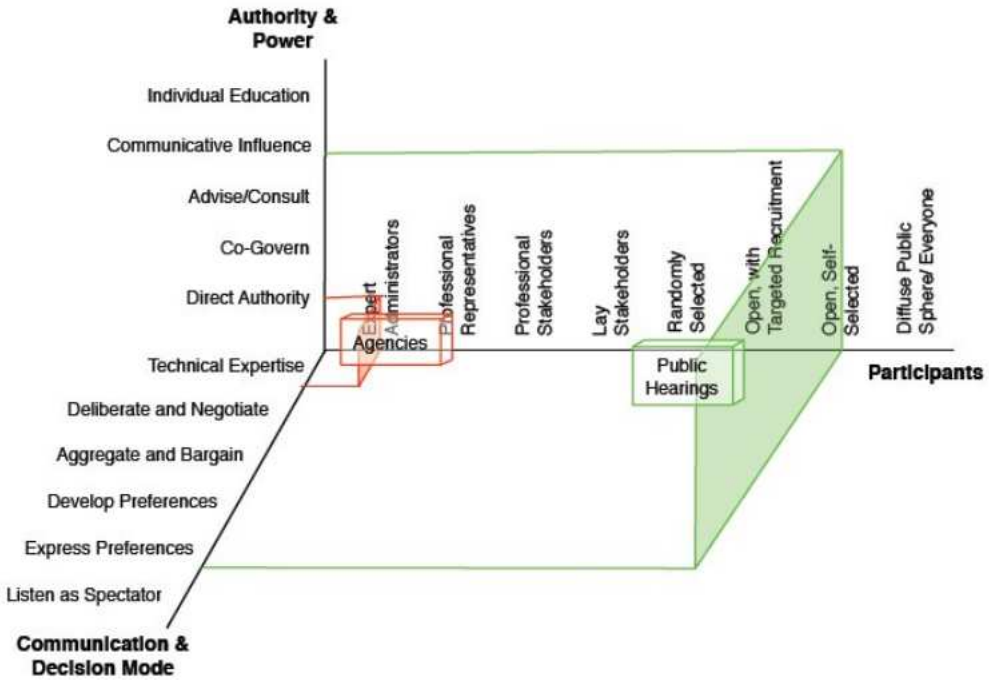
Type of engagement	Variables	Selection	Information Input	Face-to-Face	Information elicitation	Response Mode	Type of aggregation	Examples
Information/ Communication	Type 1	Controlled	Set	Non-FTF	N/A	N/A	N/A	Information broadcasts
	Type 2	Uncontrolled	Flexible	FTF	N/A	N/A	N/A	Public hearings, public meetings
	Type 3	Uncontrolled	Set	Non-FTF	N/A	N/A	N/A	Drop-in centres, Cable TV, Web 1.0 information, Open Houses
	Type 4	Uncontrolled	Flexible	Non-FTF	N/A	N/A	N/A	Hotline
Consultation	Type 1	Controlled	N/A	Non-FTF	No facilitated	Closed	Structured	Opinion poll, referendum, survey, telepolling
	Type 2	Controlled	N/A	Non-FTF	No facilitated	Open	Unstructured	Consultation document
	Type 3	Uncontrolled	N/A	Non-FTF	No facilitated	Open	Unstructured	Electronic consultation
	Type 4	Controlled	N/A	FTF	Facilitated	Open	Unstructured	Focus group, World Café
	Type 5	Uncontrolled	N/A	FTF	Facilitated	Open	Unstructured	Study circle, open space, technology festival
	Type 6	Controlled	N/A	FTF	Facilitated	Open	Structured	Citizen panel, citizen advisory committee, expert panel (?)
	Type 7	Controlled	N/A	FTF	Facilitated	Closed	Unstructured	Citizens' summit
Participation	Type 1	Controlled	Flexible	FTF	Facilitated	Open	Unstructured	Action planning workshop, citizens' jury, consensus conference
	Type 2	Controlled	Flexible	FTF	No facilitated	Open	Unstructured	Negotiated Rule making, Task force, scenario workshop, future workshop
	Type 3	Controlled	Flexible	FTF	Facilitated	Open	Structured	Deliberative polls, planning cell, charette
	Type 4	Uncontrolled	Flexible	FTF	No facilitated	Open	Structured	Town meeting, 21st century town meeting

A practically oriented, but theoretically grounded approach to the question of choosing participation methods is the 'Democracy Cube' proposed by Fung (2006). He combines consideration of the constitutional framework (polity) and intra-group and system-wide politics (characteristics of processes). The three dimensions of the Cube are the choice of participants, the kind of communication (similar to the Rowe/Frewer triad) and the relationship to the polity. Fung's approach includes deliberation quality and the constitutional framework and pays attention to the structural characteristics of the methods.

Fung's model, however, does not incorporate concrete methods, and it shares with peopleandparticipation.net the inability to recognise different methods for different stages of the participation process. Each stage of a complex engagement has to be treated as if it were an independent exercise.

Furthermore, it has to be established whether a method is adequate for the issue under discussion: the content of the participatory process. Controversial issues require different methods from 'cold' conflicts. Different approaches are needed for strategic policies and concrete, more immediate actions. Some methods are more suitable for informing broader public debates via media coverage than others. This variability is exacerbated when different methods can be used in different stages of the policy-making cycle. For example, Deliberative Polls are useful to formulate a problem, whereas Citizen Juries are suited for policy formulation and World Cafe might help in the implementation stage. This question is not addressed in either model, even though Fung argues that public participation can be used with all types of topics (2003).

'Democracy Cube' proposed by Fung (2006)



The case for evaluation

Developments in knowledge and expertise

The direct involvement of citizens in day-to-day policy-making has been gaining ground in Europe in recent years. The issues for which public participation is employed and the methods used to enable it have come a long way since their first use in the mid-20th century. They are now being used to solve problems in many areas and are making use of new technological developments.

The growing use of public participation has been accompanied by a debate within public administration and civil society about when to use participation and the benefits of its use. Public actors have begun to develop engagement strategies and now include engagement opportunities in regulations, primarily at regional and community levels. Governments are either thinking about (Germany) or have already established (UK and Austria) strategies for citizens to be included at various levels of policy-making. These developments still need to overcome the reluctance of bureaucratic structures to embrace participation processes that create uncertainty, the opposite of conventional ideas of 'managing' an issue. We have reported that actors in administrations need more information and knowledge about how participation can be used to benefit decision-making and democratic processes. National governments and the EU are supporting research and development in participation, which offers evidence for its increasing importance.

Civil society has responded by setting up participation planning and implementing processes. Civil society actors tend to be small and innovative. They see their role as convincing public administration to use public participation more regularly, and offer them to tools and expertise to do it. They provide information and education for partners in the participation process about the usability and adequacy of participation and about relevant methods. They act as contractors for public administration, where their main source of revenue lies. Some advise on the use of participation within private institutions as well (see special edition of *Zeitschrift für Organisationsentwicklung* 2007).

The field of eParticipation is younger, having more recently been recognised as a potent tool for participation by governments. Funds are being poured into research (e.g. www.demo-net.net). Among civil society actors significant efforts are being undertaken to get to know each other better through networking (e.g.www.pep-net.eu) or conferences (e.g. eDem08).[11]

This suggests that the field of participation as an area of expertise will grow. There is a conviction, or at least a hope, among many government and civil society actors that public participation can remedy the perceived malaise of democracy in developed Western countries. There is also an expectation that taking up the concerns of citizens will bring down the costs of policy implementation because policies will be better directed and take account of the realities of being put into practice.

The need for systematic understanding

The aspirations and arguments for public participation are still somewhat lodged in an experimental era and have yet to translate into consistent practice. Detailed knowledge about what already exists in the field is patchy. There needs to be a clearer mapping of the field of public participation. Even its boundaries are uncertain. Ought it be restricted to the domains of planning and resource use, or include health, science and food policy, community and social services as is happening to some extent in the UK?

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, participation methods need to be set out systematically, including mapping how they are intended to benefit democratic life. Some pioneering work has already been done on systematising what we know about participation, and future developments should build on it. For example, peopleandparticipation.net, described in the chapter on the UK would be even more useful if it incorporated how methods should be combined in multi-stage participation processes. Such a tool could also extend to cultural settings other than the UK. There is potential here for transnational cooperation. Systematisation must indicate the democratic impact of different methods, not absolutely specifying relationships between decision-makers and citizens, but giving enough indication to be able to work out what can happen in a particular context. The potentially most empowering participation process can easily be negated if it is not firmly linked to decision-making or if its potential impact is otherwise unclear.

We need to know more about how online and offline (face-to-face) processes work together. It might be useful to combine a systematic structure of participation methods, such as Rowe's and Frewer's (2005), with a comprehensive framework for choosing the right participation approach, such as Fung's. But above all we need empirical research on quite basic questions such as whether online processes work well enough on their own or benefit significantly from face to face engagement.

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[11] Purely American networks, such as the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) are recognised, but deliberatively excluded, as we are focussing on the European situation.

Constitutional security

The success of public participation depends to a great extent on the clarity of the constitutional framework that establishes it in the political setting, defining the relationship between participatory arrangements and representative democracy. An effective constitutional framework specifies how the outcomes of participatory processes are linked with policy action. It provides rules that apply to different uses of the participatory processes: informing citizens, consulting them on a given issue, directly involving them in policy-making. A framework regulates the interface between citizens and decision-makers. It formally embodies expectations of the process, helping dispel citizens' perceptions that they are being co-opted or not taken seriously (e.g. Lukensmeyer/Torres, 2006; King Baudouin Foundation, 2005: 20). A framework can help ensure that public participation has a meaningful impact on public policy; when it is used to obtain public approval for decisions taken beforehand, it discredits rather than improving democratic legitimacy (Goodin/Dryzek, 2006: 237).

A constitutional framework defines the institutional role of actors involved at the various levels of decision-making: government and administrative officials from national communities; local and regional authorities; scientific experts and the voices of minorities; interest groups; civil society organisations; interested or affected citizens. It specifies the procedural requirements for legitimate decision-making in terms of transparency, equal access to public participation, inclusion of all affected citizens and responsiveness to the input from the participatory processes. Using this framework, all actors involved, and most importantly political decision-makers, can be held accountable.

A constitutional framework may itself be developed through a participatory process that includes citizens, experts, political decision-makers and administrators, in which participants deliberate about the role of public participation in the larger political setting – what Thompson calls a 'meta-deliberation' (2008: 516). The outcome would constitute a contract about the most desirable use of public participation in political decision-making. Like the citizens' assemblies that have been used to reform the electoral system in British Columbia, it could be left to the citizenry at large ultimately to vote in a referendum on the assembly's recommendations.

Learning through evaluation

Public participation as a discipline or technology has lacked shared learning. Actors have been so busy trying things out that, with a few exceptions, they have failed to think about how the collective knowledge of all actors could be developing. A key component of learning for any community of interest is information giving, and this report shows that some of that has been going on. Many people are happy to report what they are doing, and assert its virtues, theoretically and empirically. What is missing, however, is the cool, critical review of performance that we call evaluation. All there has been is ad hoc and non-systematic work, and this is risky. Participatory processes can be employed in an inadequate or irrelevant manner, and no-one will know. Citizens may feel mistreated or grow wary of participation and not trust the opportunity it offers, and without effective evaluation, no one will know. Evaluation must include the costs and the benefits and the impact of participation processes in action and links them to the coherent theory and framework for which we argue. It must attend to the democratic benefits of public participation as well as the more technocratic efficiencies. Even though the democratic benefits may be harder to determine, they form the real heart of the rationale for participation.

A framework for participation

Earlier sections have shown the uneven, varied but often imaginative ways in which citizens are engaged in political decision-making processes as the use of public participation has grown.

This section sets out a framework for describing participation in the more systematic way that is needed for its further development and incorporation in democratic processes. The intention is to provide a stimulus and basis for continual learning and refinement of knowledge based on the insights to be gained from new data.

A clear definition of participation is the starting point. Political actors are fond of the term 'engagement'. The breadth of this concept is meant to capture the full spectrum of citizen activities. This ranges from mutual help among citizens, through the informing of citizens by government actors, to the involvement of citizens in actual policy-making. When talking about public participation in decision-making, however, engagement is too broad and vague a concept. Participation requires activity by citizens. Participation cannot simply be receiving information. Certainly information receipt is a valid element of participation processes, as it enables citizens to make informed choices. But by itself, giving information to citizens is a non-participatory way of interacting with them.

Participation ought to have an impact on society. Only by making an impact can participation heal the rift between policy-makers and citizens that has been identified as a malaise of contemporary democracies (Warren/Pearse, 2008). True participation can manifest itself in the unsolicited expression of positions by citizens via two channels: to decision-makers and to the media (cf. PublicWill). It can take the form of consultations, where decision-makers ask citizens to contribute their knowledge to solving a problem, and in the direct inclusion of citizens in making binding decisions (co-governance).

Figure: Forms of public engagement



In all three cases, a condition of participation is that citizens are active players not onlookers.

Consultation, co-decision and co-governance all require, to have any meaning or validity, a willingness on the part of decision-makers to respond directly to the citizens and the outcomes of their work. This is less a requirement in the case of unsolicited expressions of citizens' will, where response to media pressure on decision-makers may be seen by the citizens as a valid and good enough response.

Legal regulations strongly determine the degree of public participation in different countries. Participation also depends on non-regulatory differences, such as political culture. Participation is being fostered through top-down legislation and recommendations in the UK and Austria, and through developing local and regional structures without a coherent national framework, as in Germany and Italy. Also, the less trust there is in the state, the more care must be taken to ensure that participation is truly independent and transparent so as to minimise the likeliness that participation will be considered as window-dressing by citizens.

There are two key steps in determining the form of public participation:

- Appraisal of the constitutional framework and political situation, in particular the regulatory opportunities and the political climate. What kind and extent of public participation is legally possible and what could be legally mandatory? What challenges does public participation meet in a particular country and which precautionary measures need to be taken?
- Choice of method for participation to fit this political appraisal and the specific purpose and subject. The choice should be unbiased, taking into account social and monetary costs, the need to maximise involvement and the evidence of the effectiveness of methods in achieving democratic and efficiency benefits. The popularity of method should be a secondary criterion.

When intended to improve the democratic culture and reduce the disenchantment of citizens with contemporary political practices, public participation must include deliberation. Participants learn and value the practice of democracy through using deliberation and the exchange of arguments to achieve commonly accepted solutions (Mansbridge, 2007). A single deliberative process can be seen as a model of a democratic society. Therefore the choice of participation methods should include the quality of deliberation within each process. The 'response mode' category of Rowe/Frewer's typology (2005) partly addresses this, but does not capture the interaction among participants.

By deliberation we mean a process of thoughtful discussion based on the giving and taking of reasons for choices; 'a collaborative consideration of a problem of issue through the assertions of fact or value' (Rosenberg, 2007: 131). Public participation recognises the pluralism of aims and values and enables collaborative problem-solving designed to achieve more legitimate policies. Deliberation, therefore, requires modes of response to be open. Only under these conditions is it possible to foster the exchange of facts and knowledge and the consequent movement in people's positions. Deliberation works well with face-to-face interaction (offline). It might be possible to create deliberation online, observing the necessary rules of respect and sanctioning mechanisms. But this is an area that requires research and experimentation.

In order to make statements about the quality of deliberation generally, we need a better understanding of wider range of methods. Too often only the potential or opportunity for deliberation can be assessed, but it is only through empirical analysis that we can obtain the evidence of what really brings about deliberation as we have defined it.

An evaluation framework for public participation

Research by Involve (2005) and Albeson/Gauvin (2006) has highlighted the importance of better understanding and analysis of the use of participatory methods. Our report has underscored this message. There are still some benefits to be gained from increased public participation without such analysis, not least the creation of cases to study, but if public participation remains at the pioneer, experimental stage it will not became established. Without a cycle of learning, shortcomings will be not addressed and credibility will not be built. There can be no development of effectiveness, for example, no clear understanding of the monetary and societal costs involved in participatory processes unless each example of public participation can be related to others systematically.

This kind of learning requires constant research from two complementary points of view, using scientific and other paradigms. One perspective is that of the participants - the public, the administrators or politicians who have opened up the decision processes and the facilitators. The other perspective is that of an evaluator seeking to make normative judgments about the requirements for public participation and its impact (e.g. Thompson, 2008). The participants can report their perception of events and how they respond to them – their feelings and rationales. The evaluator can classify what they observe or have reported to them. They can compare with other cases or normative data.

An evaluation framework is a set of uncertainties, a rich mixture of the parameters and questions that can reveal:

- the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning and implementation of public participation processes
- the quality of decisions
- the democratic effects on those involved in the process
- the resultant changes in the political system

This is a holistic approach, contrasting with partial examples such as an examination of mini-publics that justified them with a view to costs, but without articulating the gains for the organisers or the participants (Goodin/Dryzek, 2006).

Evaluation can be an elaborate process, but it need not be. It can treat a single episode of participation or a series of events. For a single, straightforward event the evaluator might rely principally on the reflections of participants. What was the rationale or the organisers? What was the experience of the citizens who participated? Are the two reports consistent?

For a more complex participation process, the methodology might be much more like a process evaluation or draw on large-scale survey techniques.

Many forms of evaluation are formative. That is, they provide feedback and advice during the participation processes. They act, in a sense, as part of the guidance system, increasing the likelihood of a good outcome. The formative power of evaluation is the way it makes you think.

In some evaluations data collection and analysis may extend beyond the end of the participatory process itself, looking in particular for long-term effects on policies and the empowering effects on citizens (cf. Powell/Kleinmann, 2008).

Evaluation explores uncertainty in a disciplined way. In resolving that uncertainty, learning takes place. That learning may take place between an evaluator and an individual participation organiser examining the critical questions about how a particular method was chosen. It may be learning for a government administration presented with the impact of their public forum on the local public.

The choice of evaluation method is as serious a matter as the choice of participation methods. There must be an agreement between the evaluator and the sponsor of the participation processes about the intention of the evaluation process, the topics that are to be analysed and the evaluation techniques to be used.

Topics like these give a flavour of how evaluation might explore a public participation process:

- Do participants know why participation is taking place?
- Can the process claim some sort of representativeness, and is that clearly communicated?
- Does the choice of process match the question at hand and the intention of the process?
- Is every participant given the opportunity to speak and be heard?
- What are the costs and benefits for citizens (time and resources devoted in comparison to the perceived impact of the process) and for organisers?
- Was everything that had been promised realised? Did the process have an impact on the political system?
- What do citizens perceive of the process? Do they develop feelings of ownership for the process and the outcome?
- Does participation change people's attitude to democratic processes? What do they learn about policy-making?
- Do discussions within the participation inform wider public debate?
- Are politicians and public officials responsive? Are the outcomes of the participation reflected in their policy justifications and actions?
- What have the organisers of the participation learned about the methods they have used?

Conclusions and key messages

- Public participation is increasingly important in European democracies. In all countries, irrespective of their differences, local, regional and/or national authorities have in recent years made experimental use of public participation
- Most public participation takes place at local and regional level. There are greater organisational and resource challenges to organising public participation processes for a larger public
- A core challenge for all public participation processes is the way the outcomes are fed into the decision-making process. In order to increase the chance of public participation being successful, arrangements ought to be made in all countries to link public participation formally to the heart of decision-making.
- Both from a practitioner and an academic perspective, there is need for more systematisation of public participation methods. This would help to mitigate a disadvantage of current practice, namely the high costs. In addition it would help to demonstrate the wealth of available options and the multitude of possible uses of public participation. We propose a dual approach to systematising public participation methods. It combines structural characteristics with focus on the quality of deliberation and thus on the democratising potential of public participation methods.
- Too many organisers of public participation do not seem to use the tools that already exist to assist them in organising public participation and choosing methods. The tools that are available are too little known or present large amounts of information in a manner that is only of limited accessibility. Existing tools need to be developed further so that organisers can more easily use them.
- Systematic use of evaluation is needed to provide more normative, evidence-based advice on the organisation of public participation processes and to make resilient statements of the likely effects of choices in organising public participation.

Three key messages

Based on these conclusions, we emphasise three key needs:

- **A clearly defined constitutional framework for public participation.** This framework must clarify to what degree the outcomes of a participation process will be taken into account by decision-makers.
- **A methodology for choosing adequate methods of public participation.** This ought to take the form of an easy to use tool with real added value to the work of the organisers of public participation processes.
- **More consistent and systematic evaluation of participation processes in order to build a knowledge base.** Only the development and continuously keeping it up to date will allow a realistic and fruitful use of public participation in a manner that realises its democratising potential.

Interviewees

People interviewed in the course of the research

Simon Dalferth:

- **Tim Bonnermann**, Oracle and Intellitics, San Francisco: continuous exchange on the use of technology for democracy.
- **Prof. Archon Fung**, Harvard University: meeting in Berlin at a conference. Agreed to stay in contact and discuss our concepts and ideas with him.
- **Rolf Lührs and Bengt Feil**, Pep-Net, Hamburg, met at a conference, were very interested in the final report and interested in collaboration, especially concerning the use of eParticipation.
- Established contact with **Michelle Lyons** of DIUS in the UK. She set up a wiki to develop evaluation methods for eParticiaption. We agreed to stay in contact and Simon will contribute to the wiki as much as possible.
- Contacted **Felix Odenburg** of IFOK and agreed to stay in contact.
- Met with **Prof. Penta** of the German Institute for Community Organising (DICO). Took part in a community organising event in Berlin on 14.10.. Agreed to meet in November/December again to discuss PfPP in more detail.
- **Daniela Riede**l, Zebralog, to discuss possible cooperation and exchange ideas. Close contact since then and several meetings. Zebralog is very interested in the final report and the approach to systematise participation methods. The same holds true for **Mathias Trenel** of Zebralog, Berlin;
- **Heiko Röhl**, GTZ, Eschborn, was very interested in the project, saw opportunities for publications in the journal of organisational development where he is editor and gave helpful pointers to the systematisation of participation methods.
- Telephone conference with **Norbert Steinhaus** of the Wissenschaftsladen Bonn, who had been in charge of the CIPAST project, who is willing to make use of his CIPAST network and cooperate with PfPP in the context of P+P.eu.
- **Jan Strecker**, Republik Movida consultancy, Berlin. Establishment of first contacts in the political sphere, sounding out of possibilities for PfPP to get a foot in the door.
- **Carsten Trebesch,** Berlin: a doyen of the use of participation processes within enterprises based on his extensive professional experience emphasised the lack of reliable data on the effects of public participation; highlighted the importance of clear goals.
- **Anna Wohlfarth**, Bertelsmann foundation: meetings in Berlin to discuss in more detail what we could evaluate how. Preparatory mini-workshop (Anna and Simon) on November 12. Simon also sent a profile of PfPP to the Bertelsmann foundation which was well received.
- Other meetings with several people in the context of SocialBar and LikeMind Berlin.

Trevor Boutall:

- **Edward Anderson** of Involve to learn about the participation scene in the UK, agreed on the challenges for public participation and discussed the opportunities of peopleandparticiaption.net.
- **David Atkins** of RAGE on civil society activity and the only instrumental use and limited effect of consultation in health and social policy.
- **Will Norman** of the Young Foundation, who was interested in the work of PfPP and agreed to maintain contact.
- **Lisa Sevell** of the Department for Work and Pensions on the use of social media in government policy.
- **Neil Sindon** of the Campaign to Protect Rural England on public participation in planning and the discrepancy between government talk and action. Emphasised that the support of public participation is necessary to avoid the atrophy of the public's potential to participate.

Renzo Provedel:

- **Giustino Trincia** and **Antonio Gaudioso** of Cittadinanza Attiva.
- **Antonio Di Pietro**, one of the most active parliamentarians defending the citizen democratic rights in Italy.

Patrizia Nanz:

- **Philippe Schmitters**, EUI, Florence.
- **Alexander Trechsel**, EUI, Florence.
- **Yves Sintomer**, Centre Marc Bloch, HU Berlin, Germany and Université Paris X, France.
- **Charles Taylor,** Canada.
- **Paul Ginsborg**, Italy.
- **Jorges Vascolcelos**, consultant for EU energy policy and founder of the Florence School of Regulation, EUI, Florence.

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