

## Democracy 4.0: Citizen Participation Processes. A German case study.

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In Germany, citizen participation involves, on the one hand, elections and local and national referendums that are regulated by law and, on the other, deliberative processes of an advisory nature that are not. These deliberative processes encompass a range of participation methods to facilitate information, discussion and the submission of recommendations. Indeed, the “democracy 4.0” method makes use of modern information and communication technologies. This paper seeks to provide an introduction to deliberative participation and explore the practical lessons that can be learned from the “Stuttgart 21” project.

Citizen participation can be defined as the “active involvement of citizens in the execution of public (political) affairs” and their engagement “in policy formulation processes and in particular in elections and referendums” (1). In Germany’s parliamentary democracy, participation is based on parliamentary and deliberative processes and direct democracy (Fig. 1). Citizens are free to choose whether they participate.

The **parliamentary process** relates to elections, while **direct democracy** involves local and national referendums that are held separately from elections with votes on specific projects. Both these systems are formally regulated by law – election and referendum results are binding and must be implemented by government and the public administration. Other legally regulated forms of participation include the participation provided for under the Child and Youth Welfare Act (Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz) as governed by Book VIII of the German Social Code (2) and the involvement of the public early on in planning processes as set out in the Federal Building Code (3). While these statutory regulations establish requirements for participation, they often fail to state exactly how they should be implemented.

The **deliberative process** uses deliberative, discursive participation methods and is not regulated by law. This is why it is also referred to as “informal” participation. Neither government nor the public administration are bound to adopt any recommendations formulated by citizens in this type of process. Deliberative processes require different levels of participation and influence, ranging from information and consultation to cooperative participation, i.e. co-determination (Fig. 2).

Several different deliberative participation methods exist in Germany, for example:

- round tables
- town hall meetings
- citizens’ dialogues
- public exhibitions
- public consultations
- open spaces
- world cafés
- future workshops.

These methods primarily involve information, discussion and the submission of recommendations. Participants may include stakeholders, members of the public or specific interest groups. In the Planning Cell/Citizen Report method, a random sample of the population is selected to take part (Fig. 3). The names of these methods are not enshrined in law and few are standardised. They are much varied and can be easily adapted to the specific characteristics, target groups and resources of a particular participation project. A wide array of publications and platforms describes different participation methods and provides examples of their practical application, including the Bertelsmann Foundation's "Beteiligungskompass" (Participation Compass) (4) and the "Wegweiser Bürgergesellschaft" (Civil Society Roadmap) of Stiftung Mitarbeit (Foundation for Participation) (5). It is therefore possible to choose a method best suited to attain the goals of the process (Fig. 4) or any other selected criteria such as inclusion, empowerment or transparency.

When federal, federal state or local government authorities, Ministries and other institutions wish to launch a deliberative participation process, they generally issue a call for tenders and invite non-partisan organisations to bid for the contract to carry out the particular project. Naturally, these organisations must demonstrate the requisite expertise and experience, but no specific certification requirements exist. The participation process should, nonetheless, be professionally managed in accordance with publicly transparent quality standards (6). This includes ensuring that:

- goals and participant decision-making powers are transparent;
- all information is easy to understand and all communication takes place on an equal footing;
- the methods employed are suitable for the target groups selected;
- sufficient resources are available to enable participation;
- all outcomes are documented and implemented promptly.

The purpose of this is to build a culture of participation in Germany in which both political and everyday social participation become the norm.

## Democracy 4.0

In today's world, participation can take place either offline (analogue), where participants are required to attend a particular event, or online (digital), through the Internet. Mobile participation is also possible via smartphone apps. The term "Democracy 4.0" alludes to "Industry 4.0" which is the transformation of the manufacturing industry through the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) to connect man, machine and products. In the same vein, "Democracy 4.0" is the use of modern ICTs to enable comprehensive participation. It is intended to make policy formulation and the decision-making process more transparent and promote the inclusion of all citizens. It employs a mix of online participation platforms, offline events and mobile participation methods.

Many municipalities, including the cities of Mannheim and Berlin, now have online participation manuals that provide information about deliberative participation opportunities and methods (7, 8). In recent years, several German municipalities, such as Heidelberg and Wolfsburg, have developed citizen participation guidelines, a trend which looks set to continue (9, 10). By publishing these guidelines, the local authorities are making a voluntary commitment to inform the public quickly about their plans in a manner that is easily understood, facilitate participation using different methods suited to the needs of the relevant target groups and ensure accountability in their decision-making processes. However, the guidelines do not place them under any obligation to implement the outcomes of the participation process directly.

## Case Study: the Stuttgart 21 Project

At least since the time of the public protests against the "Stuttgart 21" project to convert Stuttgart's main railway station from a terminal station to a large underground through station, there has been a debate in

Germany about how to create forms of citizen participation that result in solutions that are widely accepted and avoid conflict escalation. In 2007, a public petition against the “Stuttgart 21” project was rejected and proposed changes were ignored. Large-scale public demonstrations in 2010 were marred by major clashes with the police. Despite these protests, when a referendum was finally held in 2011, the majority of the population voted against the withdrawal of funding for the project by the State of Baden-Württemberg, and the work was able to go ahead.

The planning processes that precede, for example, the development of building sites in urban locations, are frequently long term. They often only attract public attention, interest and engagement once they are well advanced by which time people have only limited scope to influence them. This is known as the **participation paradox**. When people find out that a particular project will affect their local area, this may give rise to what is known as **nimbyism** (not in my backyard). In other words, while they may support changes such as the construction of wind turbines to produce green energy or power lines to take this energy to remote parts of the country, they are opposed to them being built anywhere near where they live.

### Tips for public authorities

Government and the public administration must inform the public about their plans from an early stage and actively reach out to stakeholders and the general public and involve them in the planning process taking their interests into account. However, they also need, at some point, to take binding decisions so that the planning process can be brought to completion.

### Pros and cons

All three democratic processes have their advantages and these should be combined in future models (11). Direct participation affords people a high degree of influence over decisions through binding votes on specific issues and has great potential for mobilising the public. However, there is the danger that a straight choice between two diametrically opposed alternatives will polarise public opinion and there can frequently be a lack of detailed and balanced information in the run-up to the vote (Fig. 5). Deliberative participation – particularly when it adopts the Planning Cell/Citizen Report method whereby a random sample of the population is selected to diminish the influence of pressure groups – gives members of the public more time and space to receive information, discuss it and form their own opinions which can then serve as a basis for developing balanced recommendations and innovative solutions. Consequently, one option currently under discussion is that of “hybrid participation”, a binding combination of direct and deliberative participation (12) (Fig. 6).

# Figures

**Fig. 1 Three democratic processes**

Parliamentary democracy	Direct democracy	Deliberative democracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elect political parties to parliament</li> <li>Formal process; legally regulated framework</li> <li>Threshold clause / 5 per cent hurdle</li> <li>Federal elections every 4 years</li> <li>Federal state and local elections every 5 years</li> <li>Results are binding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vote for a proposal/ counter-proposal on a specific issue</li> <li>Formal process; legally regulated framework</li> <li>Can be called on the initiative of citizens or government</li> <li>Quorum varies across German states</li> <li>Results are binding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain information, discuss, consult, make recommendations</li> <li>Informal process; not legally regulated framework</li> <li>Process mostly initiated by government and public administration</li> <li>Can be called frequently and at short notice</li> <li>Results are not binding</li> </ul>
Elections	Local and national referendums	Variety of methods

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**Fig. 2 Levels of participation**



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**Fig. 3 Members of the public in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate in 2008 drafting a Citizen Report using the Planning Cell method**



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**Fig. 4 Process goals and examples of participation methods**

Process goal	Examples of participation methods
Gathering opinions, activation	Public consultation/citizens' panel, public exhibition
Collecting ideas	Open Space, World Café
Planning the future	Future workshop, future conference
Conflict management	Consensus conference, mediation
Initiating and supporting a planning process	Planning Cell / Citizen Report, Planning for Real
Voting on proposals	Informal public vote

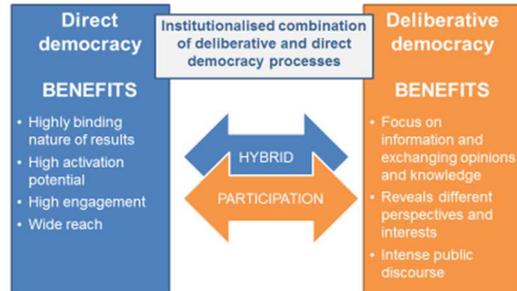
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**Fig. 5 Democracy matrix**

	Parliamentary democracy	Direct democracy	Deliberative democracy
Ability to influence decisions	average	high	low
Deliberative quality	average	low	high

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**Fig. 6 Combining the benefits of direct and deliberative participation**



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